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The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s: Songs and Songwriters

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The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s: Songs and Songwriters

by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

In memory of

David Norman Hillis ~ Brother

Valerie Ann Hillis ~ Mother

Dwight Norman Hillis ~ Father

Acknowledgements

This project began roughly twenty years ago when I visited the American Studies Department to inquire about their graduate program. I'd been rooting around the History Department where, at age forty-one and only twenty years behind schedule, I'd finished my undergraduate degree. I had the academic bug and I wanted to move on to graduate school. Professor David Montejano was kind enough to let me sit in on one of his graduate courses to allow me to get a feel for what graduate work involved. As the seminar wound down, he suggested that I check out the AMS program on the third floor of Garrison Hall. I looked through the courses the department had been offering over the last few semesters and after noticing subjects like film history, jazz, a large collection of topics in popular culture, and seminars dealing with drugs, alcohol, and the beat generation, I knew I'd found a new home. My third floor adventure led me to Mark Smith, we hit it off, and he's been with me every step of the way for the last two decades.

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The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s: Songs and Songwriters

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Abstract: In the early 1970s a collection of singer-songwriters, musicians, and music business operatives captured the imagination of a national audience and launched Austin's reputation as a powerful and prolific international music scene. At the beginning of this seminal decade, the songs, the sounds, and the identities that took shape in Austin's music venues, studios, and back rooms gained traction in the national marketplace by cultivating a cross-cultural, cross-generational musical hybrid that came to be known as "progressive country." This dissertation tells the story of this music scene and explains why it's a story worth recounting in the course of American popular culture.

The story begins by focusing on the meaning and utility of a music scene. To this end, I review a series of scholarly scene studies in an attempt to identify common currents of "sceneness" that I contrast with my findings as a participant observer in the Austin musical scene from 1967 to the present. The study then surveys the extant sources on Austin's music history, a commonly accepted history that I'm calling the "creation myth." This "myth" is expanded by introducing new voices, new interpretations, and new developments that have been under emphasized or overlooked in previous accounts. This analysis establishes the foundation for the unifying theme of this study, a theme based on

the seminal significance, power, and durability of the song in the Austin music scene. The song was the driving force behind Austin's remarkable climate of musical creativity.

The study then focuses on the local scene of the late 1960s as a precursor to the decade of the singer-songwriters. This was a highly productive era in Austin's creative history and although overshadowed by the popular splash of the 1970s, this period provided the underpinnings for music making in Austin for years to come. In the next section, the song is revisited by examining its history and its role in Western culture. Stated simply, songs are important—songs matter. They may mean different things to different people and play different roles in different societies, but they are an essential component of civilization. The discussion then expands from the efficacy of the popular song to the essence of their creators by examining the early professional careers of three prominent Austin-based songwriters—Steven Fromholz, Michael Martin Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker. Weighing the differences in their respective styles and considering their commonalities help illuminate the process by which the song permeated the creative fabric of the period. The dissertation then explores the creative output of the Austin music scene by focusing on what I'm calling "cultural products." Certainly the songs of the era are prime examples of cultural products and are addressed throughout the dissertation. In this final segment however, I single out four examples of cultural products that are rooted in the 1970s that have either played a notable role in the historical current of Austin music or that continue to contribute to American popular culture in the 21st century.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970s a collection of singer-songwriters, musicians, and music entrepreneurs captured the imagination of a national audience, garnered a great deal of media support, and launched Austin's international reputation as a powerful and prolific music scene. At the beginning of this seminal decade, the songs, sounds, and identities that took shape in Austin's music venues, studios, and back rooms gained traction in the national marketplace by cultivating a cross-cultural, cross-generational musical hybrid that came to be known as "progressive country." Progressive country was a media-generated term coined in 1972 by local radio station KOKE-FM to describe its new programming format that highlighted popular Texas-based recording artists. Although the term didn't survive the decade, the music, the vibrant aesthetic ethos, and many of the concomitant cultural institutions have survived and now thrive in the 21st century. Almost forty years after KOKE-FM rolled out its progressive country brand, Austin is recognized as one of the premier music cities in the world. This development was promulgated by municipal officials when, in 1991, the City Council declared Austin the "Live Music Capital of the World."¹ This bold assumption—understandably a product of municipal boosterism and civic pride—is based on a history of considerable aesthetic substance rooted in one of our country's most prolific climates of creativity in the late 20th century. This "history of considerable aesthetic significance" provides the foundation for this study.

The broad scope of this dissertation chronicles the ascendance of the Austin scene onto the international stage; it probes the scene's initial popularity and ensuing longevity; it recounts the cast of characters both on and off the stage; and it explores the cultural products of the era that have carried the imprimatur and influence of Austin's 1970s scene

¹ The following statement is taken from the "Austin City Connection" section of the City of Austin's website (<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/music/>): "While Austin's music heritage traces back to frontier days, it was not until 1991 that blues musician Lillian Standfield, returning from a gig in Houston, saw a city limits sign and thought the City needed a slogan to promote music. She approached the City's Music Commission with the idea of Austin becoming the "Music Capital of the USA." City staff research found that Austin had more live music venues per capita than such music hotbeds as Nashville, Memphis, Los Angeles, Las Vegas or New York City. A Council Member's suggestion that Austin should be the 'Live Music Capital of the Universe' resulted in a classic political compromise and the 'Live Music Capital of the World' became the City's official slogan by Council Resolution on Aug. 29, 1991."

into successive decades and a new century. These topics represent the durable constituents in this "history of considerable cultural significance," and in presenting and analyzing this story, I intend to address the substance and impact of the Austin scene in the evolution of Texan and American cultural history.

Telling the story of the Austin music scene initially took shape in the 1990 when, after a twenty-year hiatus, I returned to the University of Texas to complete my undergraduate degree. As I moved on to graduate school in 1992 and began to organize material to present this story, I realized that the study actually began in 1967 when I arrived in Austin to begin my original college career. Inspired by my graduate studies and newly armed with concepts like ethnography, fieldwork, and the role of participant observers, I began interviewing long-time friends and associates in the music business and seeking out written accounts of the early 1970s. These efforts established a basic platform of inquiry and a preliminary thesis that suggested the history of record, the story that has gained popular acceptance since the mid-1970s, either underemphasized or overlooked aspects of the record that I viewed as essential components of the storyline. This popular account was also at odds with many of the recollections and observations of my informants, most of whom were active participants in the 1970s scene.

This discovery suggested the power of myth and the power of contemporary reportage to reference and re-reference a popular account to the point of establishing a comfortable "history of record." I found support for this concept of myth and popular repetition as functional elements of historiography in certain texts that I was studying at that time in my graduate coursework, texts like Goetzmann & Goetzmann's *The West of the Imagination*, Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Myth and Symbol*, and Richard Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*.² These texts suggested that myth and the serial reiteration of popular accounts have contributed to commonly accepted interpretations of American history. Empowered by what I felt to be a credible scholastic foundation regarding the integration

² Goetzmann, William H. & Goetzmann, William N. *The West of the Imagination*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986); Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Myth and Symbol*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950, 1978); and Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*. (New York: Atheneum, 1992).

of myth into the written record, I gathered the extant sources that reflected the commonly accepted account of Austin's national ascendance to create what I'm calling the "Austin Creation Myth."

The Ur-Source of the Creation Myth beyond an extensive collection of journalistic pieces written during that period is Jan Reid's 1974 publication, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*.³ In 1974, many years before the advent of the Internet and the digital revolution, a hardbound book held significant sway as an authoritative source; it conferred a scholarly legitimacy on the subject at hand. And because *The Improbable Rise* was the only study of its kind, the vast majority of subsequent accounts draw heavily if not exclusively on Reid's publication. As I will argue in presenting the Creation Myth, this seminal account is accurate, it's certainly well presented, but it was a contemporary assessment that was researched on a tight schedule when the scene was exploding on the streets and stages of Austin. Reid was essentially reporting on his surroundings and never had the luxury of revisiting developments and trends from a historian's perspective. After assembling Reid's account and subsequent accounts into a literary review that inform the Creation Myth, I gathered additional sources that portrayed alternative accounts coupled with interviews and oral histories to offer an amended history of the scene's genesis. Although this historical revision established what I believe is an improved and more inclusive account that more accurately reflects Austin's "history of considerable aesthetic significance," it put me at the beginning rather than the end of a more comprehensive ethnographic analysis.

The updated version of the scene's history unfolds throughout this study by introducing new voices, new interpretations, and new developments that have been under emphasized or overlooked in previous accounts. The amended history is not an effort to debunk the Creation Myth—as mentioned, the essential facts of this popular storyline are verifiable, accurate and relevant. Rather, the amended history is an effort to expand on the Creation Myth by introducing a more inclusive cast of characters and conditions that played out on Austin's ethnographic stage, and, at the same time, by reevaluating the emphasis placed on the original cast and circumstances of the myth. This modified

³ Reid, Jan. *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*. (Austin: Heidelberg Publishers, 1974).

assessment is not the end game; it's an attempt to provide a foundation from which to launch an enhanced analysis of the Austin scene and its influence on Texan and American music. And, by extension, it sets the stage for the unifying theme of this study, a theme based on the seminal significance, power, and durability of the song in the Austin music scene.

I believe that the song was the driving force behind Austin's remarkable climate of musical creativity. I will argue that the popular song is the aesthetic adhesive that united seemingly disparate cultural forces of the period and acted as an indelible bonding agent that ushered the scene into the 21st century. At bottom, the primary players of the period were songwriters. Willie Nelson, Michael Martin Murphey, Jerry Jeff Walker, Steven Fromholz, Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, Willis Alan Ramsey, Bobby Bridger, Rusty Wier, B.W. Stephenson, and Marcia Ball were all songwriters, and, if they're still alive or capable, they continue as active songwriters. Bands and musical arrangements came together around the song, collections of songs made up the sets played at concerts, songs were recorded, released as singles, played on the radio, recorded by other artists and generally functioned as the popularizing agents for their creators and performers. As this analysis will reveal, songs and songwriters were the brick and mortar of the Austin music scene.

The amended scene history built on and expanded from the Creation Myth, is the set and setting of the scene's development and as such it's necessary to contextualize that history in the broad transnational cultural landscape of the 1960s and 1970s. This double-decade era, one of the most provocative cultural periods since the Jazz Age, linked the radical reverberations of the 1960s with the reactionary rumblings of the 1980s. Austin played a noteworthy role in this national journey from the Port Huron Statement of 1962 to the Haight-Ashbury "Summer of Love" in 1967 and on to the Inauguration of Ronald Reagan on the National Mall in 1980.

There are many insightful treatments of the political and social ferment of the 1960s and 1970s, but one in particular, Doug Rossinow's 1998 study, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*, is particularly

germane to this study because the author situates his study in Austin, Texas.⁴ In *The Politics of Authenticity*, Rossinow depicts the University of Texas campus in Austin as an essential staging area for radical political activism during the 1960s. UT Austin had a high-profile chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society, many students and fellow new-left travelers were politically active empowered by the tenets of the 1962 Port Huron Statement, the Civil Rights movement, and feminism—the "problem that [had] no name" as defined by Betty Friedan in her 1962 book, *The Feminine Mystique*—as well as other texts and trends that supported the pervading ethos of social realignment. The war in Southeast Asia raged with unsettling images broadcast nightly on television sets across America, Lyndon Baines Johnson, the newly elected Texan-in-Chief, was demonized for combat escalations even as he championed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and domestic anti-war protests gathered momentum and grew increasingly violent. The 1968 assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy followed by the havoc and brutality at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago further darkened the mood of an ailing nation. The "silent majority" that brought Richard Nixon to power that same year confronted an extremely vocal minority in Austin and on the campuses and streets of cities nationwide. As this contentious decade wound down, Rossinow described a shift in the fabric and focus of the protest movements. In his chapter, "This Whole Screwy Alliance: The New Left and the Counterculture," Rossinow argues that the politically charged efforts of the new left adopted a tactical shift that co-opted the culturally charged efforts of the counterculture. In defining "counterculture," the author notes that "there were many 1960s countercultures: pastoral and high-technology, rural and urban;

⁴ Rossinow, Doug. *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). Other relevant studies of the period include Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); Allen J. Mastow's *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*. (New York: Harper Torchbooks 1984); James Miller's *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1994); Bruce Schulman's *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press 2001) in which he argues that freewheeling American enterprise coupled with the culmination of the 1960s zeitgeist created the cultural ethos that gave us Reagan and a new brand of American conservatism; and David Frum's *The 70s: How We Got Here*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000) that focused on the decline of traditional moral values as the defining agent in the political segue to Reagan.

misogynist and feminist; black, white, brown."⁵ But he cites that the "counterculture to which the new left felt linked, and the one [Rossinow] refer[s] to as 'the counterculture,' was the loosely associated set of cultural rebellions among affluent white youth in the 1960s and 1970s."⁶

This radicalized contingent of college students drifted from political ideology to lifestyle consumerism as an actionable component of cultural realignment. These privileged white, middle-class students, ironically fueled by the financial wherewithal of their parents and "the establishment," the very symbols of their generational angst, represented a substantial segment of the participants who would populate the Austin scene of the 1970s. This was a group more likely found in the living rooms of student apartments situated around the UT campus listening to the latest sounds, passing around the intoxicants de jour with the black light highlighting the rock posters on the wall. This was not a group inclined to be on the streets "Singing songs and carrying signs, [that] mostly say, hooray for our side!"⁷ As importantly, this was a youthful demographic at odds with itself. Many of these new Austinites were only months out of the parental nest and were grappling with the "establishment values" of their folks, values rooted in traditional social mores and tastes in music, art and entertainment that stood in contrast to the super-charged, popular culture environment of a progressive university town with a full menu of new sights, sounds, and experiences on the streets, in the clubs, and on the air waves. This was an economically empowered group with one foot on Norman Rockwell's Main Street and the other foot on the Drag. This systemic cultural conflict and the subliminal effort to rectify the establishment "old" with the culturally radical "new" is reflected in several of the key terms that surfaced to describe the musical styles of the 1970s.

The label "progressive country" for example, hints at an inner etymological conflict. The word "progressive" in a broad sense, suggests progress, improvement, positive change, and reform, and in the American political lexicon it implies advocacy

⁵ Rossinow, p. 248.

⁶ Rossinow, pp. 248-249.

⁷ From the popular 1967 Buffalo Springfield song, "For What It's Worth" written by Stephen Stills from the album, *Buffalo Springfield Again*. "For What It's Worth" climbed to #7 on the U.S. Pop Charts that same year.

and activism through government action. The word "country" suggests a musical genre of rural origin generally performed by string-instrument ensembles and featured iconic vocalists. Country music is largely associated with conservative, blue-collar, working-class people who appreciate lyrical messages that underscore the common joys and challenges of a staid, traditionalist lifestyle that rejected government intervention. The notion of "progressing" or improving the standard Nashville country-music songbook would gain little traction with a "real" country music crowd of the seventies. Long-time country stars like George Jones, Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette, Buck Owens, Dolly Parton, and Conway Twitty dominated the country charts for the bulk of the decade and the record-buying, radio-listening country audience displayed little enthusiasm for the adulteration of their sacred sounds. On the production side of the country music equation, the tight-knit Nashville community responded to the new sounds emanating from Austin with the reverberating declaration, "That ain't country!"

"Cosmic Cowboy" is another signifying phrase of the period. It is drawn from the song, "Cosmic Cowboy, Pt. 1" on Michael Martin Murphey's 1973 album, *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*. The popular press quickly appropriated the phrase to describe the music and social ethos that dominated the regional 1970s scene.⁸ "Cosmic" suggests the psychedelic zeitgeist of the 1960s and the term "Cowboy" reigns as the tired and true trope that captures the essence of the straight-shooting, moralistic American hero dating from Natty Bumppo through the iconic career of John Wayne. These two words, "cosmic" and "cowboy" are unlikely companions on the conventional cultural trail . . . It's difficult, for example, to imagine John Wayne cast in a "cosmic" role. The *phrase* Cosmic Cowboy however, is a creative representation of the peculiar cultural conflict and consensus of the period and endures as an aesthetic moniker associated with the Austin scene during the early 1970s.

A final example is the term "Redneck Rock." This word combination comes from Jan Reid's 1974 book, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, previously noted as the seminal literary account of Austin's popular music scene in the early 1970s.⁹ "Redneck" has lingered in the American lexicon for over 150 years. It was initially coined as a

⁸ *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* was Murphey's second major album for A&M Records. It was produced by Bob Johnston and released in 1973.

⁹ Reid, Jan. *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*. Austin: Heidelberg Publishers, Inc. 1974.

derogatory term to describe poor white Southern farmers who sported red, sunburned necks from their extended labors in the fields. The term was adopted by the counterculture in the 1960s to describe a loutish, ultraconservative who characterized the antithesis of the "hippie." The term "Rock" emerged during this period as a rougher-edged version of the original term, "rock and roll." Rock and roll is a term popularized by Ohio disc jockey Alan Freed in the 1950s to describe innovative pop songs influenced by an African American rhythm & blues made popular by recordings artists like Bill Haley & His Comets, Chuck Berry, and Elvis Presley.¹⁰ The rock and roll label however, didn't accurately capture the harder edged, heavier textures of popular 1960s artists like the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, and Led Zeppelin. The term rock and roll didn't adequately describe the esoteric tonal experiments of groups like the Grateful Dead or the politically powered musical messages of groups like Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. These musical strains are definitely derivatives of the counterculture far removed from the commercial country inventory associated with Nashville. "Redneck Rock" therefore, suggests an unlikely mix of country, the redneck's music of choice, with rock, the sounds that defined the hippie's audio preferences.

These three neologisms—"Progressive Country," "Cosmic Cowboy," and "Redneck Rock"—represent working dichotomies based on the blending of seemingly disparate concepts into a confluence of enduring musical styles. The three terms also suggest the underlying cultural tensions of the 1970s. The terms are an etymological veneer for myriad cultural and musical shifts during the decade. Just as "progressive country" and other phrases signified an inherent tension in the music and a youthful fan base, there was a similar tension in the popular performers making the music. These

¹⁰ Albert James "Alan" Freed (December 15, 1921 – January 20, 1965) is largely credited with appropriating the term "rock and roll" (the term can be found in blues lyrics prior to the emergence of rock 'n' roll). Freed was a popular AM radio personality broadcasting under the moniker "Moondog" on various Pennsylvania and Ohio radio stations in the early 1950s. Freed had been a long-time advocate of African-American music, he commonly played the original African-American versions of a particular song rather than the "cover" versions of white artists, and he produced a series of interracial concerts that stoked the ire of entertainment executives and regional community leaders. His most notable promotion was a 1952 concert in Cleveland, Ohio called "The Moondog Coronation Ball," an event generally credited as the "first rock and roll concert." Given Freed's early contributions to the genre and the popularity of Cleveland as a trend-setting popular culture market during the genesis of these new sounds, Cleveland is the home of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum that opened its doors in 1995 on the shores of Lake Erie.

entertainers were involved in a process of reinventing themselves, trying to establish a successful commercial identity by balancing musical influences, professional experience, personal challenges, and aesthetic dreams into a coherent aesthetic identity. Here, performers like Michael Martin Murphey, Jerry Jeff Walker and Willis Alan Ramsey come to mind. These entertainers were hard at work developing a unique musical niche that distinguished them from their contemporaries. Other relevant entertainers of the period like Willie Nelson and Steven Fromholz, who I perceived to be more comfortable in their own aesthetic skin, grappled with a rapidly evolving music and media industry in their attempts to establish an avenue to bring their unique creations to a dynamic marketplace.

The personal and cultural identity crisis at play in both fans and performers coupled with the emerging musical styles of the period suggest a parallel interpretation rooted in a practical consensus. As the Creation Myth and the amended genesis account will illustrate, many observers of the period see these phrases and the music they represent as a cultural compromises, generational meetings of the minds, or synergistic genre mélanges that promised innovative avenues for popular music. Accordingly, progressive country was a blend of mom and dad's Nashville sounds with contemporary rock influences, the term cosmic cowboy suggested the unlikely confluence of Hunter S. Thompson and Roy Rogers on a Wild West enlightenment quest, and redneck rock implied a workingman's night out at a hippie commune. Flippant analogies aside, this notion of genre and generation blending is artfully encapsulated by Jason Mellard in the introduction to his dissertation, *Cosmic Cowboys, Armadillos, and Outlaws: The Cultural Politics of Texan Identity in the 1970s*: "The 1970s vogue for country music nationally fused populist nostalgia for supposedly simpler times with the countercultural preoccupation with authenticity and the natural, making Austin's progressive country music scene prime for national exposure."¹¹ The operative nouns and verbs in this sentence could be reconfigured to produce an equally relevant statement: The 1970s national vogue for Americana nostalgia and supposedly simpler times (*in the wake of and in opposition to the political and social upheaval of the 1960s*) fused long-standing

¹¹ Mellard, Jason Dean. *Cosmic Cowboys, Armadillos, and Outlaws: The Cultural Politics of Texan Identity in the 1970s* (Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin, May, 2009), p. 26.

popular genres (like Nashville-based country and the pop-rock hits of the 1950s and 1960s) with the countercultural preoccupation with authenticity and more organic musical platforms, making Austin's progressive country music scene prime for national exposure. Either way, it's the same recipe with a different hierarchy of ingredients that produced the same aesthetic cultural stew with similar national results. In the early 1970s, Austin was indeed "prime for national exposure," and accordingly, the scene began its ascendance into the national spotlight.

The Birth of a Middle-Aged Ethnographer-Participant Observer

Many of the people, places and events that have inspired and shaped this study have also influenced my career in the entertainment industry. Consequently, I'm offering an abbreviated autobiographical sketch as it applies to the Austin scene and my small part in the evolution of that scene. As an active participant in Austin's aesthetic arena since the late 1960s, I've been a musician, a concert promoter, a booking agent, a record producer, an artist manager, a partner in a record company, and a nightclub owner. Looking back at age 61, I can objectively report that I've managed to achieve a distinct mediocrity in each of these adventures—no stunning victories, no stunning defeats. Still, I'm hoping that these different and sometimes oppositional perspectives will enrich the forthcoming narrative. In addition to blending my voice into the story, I've included the voices of key operatives in the scene through a series of interviews and oral histories I've actively collected since 1991. In this process I've tried to include not only the so-called "stars" of the period but the support musicians, the managers, agents, record producers, the road crews, fans, recording engineers, and the venue owners—essentially an inclusive cross-section of the scene's constituents. By capturing their memories, perspectives and opinions, I've tried to present an inclusive survey of the human resources that powered the Austin scene. Indeed, an essential argument in this dissertation is that a music scene *is* the combination and the interaction of all these and other contributing components.

Regarding my history, music has been a constant in my life. I was raised in a musical family and have been an active guitar player since the summer of my twelfth year. My father was a career Air Force officer and an amateur musician, my paternal grandmother and great grandmother were professional musicians in the American folk

idiom and in the popular musics of their respective generations. As a military family, we moved periodically from assignment to assignment—Texas, California, Alabama, Florida, Kansas, New Mexico, Arizona, Virginia, and England—and I was exposed to a variety of regional cultural influences. Of particular interest to my early musical development were the years my family spent in England from 1959-1963. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones were catching on in the European market and I experienced the early rumblings of the "British Invasion" from the *other* side of the Atlantic. I observed various British bands in the early 1960s aping their American counterparts—Cliff Richards for example was the English counterpart to Elvis Presley, and the Shadows, Richard's back-up band, was the English version of the popular California instrumental group the Ventures. When I returned to the States to begin high school I experienced American roots music filtering back to the "colonies" through the music of the Rolling Stones, the Animals, the Yardbirds and similar groups that featured blues-inspired guitar stylists like Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck. During my high-school years in the Washington, D.C. area (1963-1967), I played in rock bands that diligently tried to reproduce the top-ten radio play lists of the era, a task that generally involved learning the licks and arrangements of the British groups who had absorbed and recycled the work of the Delta bluesmen like Robert Johnson, the urban bluesmen like Muddy Waters, and the top rock acts of the fifties and early sixties like Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and the Everly Brothers. In 1965 I was fortunate to secure a job at a local music store where I worked as a guitar salesman and instructor after school and on weekends through my tenure at the local high school.

I continued my guitar exploits at the University of Texas, playing in top-forty bands performing in local nightclubs and constantly seeking out those financially lucrative dates on Fridays and Saturdays on the UT fraternity-sorority circuit. During my fourth year at the University, I was fortunate to fall in with a group of nationally recognized singer-songwriters who regularly played the Austin market on their regional promotional tours. My introduction into the world of song crafting came through Steven Fromholz, a popular folksinger who, along with fellow musician Dan McCrimmon, had the successful folk-music duo "Frummox." Frummox had recently released their album, *From Here to There*, on ABC Records and were touring in support of their release.

Meeting and befriending Fromholz greatly expanded my appreciation for well-written compositions, compositions that blended crisp, comfortable melodies with lyrics that addressed meaningful topics in an artful, clever way. His style and delivery struck me as meaningful and significant . . . Certainly a cut above the pop songs I'd been playing in high school and college. It was a promising introduction into the world of art songs and their authors.

Fromholz and I connected both musically and personally from our first meeting. In our regular "pickin' sessions," we continued to exchange ideas and he expressed a desire to play his music using a rock band for accompaniment. I suggested my five-piece group, the "Eternal Life Corporation," as a vehicle for this folk-rock experiment. After a brief band rehearsal and a few chord charts, Frummox, backed up by our group, appeared at a popular Austin outdoor concert venue called Hill on the Moon several miles west of Austin. This marked the beginning of my long and deeply satisfying relationship with Steven Fromholz and spurred my career as a support guitar player for other Texas singer-songwriters. This Frummox-Eternal Life Corporation performance at an ad hoc amphitheater on a hillside in the Texas Hill Country also marked an early blend of professional singer-songwriters and talented young musicians from Austin's commercial rock 'n' roll scene, a confluence that would later be labeled, "progressive country."

Through my friendship with Fromholz, I met Michael Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker, and from 1970 though the mid-1970s, I traveled and recorded with these gentlemen as they continued to expand their popularity in the national market. Murphey had established a reputation as a first-rate commercial songwriter during his tenure as a staff writer for Screen Gems Music in Los Angeles. His songs had been recorded by pop acts like the Monkees, and established folk artists like John Denver and other popular recording artists of the day. At the time of our meeting, Murphey has just completed an extended double-album songwriting project with Kenny Rogers and the First Edition called *The Ballad of Calico* that chronicled the life and death of a silver-mining boomtown, Calico, now a reconstructed tourist attraction in the Mojave Desert of Southern California. Through my association with Murphey, I met Jerry Jeff Walker, an established folk singer from the Greenwich Village-New York school whose hugely popular "Mr. Bojangles," had been successfully recorded by a cross-section of mainline

acts from the Nitty-Gritty Dirt Band, who had the initial national hit, to venerable icons like Harry Belafonte and George Burns. Walker was a self-styled drifter who crafted his professional persona as a "Gypsy Songman," the title of one of his popular compositions. Connecting with these established artists proved to be an excellent opportunity for a young support player to study the art of song-crafting, record production, and live performance under the tutelage of experienced songwriters and seasoned entertainers. I was fortunate to serve as the lead guitar player and contributing songwriter on several of the seminal recordings that helped define the progressive country trend and the musical identity of the decade—*Geronimo's Cadillac* (A&M Records, Michael Murphey, 1972), *Jerry Jeff Walker* (MCA Records, Jerry Jeff Walker, 1972), *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* (A&M Records, Michael Murphey, 1973), *¡Viva Terlingua!* (MCA Records, Jerry Jeff Walker, 1973), and *Michael Murphey* (Epic Records, 1973). Recording these albums with major labels afforded me the opportunity to experience the day-to-day mechanics of the corporate entertainment business, to work with long-established record producers and recording engineers, and to observe and play with exceptional studio musicians in New York, Nashville and Los Angeles. Most notably I had the opportunity to work with Bob Johnston, one of America's most successful record producers.

Johnston's production star initially rose when he was a staff producer for Columbia Records in New York working with Patti Page in 1965. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Tennessee, assumed the helm of Columbia's Nashville office and went on to produce Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, Johnny Cash, Leonard Cohen and other top-tier acts. After this exceptional run, Johnston started his own production company and signed Murphey to an independent recording contract in 1972 after hearing him play at The Rubaiyat, a small folk club in Dallas. This led to an extended relationship between Murphey and Johnston and a series of albums on the A&M and Epic labels which culminated in Murphey's national hit, "Wildfire," in 1975. Working with a producer of this stature and experience was a tremendous boon for a fledgling guitar player in his early twenties learning his trade. Equally educational were the national tours underwritten by major record companies in support of new album releases. This involved touring a series of small concert halls and showcase rooms in major markets around the

country coupled with radio interviews, in-store appearances, and a variety of promotional events facilitated by the label.

I recall my involvement during the first half of the 1970s as a collage of activity accented by rehearsing, recording and touring. This was a kinetic phase in Austin music history powered by the influx of popular songwriters with established connections in the entertainment business looking for backup musicians and essential support services ranging from managers and publicists to musical instruments and road crews. My particular peer group of players established a niche by moving between different employers as determined by demand and circumstance.

In 1975, I stopped touring, took a job in at Strait Music Company, Austin's successful retail musical instrument store. During this brief "retail" period I continued my work in the recording field and quickly realized that I was far more comfortable with making and marketing music than selling musical instruments. This led me to an Austin-based artist management company, Moon Hill Management, a successful going concern that handled several of the acts with whom I'd previously played. Signing on with Moon Hill was a significant step forward in my ongoing professional education. Looking back after thirty-five years I see my affiliation with the company as a pragmatic graduate program in the entertainment industry. I was able to put my extemporized knowledge as a professional musician to work in the marketplace and through this segue from stage to office, I was able to delve into the nuances of artist management, talent booking, music publishing, and the practical aspects and responsibilities of operating a small business.

Moon Hill was a well-run, successful company launched by a small group of energized music business visionaries in their mid-twenties that focused on artist management, booking, and publishing. At Moon Hill I retooled their booking operation into a highly profitable department by securing performance dates for regional artists on the nightclub and coffee-house circuit around the country, by developing national tours for recording artists in support of their recording releases, and by booking regional dates for national artists touring Texas. The success of the booking operation enabled me to hire additional agents and free up time to pursue my primary goals in record production. I had a quid pro quo arrangement with the company: In exchange for my delivering a profitable booking department, Moon Hill pledged to help me establish my career as a

record producer. They arranged for me to produce the demo sessions for their clients that were then used to place an act on a major label or with an independent production company. The demo process involved working with the artist and the Moon Hill publishing department to select the songs to be recorded, then rehearsing the artist, their band, and if necessary, the selected studio players. It then involved the actual recording process—usually three to five songs—followed by the mixing phase and finally delivering the recordings on time and within budget. Additionally, I took on individual projects to produce singles, record company demos, or publishing demos for a sing-songwriter or a group.¹² In this capacity I did recording projects with Steven Fromholz, Rusty Wier, B.W. Stevenson, Bill and Bonnie Hearne and other artists affiliated with Moon Hill. I recorded a number of tapes and singles with regional artists as well as a collection of 30- and 60-second radio jingles for various national and Texas-based businesses including retail chains, service organizations, political campaigns, product lines and beer companies including a series with Lone Star Beer. During my booking-production period at Moon Hill, I subcontracted with the local PBS station, KLRN, to work on their nascent live-music broadcast, *Austin City Limits*. I served as their first national talent consultant, arranged the performers for their second season, and secured commitments for an array of prominent entertainers for subsequent seasons.¹³

¹² A "single" is a small 6.75 inch 45 rpm vinyl disc containing two songs, one on the "A" side and the other on the "B" side, used for radio airplay and the promotion of a larger multi-title album. In addition to being sent to radio stations for airplay consideration, many groups produced singles to "put their best song forward" with their "pick hit" on the A side and their second choice on the B side in an attempt to present their music to the public and to potential performers without the expense of an album-length recording. Singles fell out of common use with the advent of the CD in the early 1980s. The basic idea of the single however plays a significant role in the digital recording age: Large radio chains like Clear Channel and independent radio stations still focus on single titles rather than CD sets for contemporary airplay and the music buying public has the ability to purchase single songs from online retail entities like iTunes for ninety-nine cents and build their own customized record albums and song collections. A record company demo is simply a three- to six-tune recording designed as a sales tool to attract the attention of a major recording label or an independent production company and a publishing demo is a recording of a song or songs used by music publishers or individual songwriters to interest other artists in recording or "covering" their tunes.

¹³ At the inception of *Austin City Limits* in 1975, Austin's PBS station was a satellite of the San Antonio-based PBS station KLRN owned by the Southwest Broadcasting Council. The Austin station established its independence and programming autonomy in 1987 when it was purchased by the Capital of Texas Public Broadcasting Council who currently maintains ownership of KLRU.

In 1978 I received a call from an old friend, Michael Murphey, with a lucrative job offer. He asked me to come to Colorado and serve as his personal manager. Although I harbored considerable trepidation about leaving Moon Hill, Murphey's offer was an exciting opportunity to establish my own niche in the industry while working with a close friend who, in my judgment, was one of the finest songwriters and musicians in the country. Murphey's star had been recently polished by his national hit "Wildfire," he was working with a new producer, John Boylan, who greatly interested me, and Murphey supported my commitment to continue with two key production projects I had in the works. At that time I was producing two acts, the rock band Denim whose first album on Epic Records had been produced by Boylan and with an exceptional singer-songwriter from Houston, Vince Bell. I moved to Evergreen, Colorado in the mountains above Denver and spent approximately sixteen months in Murphey's employ. The educational high-point was working with Murphey and John Boylan on Murphey's new album, *Lone Wolf*, on Epic Records. Boylan was an acclaimed record producer in Bob Johnston's class with a series of hit albums and acts to his credit: Rick Nelson, the Association, Linda Ronstadt, Brewer & Shipley, Roger McGuinn, Pure Prairie League, the Little River Band, and the multi-platinum sensation Boston. The recording project represented a new avenue for Murphey and an exceptional learning experience for me. *Lone Wolf* was a rock-based album with many up-tempo tunes; it was recorded in Los Angeles with a cadre of exceptional West Coast session players, and mixed and mastered in several of Hollywood's leading sound studios.

Murphey moved on to a large management company in Los Angeles and I returned to Austin to set up an independent management and production company that focused on several artists and groups that I felt had long-term potential in the popular music sphere. In 1982 I moved into a new music business phase and bought Steamboat, a popular nightclub on Sixth Street, Austin's premier entertainment zone of the period. This move enabled me to engage the skills I'd learned by taking a popular nightspot and molding it into a popular performance venue and national showcase. The continued success of the club enabled me to create a new venue and, in a way, complete a life-circle of twenty years. In 1990 I built the Saxon Pub, a small listening room that focused on the

music of singer-songwriters, often featuring some of the artists that I'd initially worked with in the 1970s.

The purpose of this vita is to illustrate my potential as a participant observer to report from different perspectives. As an adolescent raised in a musical family I waded into the shallows of the music current as an passionate member of a young rock 'n' roll audience. I took the stage in high school playing in rock bands, continued through college, then rejoined the audience as an aesthetically enthused fan of the singer-songwriters. Good fortune resituated me on a larger national stage and into first-class recording studios under the tutelage of venerable producers, recordists, and session players. During this period I experienced the efficacy of management and booking from the artist's perspective and witnessed the highs and lows of working with large record labels and transnational entertainment media organizations. After years of touring, I segued into a new observation phase by moving from the "managed" to the manager, from the stage performer to the booking agent, and from the studio player to the producer and recording engineer. And in a third stage, I assumed the role of nightclub proprietor and talent buyer, a distinct departure from performing in the clubs and representing acts to club owners as a booking agent. I believe that these assorted, often disparate professional identities and perspectives will enrich the forthcoming analysis if the lessons learned in these various settings are addressed objectively. Regarding the question of objectivity, I recognize that participant observation is not without certain shortcomings and potential fiduciary conflicts. This is a consideration shared by Barry Shank in *Dissonant Identities*.

Shank couches his 1994 study of the rock 'n' roll scene in Austin into "the genre of critical studies ethnography" and frames the inquiry with two important questions on method: "Can an admittedly interested and involved ethnographer say something meaningful about the cultural practices in which he or she is involved? Or do the personal interests limit the validity of the ethnographer's interpretation?"¹⁴ I would suggest that it depends greatly on the nature and the extent of the interests and the level of involvement. If, as in my case, the ethnographer owns and operates a popular nightclub and the subject is an analysis of the live-music venues and their significance in

¹⁴ Shank, p. xi.

a particular scene, and if financial benefits inure to the ethnographer/owner-operator, then a conflict of interest is a distinct possibility. Still, it depends on the chronological context of the potential conflict. With respect to my nightclub equity interests, when I owned popular nightclubs in Austin I wrote about them for popular publications, ran extensive advertising campaigns and tried to maximize their success but I sold both businesses in 1996. This enabled me to move beyond the day-to-day financial considerations and management responsibilities, to devote much more time to graduate school, and to review my thirty-year history in Austin as a musician and a music business operative from the perspective of a middle-aged graduate student. Therefore, to address Shank's query about the "interested and involved ethnographer" saying "something meaningful," I would respond with a hopeful, "Yes."¹⁵

Further, Shank maintains that the "implications and assertions of postmodern ethnography," suggest that "no cultural description can be neutral."¹⁶ In other words, the observer, through his or her intrinsic energy and predisposed social beliefs will affect the ultimate outcome of the observation. This soft-science extension of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle applies to this study. By placing myself in the ethnographic script and reporting from that perspective, as the observer I'm impinging on the observed, which in turn potentially compromises neutrality. I would argue that the extended time-period between the cultural practice and the "impinging" observation—often as many as thirty-five years in this study—mitigate the dangers associated with compromised neutrality. That, at least, is my hope, but the level of my success and the value of my ethnographic-autobiographical offerings rest with the judgment of readers and critics.

What Color Are *Your* blues? Agreeing on Terms

Inasmuch as this story is told from a musician's point of view, it involves a notable degree of musical analysis and "music-speak" which suggests the need for a common vocabulary. I'm not referring to technical terms often used in the music business like mechanical licensing fees or statutory song licenses or terms common to the recording process like tape saturation, noise gates or compression envelopes. These

¹⁵ Ibid, p. xi.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. xi.

terms represent simple concepts that are easily explained as needed throughout the course of the text. I'm not referring to the intricate jargon of music theory common to classically trained performers and musicologists, a category well beyond my training. I'm concerned with the every-day terms designed to establish a cognitive link between what we *hear* and what we *call* it, especially when discussing genres, sub-genres and musical styles. For example, by mentioning the term "blues," does the term suggest specific audio references in the listener? Is there an internal audio memory bank that automatically flips to the play mode? Does that listener hear the raw, loosely structured acoustic songs of the post-Reconstruction black rural south or the amplified sounds of Chicago's south side after World War II? Definitions of the blues are as multi-faceted as the sounds and textures associated with the term. What, for example, is country music? Is it the curious combination of British folk forms with rural Appalachian interpretations as performed and popularized by the Carter Family, the so-called "first family of country music?" Is it best represented by the laments of Hank Williams, the honky-tonk hits of Ernest Tubb and George Jones, or by the more sophisticated post-Chet Atkins productions of Nashville's Music Row that ebbed into the pop market during the 1960s? The term jazz is equally perplexing. Does it suggest the sounds of New Orleans' pianist Jellyroll Morton at the turn of the 20th century, the later Dixieland textures popularized by King Oliver and Louis Armstrong, the big band renditions of Count Basie, the cool jazz of Miles Davis and Dave Brubeck? Also worth asking, why is this side trip into typology important?

The goal in establishing common understandings of terms is not to create the definitive definition of any single word, genre, or style. Rather, the goal is to insure that both reader and writer are attaching a similar sound or audio reference to the word to insure that the term has practical utility as an analytical tool. When the surgeon requests a scalpel, a retractor and a hemostat, medical jargon and surgical procedures guarantee that the surgeon receives precisely those tools in the proper order. This is not the case in musicology and contemporary music criticism when dissecting styles or genres, when describing new sounds, or when comparing different musical cultures. A typical review of a new CD release or a newspaper piece regarding an innovative musical hybrid that's saturating the independent radio airwaves is likely to contain language like the following:

The latest sounds from powerful rock foursome, "Rock 'n' Rumble," is a refreshing return to the group's blues roots before they doubled down on oversized amplifiers and stadium rock performance styles. Their new CD, *Hip Tide*, on Gambling Genre Records features the sounds that made them popular—their countrified southern versions of blues classics with that peculiar splash of rockabilly that defined their formative years. But beyond a few select cuts, *Hip Tide* moves in a new direction. It's obvious that the band has absorbed some new styles in their extended touring schedule as urban jazz influences as they creep into new songs like "Six-Nine-Flat-Five" and "Bi-Polar Betty." There's no missing the Cajun and Zydeco influences in tunes like "Gumbo Groove" and "Catfish Kangaroux." Rock 'n' Rumble, the first band to be identified with the now famous Brave Wave scene that coalesced around the historical epicenter of surf music in Southern California, is establishing a strong new current in this expanding genre. With their unique combination of basic blues, heads-up rock 'n' roll, alternative country, and the recently added jazz, Cajun and Zydeco influences, Rock 'n' Rumble has unleashed a tsunami of progressive, innovative sounds.¹⁷

This fictitious review is an attempt to typify the liberal use of genre typology in describing music and musical trends. After reading such a review I'm left wondering, "Exactly what kind of music is this?" It's very difficult draw a clear mental picture or reference an internal audio file through such language, but that's the inherent challenge in using words to depict sounds and the feelings that certain sounds trigger in the listener. If "my blues" are those of Delta progenitors like Charlie Patton and Robert Johnson rather than the electric blues of McKinley Morganfield, more commonly known as Muddy Waters, then the blues metaphor is compromised. The same holds true in describing any popular genre by way of language, and it's a challenge that has expanded exponentially since the advent of the Internet. In the late 1950s through the 1960s there was a select number of "Country & Western" radio stations and the term country embodied more specificity given the homogeneity of program play lists and the similarity of the songs, the arrangements, the instrumentation and the vocal styles of the performers. This is not the case in the digital age. Radio stations in the late 20th-century are dominated by select corporate entities with play lists generated from "programming board rooms" thus

¹⁷ This faux record review and scene commentary is designed to reproduce a typical journalistic treatment that is characteristically heavy in genre and style typology and light on actual musical and structural analysis.

insuring that the hits and styles heard in Seattle are the same hits and styles heard in Miami. But the Internet presents limitless alternative options for accessing specific sub-genres and styles and the vocabularies of journalists and music critics have expanded accordingly. The result is an increasingly nebulous connection between popular sounds and the words used to describe them. I initially toyed with the idea of including an audio CD with this study to establish a viable link between a specific song or style with the popular identifying term, but the copyright and usage issues presented a cumbersome challenge.

Consequently, I've elected to reference the popular memory of the listening public in what essentially amounts to an individual audio reference dictionary. There are myriad hit songs from the American Songbook and the musical canon of modern radio airplay and broadcast television that have found their way into the consciousness of millions of Americans. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, in describing a song, song type, or a sound, I'll reference a popular piece of music or a well-liked group or recording artist who typify a style, genre, or sound. In trying to sketch out the general feel of "Whiskey River" for example, the Johnny Bush song that Willie has used to open his shows for decades, I might make the following reference: "*(think "She'll Be Comin' Around the Mountain).*" Or in describing the yodeling, falsetto vocal texture common in many country songs, I might suggest: "*(think Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons).*" In this way I hope to be able to make a useful connection between a written description of a musical concept and a familiar audio memory.

A Revised Historical Perspective — Rearranging the Punch Cards

I recall a computer-programming course I took at the University of Texas in 1968. I remember a mass of electronic equipment under the East Steps of the Main Building . . . a solid wall of sophisticated binary gadgets . . . reels of black tape spinning back and forth, lights, bells, whistles . . . a perfect backdrop for an episode of "The Outer Limits." I specifically remember the punch cards . . . one card defined one command . . . creating the most simple program was therefore tedious business . . . boxes and boxes of elongated punch cards . . . the length of a program could be measured by the number of cards in a box . . . above all I remember trying not to drop the box of punch cards. Computer

technology, like music-making in Austin, has come a long way since 1968. Why then are we operating with the same set of historical punch cards that were initially perforated in the late 1960s and the early 1970s until Jan Reid gathered them together to format *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* in 1974? I believe it's time to shake up that original box and consider a new sequence and expanded collection of cards.

This dissertation revisits this singular climate of creativity and the prolific artistic community of the period in an attempt to amend and expand the story of record. This is not an effort to simply set the story straight. Stories don't travel in convenient linear furrows; they meander in relation to momentum, resistance, and environmental determinants. This is an effort to expand and amend the story through the voices, experiences, and opinions of a broad range of informants and by introducing a new inventory of institutions and events. The value of such an amended account lies in its utility as an analytical tool; it is not the endgame. Accordingly, it situates us at the beginning of a larger challenge by providing an enhanced platform to study the scene's component parts, their origins, their synthesis and the pragmatic consequences of their cultural fusion. A revised view of the scene allows for a reevaluation of scene's fundamental components, and, as this dissertation argues, the song surfaces as the primary cohesive agent of the scene. Additionally, reconsidering the history of record thirty-seven years after the publication of Reid's original account allows for a historical perspective. In the second decade of the 21st century, there are many highly regarded and influential cultural products with direct links to the exceptionally creative decade that was Austin in the 1970s. This dissertation maintains that cultural products like *Austin City Limits*, the career of Willie Nelson, or the ubiquitous popularity of the Texas singer-songwriter all owe a degree of allegiance to that unique period in Austin's cultural history.

Chapter 1 expands on the theme of defining terms by focusing on the meaning a music scene. In this chapter, I review a series of scholarly scene studies in an attempt to identify common currents of "sceneness" that I contrast with my findings as a participant observer in the Austin musical scene from 1967 to the present. This is an attempt to develop a functional definition of a music scene, particularly as it applies to Austin, and to explore the practical significance of the seventies' scene in the evolution of Texan and

American popular music. This analysis takes me beyond the primary decade under study as I consider the mechanics and subsequent significance of two popular Austin venues, Steamboat during the 1980s and the Saxon Pub during the 1990s. By studying these post-seventies public environments and applying the findings to the 1970s, I hope to ascertain how specific bar scenes and other cultural sub-scenes interact to generate the cultural products that affect the lives of scene participants and Austin's concomitant cultural ethos.

Chapter 2 begins with an encapsulated version of the Creation Myth then moves through the iterations that have contributed to its gospel-like indelibility since original publication of *The Improbable Rise*. My basic argument maintains that the myth, while fundamentally accurate, is a 1974 document created without the luxury of historical perspective and like many period pieces, the account should be revisited and revised. I initiate this process by comparing specific observations in Reid's account with alternative positions that have been overlooked or under represented over the last thirty-five years. These counter-interpretations set the stage for similar assessments that surface throughout this dissertation. Chapter 3 is an extended assessment of the Creation Myth based on the arguments presented by Barry Shank in *Dissonant Identities*. Like other observers of the Austin scene, Shank draws on Reid's *Improbable Rise* but expands his analysis to argue that the seventies' scene was strongly rooted in an attempt to "construct a musicalized performance identity" in keeping with a "Texan identity."¹⁸ Additionally, he sets the subculture of the 1980s, the essential focus of his study, in opposition to the music of the previous decade and presents positions that, in my judgment, inaccurately represent the creative process and the notable contributions of the progressive country period. Just as the 1970s built on the creative underpinnings of the late 1960s (as I argue in Chapter 4), the 1980s built on the creative contributions of the previous decade. In an attempt to draw out the basic components of causality and the strategic significance of music-making in Austin during the 1970s, Chapter 3 challenges many of Shank's arguments in *Dissonant Identities*.

¹⁸ The quoted passage is a modification of the title of Shank's second chapter, "Constructing the Musicalized Performance of Texan Identity."

Chapter 4 presents the Austin scene of the late 1960s as a precursor to the decade of the singer-songwriters. This was a highly productive period in Austin's creative history that has been somewhat overshadowed by the popular splash of the 1970s. Ironically, Austin's preexisting sixties' scene was a seminal component of the "popular splash" of the 1970s. Although academic and media sources single out several noteworthy acts associated with the period—the 13th Floor Elevators, for example—the larger local scene was an exceptional pocket of productivity and innovation and must be reconsidered in an objective account of Austin's musical evolution, particularly as it related to the subsequent decade. Further, it was at this sixties-seventies juncture that the song took center stage in the creative mechanics of the emerging scene as professional songwriters began working with Austin rock 'n' roll musicians to articulate their work. Chapter 4 addresses this aesthetic segue, it encapsulates the arrival of the singer-songwriters, their motivations and relationships with the resident Austin rockers, and the practical consequences of this exchange.

Chapter 5 recounts the history of the song and its role in Western culture. Stated simply, songs are important—songs matter. Although they mean different things to different people and play different roles in different societies, they are an essential component of civilization. Their significance has expanded appreciably since the emergence of recording technology and the advent of electronic media in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Songs now permeate the personal environments and day-to-day lives of countless global constituents, organizations, and social institutions. In addition to offering a brief historical perspective of the song, this chapter considers the utility of the popular song in the entertainment industry and argues that these unique blends of music and poetry are prized commercial commodities and durable cultural products. Chapter 6 moves from the efficacy of the popular song to the essence of their creators by examining the early professional careers of three prominent Austin-based songwriters—Steven Fromholz, Michael Martin Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker. Because this study maintains that the song is a primary component of the scene, it's important to explore the source of the songs and the disposition of the key writers of the period. Weighing the differences in their respective styles and considering their commonalities help illuminate the process by which the song permeated the creative fabric of the period.

Chapter 7 explores the creative output of the Austin music scene by focusing on what I'm calling "cultural products." Certainly the songs of the era are prime examples of cultural products and are addressed throughout the dissertation. In this chapter however, I single out four examples of cultural products that are rooted in the 1970s that have either played a notable role in the current of Austin music history or that continue to contribute to American popular culture in the 21st century. The initial example is an Austin-based artist management company, Moon Hill Management, that represented a number of the defining musical acts of the seventies. Moon Hill was Austin's first business enterprise of broad professional scope that provided a viable template for conscientious music-business practices and subsequent management companies. The second cultural product, *Austin City Limits*, is the longest-running live-music program in television broadcast history. *ACL* surfaced on Austin's aesthetic drawing boards in the mid-1970s and continues as a dominant force in the new century. The third product, the Kerrville Folk Festival, originated from Austin's music milieu in 1972 and currently reigns as a global music institution that is celebrating its fortieth anniversary in 2011. Finally, Bob Livingston's international cultural-exchange music programs sponsored by the United States Department of State continues to take the music of Texas to outposts around the world. Livingston was a mainstay in Austin's seventies' scene and has presented his musical message of goodwill and unity throughout South Asia, the Middle East and Africa as a representative of the American people and the State Department. These products stand as enduring signifiers of the scope and the power of the Austin music scene of the 1970s.

Jan Reid captured a defining moment in Texas music history and I write this dissertation to bring his account forward and explore the subsequent developments that continue to play into the evolution of popular regional and national culture. My affection and respect for the songwriters and their work as well as my enthusiasm and appreciation for the support organizations and talented operatives whose vigorous contributions provided the essential momentum beyond the arc of the klieg lights are constant themes throughout this study. Music scenes, like communities, countries, and civilizations, are dynamic organic entities. They are composites of intricate sub-structures and this dissertation strives to identify these components and weigh their significance during a

decade of exceptional musical innovation. I now turn to an expanded examination of music scenes in an attempt to present an encapsulated definition that applies to Austin from the mid-sixties forward.

Chapter 1

THE ESSENCE OF MUSIC SCENES

What exactly caused Austin's ascendance into the "national spotlight?" Was it a new musical style, a unique collection of songs, a select group of singers, songwriters and musicians, a pristine Sunbelt city steeped in a fresh wave of nuevo cowboy chic? In fact, it was all of these things and more, bundled together under the rubric of a *music scene*, a term that is the subject of this chapter. The basic noun, "scene," comes to the modern American lexicon with an array of meanings ranging from a specific segment of a stage play to the subject matter of an oil painting or from the physical location of a crime to an embarrassing public display of emotion. The phrase "music scene" still embodies these notions of backdrops, settings, locations, and circumstances, but my reading of this term suggests something more in keeping with a localized culture factory that creates environments, goods, and services per the needs of the participants. Developing a working definition of an Austin music scene in the late-1960s and beyond is the mission at hand. But before sifting through this task, it's necessary to consider other scholarly treatments of modern music scenes and how these cultural constructs develop and function in domestic and foreign environments.

To say that there are many music scene studies is a considerable understatement. From one point of view, there are as many music scene studies as there are specific musics—Chicago blues, anarcho-punk, indie rock, London salsa or riot grrrl—and from another point of view, there are as many studies as there types of music scenes—local, youth, national, virtual/digital, or ethnic. This vast catalog further expands by considering other cross-discipline classifications like subcultures, lifestyles, new orders, sociological subsets, or countercultures, all of which often double as music scenes. Rather than unpacking the multidimensional essence of the "music scene," I'm opting for identifying a few common yet critical themes that flow through the common current of these contemporary scene studies. I will then combine these commonalities with my ethnographic observations of the music-making process in Austin to develop a working definition of a music scene as it applies to this study.

Scholarly Scene Studies - Participant Observer Scene Studies

According to sociologists Andy Bennett and Richard Peterson, "The term 'scene' was first widely used by journalists in the 1940s to characterize the marginal and bohemian lifestyles of those associated with the demiworld of jazz."¹⁹ The term has become increasingly popular in journalistic and academic writings since the 1950s to describe a rapidly evolving pop-culture setting powered by advances in recording and broadcast technology, the digital revolution of the 1980s, and the advent of the Internet. These mass media developments coupled with seismic shifts in global enterprise, transportation, and related socioeconomic conditions have instigated a diverse collection of musical styles and scenes that are highly accessible through cyberspace. This explosion of styles and scenes has prompted a geometric increase in academic and journalistic analyses and an expanded public discourse. Modern studies address hundreds of individual music scenes around the world and over the last twenty years scene reportage has moved beyond basic description and comparison to address the mechanics of various scenes and their cultural utility. In this sea of scene studies I've selected four scholarly examples that are representative of current analytical methodologies and research techniques. One of the earliest studies, *Rock Culture: Popular Music in the Making* (1991) by anthropologist Sara Cohen, researches the prolific rock band scene in Liverpool, U.K. where a young, working-age population faced with a future in the lower-income industrial job market often embraced the hope of a national musical breakthrough in the Beatles' hometown.²⁰ According the author, a young Liverpoolian "might as well pick up a guitar as take exams, since your chances of finding a full-time occupation from either were just the same, being in a band was an accepted way of life and could provide a means of justifying one's existence."²¹ The study is contextually rooted in the inherent tension between youthful sub-culture and socioeconomic hegemony, gender issues in the performance environment, the efficacy of local versus global music scenes, and the individual's quest for identity. Barry Shank addresses Austin music-making in the 1980s

¹⁹ Bennett, Andy & Peterson, Richard A., Eds. *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), p. 2.

²⁰ Cohen, Sara. *Rock Culture: Popular Music in the Making*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

²¹ Cohen, p. 3.

in *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*.²² As the title implies, Shank invests heavily in the notions of identity and place. In his Preface, he argues that "the performance of rock'n'roll music in the clubs of Austin creates an environment conducive to the exploration of new identities" and that this exploration "is related to the historical context of the Austin scene."²³ Shank's observations on the Austin scene and scenes in general come into play periodically throughout this study. Another informative scene study is the 2003 *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* by John Connell, a Professor of geography and Chris Gibson, a lecturer in economic geography.²⁴ The authors describe *Sound Tracks* as "the first comprehensive book on the new geography of popular music, examining the complex links between places, music and cultural identities."²⁵ A final example is *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*.²⁶ This collection of 14 essays edited by Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson expands on themes developed by Cohen in her earlier analysis of the Liverpool scene by focusing on the continuing emergence of singular regional music scenes in an increasingly globalized music industry environment. The individual essays depict the utility that these diverse, smaller scenes have in driving larger global trends by bringing together "clusters of producers, musicians, and fans" as they "collectively share their common musical tastes" that "distinguish themselves from others."²⁷ In other words, the innovation that will spark "the next big thing" develops in the neighborhoods and on the local stages rather than the corporate boardroom.

These studies share two dominant themes: The first is the concept of place—the socioeconomic and cultural setting of the scene, what many scholars call environmental determinism. As a modern academic buzzword, "place" covers quite a bit of territory. Place refers to the physical plant of a music scene, a city, a rural community, a manufacturing center, a college town, a land-locked community waiting for the next train or an international shipping center at the mouth of a major river. Place refers to locations

²² Shank, Barry. *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. (Hanover & London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

²³ Shank, p. x.

²⁴ Connell, John & Gibson, Chris. *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*. (London: Routledge Publishing, 2003)

²⁵ Connell & Gibson, p. i.

²⁶ Bennett & Peterson.

²⁷ Bennett & Peterson, p. 1.

linked to economic timelines like Detroit in the 1960s, supercharged with the horsepower of the "Big Three" automobile companies versus Detroit in the 21st century sorting through the bones of the historic Motown scene and a depleted urban population. Place refers to historical settings like the brick streets of New Orleans, sole-scuffed by generations of brass bands accompanying their departed brothers and sisters to their soggy crypts or the New York neighborhood on West 28th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenue known as Tin Pan Alley. Connell & Gibson offer a representative example of the significance of place in their Preface to *Sound Tracks*. The following quote comes from a 1994 newspaper piece in the Australian newspaper, the *Sydney Sun Herald*, covering the arrival of the Canadian "roots-rock" band Junkhouse in Australia:

In the Canadian town of Hamilton there are limited choices for teenage boys in their final years at high school — unemployment, a life in the steel mills or a career as a rock 'n' roller, bluesman or jazz performer. . . . They knew that if they were going to work in Hamilton the music had to be rootsy. "That sort of music has always been what the town is about" . . . [the lead singer] said. "A blue collar town, and most of the people from Hamilton who decide to play wind up with a pretty direct human type of music. When you're learning how to play music. . . you have to be able to relate to your audience, to communicate. We learn to communicate in the simplest terms in my home town, because it is an industrial town."²⁸

This quote clearly places the musical format of this aspiring rock combo in their environment, it echoes the challenges faced by the young students in Liverpool that Cohen describes in *Rock Culture*, and, according to Connell and Gibson, is representative of "similar statements enshrining environmental determinism [that] are legion."²⁹ Place and its extensive menu of meanings, is a constant and effective analytical tool in scene studies.

The second theme is the concept of identity—the psychological development of the individual situated in a surrounding scene that serves as an incubator for this tangled process of personal edification. Personal identity implies an inner pursuit of self-image, personal worth, purpose, and a sense of belonging, particularly in a social setting of young adults. Identity in the context of a scene commonly connotes the individual

²⁸ Connell & Gibson, p. viii.

²⁹ Ibid, p. ix.

embracing the behavioral, artistic, and sartorial attributes of a larger cultural template. Stated simply, scene participants often find both solace and empowerment by melding with a like-minded group of cultural adventurers. Scene travelers sometimes find unity in a communal defiance of the status quo. The four studies mentioned above, as well as many other scene studies, point to a shared resistance to hegemonic structures as a common theme of "sceneness." Although this structured push back constitutes a common thread in scenes, particularly the music scenes of 1960s and 1970s, I've elected to lump such resistance into the more encompassing theme of identity. As will be addressed later, many operative aspects of music scenes and their practical results were rooted not in resistance but in shared values and tastes that actually complimented the status quo. In sum, the concept of identity is a dominant thread throughout countless scene analyses. Shank, for example, defines "the fierce desire to remake oneself through musical practice" as one of two guiding principles in characterizing "the rock'n'roll scene in Austin."³⁰ Observations about the significance of identity in music scenes are similarly laced through the texts of Sara Cohen, John Connell & Chris Gibson, and Andy Bennett & Richard A. Peterson. Like place, identity is a densely packed term that informs the essence of contemporary scene studies.

My current understanding of a "music scene" initially took shape when I began creating them in nightclubs and live entertainment venues to make a living. In 1982 I bought a minority interest in Steamboat, a nightclub in Austin's popular Sixth Street entertainment district. Armed with my experience in the music business and my affinity for Austin's exceptional talent resources, I reasoned that I could fashion a new course for the venue by presenting first-class music productions that featured local and national acts. Accordingly, I concentrated on talent bookings and innovative entertainment concepts while learning the mechanics of liquor sales, inventory, staffing and the related logistical challenges of a small business. The learning curve was steep, but I eventually mastered the necessary commercial skills, I bought out my partners in 1984 and aggressively began implementing many of the entertainment concepts and specialty shows I'd formulated during my tutorial phase.

³⁰ Shank, p. x. Shank defines the second guiding principle as "the equally powerful struggle to affirm the value of that practice in the complexly structured late-capitalist marketplace." (p. x.)

In the process of producing music seven nights a week, with most nights featuring two and sometimes three acts, in studying the nightly crowds, in keeping tabs on the admission receipts and the sales numbers, and in trying to figure out what was working and why, I began to recognize overriding themes and specific patterns. As an established rock 'n' roll club, Steamboat had a solid pedigree in Austin and a growing national reputation. The club had hosted various entertainers in the late 1970s who later exploded in the national market. Christopher Cross, a long-time regular performer at the club who swept the Grammy's in 1981, and Stevie Ray Vaughan, another fixture at the club before his international star ascended in the 1980s, both underscored the significance of Steamboat as a place to experience tomorrow's stars in an intimate setting.³¹ The club had an exceptional sound system, the latest in stage lighting technology, and a production crew dedicated to providing a unique concert experience in a small, 350-seat room. Collectively, these components established Steamboat as an important *place* with a unique venue *identity*. In short, the club with its singular set and setting and its established performance presentation procedures was itself a music scene, essentially a sub-scene in the larger Austin milieu.

Another aspect of the Steamboat experience that contributed to club's success and longevity was the popularity of what I called "concept" nights. A concept night was a straight-forward affair that involved booking the same band on a particular night of the week for an extended run that allowed the band to build on their fan base and create an ever-growing audience. In contemporary music-biz parlance, these events are called "residencies" whereby the same band is in residence at the same club on a designated

³¹ San Antonio native and Austin transplant, Christopher Cross, whose band included Austin musicians Andy Salmon (bass), Tommy Taylor (drums) and Rob Muir (Keyboards)—all friends and associates of Austin's "progressive country" musicians—swept the 1981 Grammys. Cross's self-titled album won "Album of the Year" and one of the singles from the album titled "Sailin'" won "Song of the Year." Cross also won the Grammy for "Best New Artist." The same year he won a Golden Globe Award and an Oscar for his song "Arthur's Theme (Best That You Can Do)" co-written with Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer Sager. Cross honed his skills in Austin nightclubs, he regularly played weekend fraternity and sorority parties on and around the UT campus, and his manager, Tim Neece and his engineer, Chet Himes were Austinites and colleagues of many of the prominent entertainment operatives in Austin. On April 1, 1980 Stevie Ray Vaughan broadcast a live show from Steamboat on Austin rock station KLBK-FM. Various segments of the broadcast were periodically rebroadcast on KLBK and served as a powerful boost to his nascent career. Vaughan was killed in a helicopter crash on August 26, 1990 and the Steamboat recordings were configured into a live album, *In the Beginning*, released in 1992.

night. This is an appealing format for a club owner because the weekly regularity minimizes advertising costs and provides stability to the monthly booking calendar. It was appealing to the band because it provided a weeknight anchor date and a steady paycheck that made weekend out-of-town concerts and private party engagements more feasible. The nonce word "residency" however, doesn't capture the significance of these weekly events. The term residency places the *resident* band at the center of the activity, and although the music is the initial calling card for the event, it's chiefly a catalyst for the strategic development of the concept night or, more accurately, it's the catalyst for the subsequent scene that unfolds. In booking and overseeing these concept nights I made several observations that began to inform my continued discovery process concerning scenes, their essence, and their utility. People don't simply come out week after week to see the same band play the same songs often in the same order with only the occasional addition to the repertoire. They come out to experience and contribute to the scene; they come out to see and be seen, to draw whatever enjoyment they regularly glean from the event, to satisfy whatever needs that kept drawing them back into the weekly soiree. A typical concept night at Steamboat was an encapsulated dynamic between bands, patrons, bartenders, wait staff, band managers, booking agents, professional partiers, drug dealers, sound engineers, regular customers, resident groupies, and die-hard fans of a particular group. Several distinct, long-standing concept nights come to mind in reviewing these Steamboat "sub-scenes" of the 1980s.

Monday nights with the Austin All Stars was one of Austin's most enduring popular concept nights. The group was a loosely defined contingent of professional musicians who played in different bands and shared a passion for the rock 'n' roll classics of the 1960s and 1970s. The Austin All Stars surfaced in Austin during the mid-1970s, a heady time when the Capital city was on the national radar as an energized climate of musical creativity. The progressive country phase was in full swing and a significant roster of successful recording acts called Austin home. These acts—Willie Nelson, Michael Martin Murphey, Jerry Jeff Walker, Asleep at the Wheel, B.W. Stevenson, and many more—all tapped the Austin talent pool to assemble their bands. Recording and touring schedules were quite demanding and Austin-based musicians logged many road miles. But on any given Sunday night, many of these musicians made their way home

from their last tour date for a few days off. And on Monday nights many routinely convened at their favorite club to catch up with friends from other groups, swap war stories, and swap songs on stage in an informal jam session. Unlike the original music they played on the road as support musicians, they sampled a large selection of popular rock songs that enabled them to stretch out, experiment as soloists, and share a few "musical laughs" and good times with their fellow players.

In time, this informal jam session developed into a steady Monday-night event, and through the 1970s the group enjoyed extended runs at several nightclubs in Austin until they settled into Steamboat in the early 1980s. The All Stars developed a flexible rhythm section that included several drummers, several bass, guitar, and keyboard players whereby if drummer "A" was out of town on a tour then drummer "B" would readily step in and this handy depth chart applied to all the instruments. As the affair gained momentum, musicians from various groups and stylish cliques from around town lined up to play, and a given Monday night might feature 10 to 15 different guitar players and as many other change-outs on the other instruments. A typical Monday-night set up would include a drum kit, a bass station, three guitar amps, a keyboard bank, several mics for horn players and additional mics for vocalists and background singers. As mentioned, the repertoire was based on "popular rock songs" but this didn't necessarily mean an extended list of Billboard Top-Ten tunes. The term "popular rock," covers a great deal of stylistic ground and like most popular culture jargon, particularly music jargon, the meaning rests in the imagination of the beholder. The All Stars' set lists were filled with songs by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Byrds, CSN&Y, the Who, Dylan, Roy Orbison as well as R&B classics, one-hit wonders, soul tunes, Motown ballads, gut-bucket blues, and some snappy selections from the 1950s. A typical set might include "Back in the U.S.S.R." (The Beatles), "Start Me Up" (Rolling Stones), "Feel a Whole Lot Better" (The Byrds), "Long Time Gone (CSN&Y)," "Like a Rolling Stone (Dylan)," "Behind Blue Eyes" (The Who), "Pretty Woman" (Roy Orbison), along with "Tore Down" (Freddie King), "I Fought the Law" (Bobby Fuller), "Ain't Too Proud to Beg" (The Temptations), "Dock of the Bay" (Otis Redding), "Dust My Broom" (Elmore James), and "Return to Sender," (Elvis). There were however, no set lists and the band never rehearsed! Once on stage, a band member would suggest a song or someone from

the audience might shout out a request, and the game was on. They only convened on Monday nights, the core rhythm section shifted according to player availability, and a long list of guest artists was the rule. Informed by years of playing in copy-rock bands during the 1960s and early 1970s, the players that comprised the extended rhythm section had developed their individual senses of "musical radar," a trait that served them well in their duties as professional sidemen. They also performed with a strong sense of ensemble. Good ensemble players recognized the sonic utility of working together as a unit and not stepping on their neighbor's musical toes, laying back and stepping forward as the song arrangement required. Having six to nine (and sometimes more) musicians on stage, five to eight of whom are playing electronically amplified instruments with the odd man out attacking a trap kit with the thunder of Thor, has the immediate capacity to degenerate into a high-decibel cacophony. "Intelligent Restraint," what I call the Hippocratic Oath of rock 'n' roll jam sessions, is an essential learned behavior for maturing musicians.

As a founding member of the Austin All Stars and as the owner of Steamboat, I was in a singular position to observe and comment on the band's Monday-night tenure at the club. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I was situated squarely in the middle of an ethnographic Petri dish and enjoyed a unique position as an actively engaged participant observer. This "Petri position" certainly encompassed much more than one band and one nightclub, but I'd first like to offer some retrospective observations regarding the All Stars, Steamboat and how they apply to my practical definition of music scenes.

The band itself with its jam-session ethos and the laissez faire song-swapping format became the first level of the nightly scene: The interplay on stage, the spontaneity, the experimentation, the opportunity for participants to engage other musicians who they might not regularly play with, and the prospects of learning a few new licks or exploring different performance styles. These activities and exchanges between musicians both on and off the stage was a cultural microcosm. Those involved derived positive results through their participation. They might discover a new gig opportunity, pick up a studio session or kick start a new music project with new-found friends. The audience provided the second level of the nightly scene: They came for the

music, they came to drink and dance, they came for the camaraderie and possibly for more intimate liaisons, but as importantly, they came to "make the scene." The phrase, "make the scene" implies several meanings: In a literal sense, they came as creators of the scene. Their presence, activities, and enthusiasm were the basic underpinnings for the evening's festivities . . . It's tough to have a scene in a nightclub without an audience. They came as performers on their own stage. In the scene scenario I'm suggesting, the entire club was a stage where the audience could display their public personas, their sartorial, behavioral, and networking assets, and if they were friends of the band, which was often the case, so much the better! They came because a Monday at Steamboat with the All Stars was safe and dependable, a setting where "everybody knows your name," as defined in the theme song for the hugely popular 1980s' sitcom "Cheers," where the bar as place and the patrons served as a surrogate family and home-away-from-home setting, a sub-set of their individual lives, and an environment where they could act out these public personas free from the responsibilities of work, school or home life. Or, to regress from a contemporary pop-culture metaphor to a late 19th-century reference, the Monday night scene was a William Jamesian "habit;" a post-adolescent behavior pattern that generated pragmatic results. Monday nights offered a dependable environment that satisfied certain needs of the audience participants.

The nightclub and its public identity provided the component of place and was an essential component of the scene. The dynamics between the band and the audience, coupled with Steamboat's physical plant—the ambiance of a venue housed in a late 19th-century building invigorated by an enthusiastic staff and state-of-the-art sound and lighting production components—and the city-wide popularity of Sixth Street came together in real time to create the steady Monday night scene at Steamboat. There were however, six other nights on the club's calendar and the subsequent weeknights each had their individual bands, audiences and consequently their individual scenes. Tuesday night for example was "Triple Ticket Tuesday," a concept night that featured three young bands trying to break into Austin's live-entertainment market. Each act would be given a batch "Free Admission" passes that resembled a concert ticket with the names of the participating bands and their respective show times. "Band One's" ticket batch would be printed on a red paper stock, "Band Two's" on a green stock, and "Band Three's" on a

blue stock, and each group would distribute their tickets to the public, friends and fans. Each band would be paid \$1.00 per ticket redeemed at the door. The result was an enlivened younger audience, a weekly showcase for up-and-coming groups, and a singular scene. Wednesday night featured Extreme Heat, a group of exceptional musicians presenting their brand of rock 'n' roll-funk music (*think* Rick James' "Super Freak") that was highly appealing to a dance crowd of students, young professionals and, interestingly, a number of UT athletes. On these high-energy Wednesdays, ladies were admitted free, and the band's bi-racial mix enticed a diverse audience that underscored another singular weeknight scene. Thursdays and the weekends were reserved for higher profile regional and national acts, and the combined seven-night booking component was a synergistic set of sub-scenes that collectively defined the larger Steamboat live-performance identity.

There were however a score of other successful nightclubs on Sixth Street; there were scores of successful nightclubs, concert venues, dance halls, and band-performance destinations at all points of Austin's compass, each with their identifying ambiance, format and complimentary sub-scenes and this combined venue milieu signified the larger Austin live-music scene of the 1980s. Still, the club and music-venue landscape was simply a sub-set of the larger Austin scene equation that included other scene-essential elements like music management and booking agencies, recording studios, retail music stores, radio stations, production, staging and sound companies, graphic artists, regional record labels and similar organizations that served as functioning parts of the larger cultural workshop that was the Austin music scene. And like all workshops, the Austin scene created *things*, things that I'm calling cultural products.

The significance of cultural products lies at the heart of my analysis of Austin's music scene. As previously mentioned, the term suggests an array of items that might include a hit song or top-selling record album, a lucrative artist management company, a popular television program, or a music festival that tapped the power of the scene to develop a successful talent format. I believe that a pragmatic analysis of the Austin scene demands a careful review of that which the scene created. In other words, what did the Austin music scene of the seventies actually *do*? Did the scene create an ephemeral pop-culture fad, a musical flash in the pan, a signifying cowboy-hippie culture meld, a

unifying phase of the culture wars of the sixties and seventies, or some sort of paradigm shift in the evolution of popular music? What long-term effect did the Austin scene have on its participants from its brightest stars to its fan base and the extended population in contingent support fields? What role did the scene play in Austin's cultural history or in the main currents of Texan and American music? I maintain that these questions and others can be more effectively addressed by exploring the output of the scene; by considering the cultural products created in Austin's cultural workshop, particularly those "legacy" products that continue to play an active role in 21st-century American culture. A more thorough analysis of the scene's cultural products is presented in Chapter 7, but because the concept of a cultural product is a constant throughout this dissertation, I'm offering a few preliminary examples below.

Beyond the songs themselves, the recordings on which they appear might be one of the scene's most accessible products. Jerry Jeff Walker's million-selling 1973 album, *¡Viva Terlingua!*, defined the laissez-faire aspect of the Austin recording scene and in the opinion of many scene observers, it captured the "live and let live" ambiance of the period. This is not to suggest that all of the albums associated with the progressive-country era were similarly recorded . . . As I will illustrate in subsequent chapters, many of these recordings were intricate, highly technical efforts. But Walker's *¡Viva Terlingua!* certainly captures a signifying segment of the scene and will be discussed in Chapter 6, which addresses the work of three Austin songwriters. Willie Nelson's 1975 recording of "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," a country-music standard penned by seminal Nashville songwriter Fred Rose, was a number-one country hit and the lead single from the album *Red Headed Stranger*. This recording project was a curious confluence of the old and the new. Reaching back to choose a song written by a founding father of the Nashville scene, including it on a high-risk concept album that told the tale of love, loss and revenge in the American West, releasing it over the objections of the record company, and then generating almost three-million album sales are the classic components of a "Williefied" cultural product. Nelson's 1978 album release, *Stardust*, featuring his unique arrangements of standard tunes from the American Songbook sold

over 18 million copies.³² This successful album connected several generations of songwriters and underscored the staying power and vitality of well-crafted songs.

Music management companies like the Austin-based Moon Hill Management made lasting contributions to the careers of many of the leading recording artists of the period and paved the way for a series of successful regional management, production and booking agencies. *Austin City Limits*, now in its 35th season, is the longest-running live music television program in broadcast history and is arguably the most prominent cultural legacy product ever created in Austin. In 1974 the local PBS station KLRN had completed a major studio makeover to develop one of the most advanced television production facilities between New York and Los Angeles. As station management weighed options for creating original content, program director Bill Arhos toyed with the idea of a music series. After conversations with regional media and business aficionados, KLRN team members, and local music scene advocates, Arhos realized that the answer was in his backyard. "It was obvious," Arhos said referencing the local live-music scene. "What was the most visible cultural product of Austin? It'd be like ignoring a rhinoceros in your bathtub."³³ The Kerrville Folk Festival, celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2011, is similarly rooted in the Austin music scene. Kerrville creator, Rod Kennedy, was an established Austin event producer when he organized the first festival in 1972 in the Texas Hill Country town of Kerrville one hundred miles southwest of Austin. The Festival's talent roster during the seminal years that set the tone and public perception of the perennial event drew strongly from Austin's stable of popular singer-songwriters then known as "progressive country" artists and from the Chequered Flag, Kennedy's folk music showcase club in Austin. All of the aforementioned cultural products—hit records, a music business management company, a television program and a music festival—are pragmatic manifestations of a prolific climate of creativity and examples of the enduring influence of the Austin music scene in a trans-America cultural setting.

Thus far in my attempt to unpack the concept of a modern music scene with a special focus on the Austin scene of the 1970s, I've referenced scholarly sources that

³² Stardust sold 5 million copies in the United States, 7 million in Australia, 2 million in Canada, and 4 million New Zealand,

³³ Endres, Clifford. *Austin City Limits: The Story Behind Television's Most Popular Country Music Program*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), p. 15.

analyze domestic and international music scenes. I've taken an ethnographic leap as a participant observer into the 1980s to present the characteristics of a popular nightclub scene that situate the small Steamboat sub-scene as one of many building blocks in a larger live-entertainment network. The lessons learned in the eighties offer insights into the dynamics of the previous decade and the clubs, bands, fans, and the range of support systems that underpinned the cultural workshop that was Austin in the seventies. In my reading, extant scholarly sources are often vague in defining and analyzing cultural products, particularly the products that I'm defining as "legacy products," products that endure to play pragmatic and strategic roles in the evolution of music scenes, in the lives of scene participants, and in the cultural sensibilities of a national or international public. This is not to imply that these sources are deficient. Rather, it implies that these studies are rooted in their individual criteria, primarily the notions of place and identity. Further, many of the scenes addressed in the scholarly studies did not generate cultural products like a series of hit recordings, a productive and profitable music-business setting, or enduring artifacts like an *Austin City Limits* or a Kerrville Folk Festival. With that in mind, I'd like to briefly revisit the efficacy of place and identity as defined in scholarly critiques and their relevance to the Austin scene and its longevity.

The concepts of place and identity play dominant roles in the examination of modern music scenes and factor into the previously mentioned All Stars Monday-night scene, similar concept nights at Steamboat, and the more encompassing Austin scene during the eighties. The mechanics and motivations of the Steamboat scene provide insights into the scene structures of the previous decade. Regarding place, Sixth Street was recognized throughout the country, particularly the South and Southwest, as an entertainment destination. Austin had an extremely large population of musicians and support industries, and in the aftermath of the seventies with a strong blues and rock scene on the rise with new stars like aforementioned Stevie Ray Vaughan and multi-Grammy winner Christopher Cross lighting up the city's music horizon, Austin had established an identity as a prolific "music city" rich with opportunity. Similarly, place and identity played a dominant role in staging the Austin scene of the seventies. Austin occupied a high-profile place on an active national timeline, that curious historical borderland between the late 1960s and the 1970s that was one of America's most volatile

domestic periods. It was a time when popular culture, fueled by technological explosions in mass media and the political and social ferment of the era played a significant role in shaping the philosophical and moral compasses of millions of young Americans. Austin had long been identified as the state's most liberal and intellectual enclave where the combination of a pristine natural environment, a state capital, a collection of colleges and universities, and a strong local economy came together as determinants to invigorate one of America's most creative cultural climates of the late-twentieth-century. Three of the studies listed above, Shank's *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*; Connell & Gibson's *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*; and Bennett & Peterson's *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*, all invest heavily in the notion of place and identity. One of the "two forces" that defines Shank's thesis is "the fierce desire to remake oneself through musical practice."³⁴ Connell & Gibson, as cultural geologists, focus on ethnicity, gender, regional and national affiliation, and the infusion of defiant countercultural attitudes as instructional elements of identity formation in young scene participants. And Bennett & Peterson's collection of essays reveals a common theme that smaller international music scenes enable their members to "define who they are and affirm group membership" by sharing "their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others" in making distinctive lifestyle choices.³⁵ All three studies equate scene membership with "distinctive lifestyle choices" that by and large determine an individual's role in a larger societal or cultural setting; a role that can pervade an individual's self image, professional identity, recreational preferences and their general view and approach to their immediate public and personal environment as well as their goals and their future.

It is at this point that my attempt to construct a working definition of the Austin music scene departs from these scholarly sources regarding place and identity. Certainly place is a powerful cultural determinant. Austin's climate of creativity in the late 1960s and early 1970s contributed significantly to the music scene crescendo of the seventies, but Austin as "place" is more accurately defined as an aggregate of many disparate influences and sub-scenes rather than a unified setting. In the late 1960s for example, the

³⁴ Shank, p. x.

³⁵ Bennett & Peterson, p. 1.

scene at the Vulcan Gas Company, the hippie-counterculture headquarters in downtown Austin featuring rock bands, venerable blues players, and a provocative new style called psychedelic music stood in direct opposition to the scene at the Broken Spoke and the Split Rail, two of several two-steppin' country honky-tonk dance halls in Austin. Nonetheless, all of these country venues would play significant roles in the development of the Austin scene of the seventies. Or, during the mid-1960s when Threadgill's hosted jam sessions that involved their regular country pickers and the folkies from the UT campus; when the East Side clubs were alive with blues & R&B bands; and when the West Campus frats and sororities cranked up the weekend parties, there was little to suggest a strategic connection between these venues and the comprehensive Austin scene. Nonetheless, all of these situations, all of these singular "places," contributed to Austin's musical persona as it developed in the 1970s and beyond.

Austin as a collection of "places" is also evident in the city's shifting demographical environment. As a university town, each semester welcomed a new collection of students as graduates moved on. Every spring and fall, the University of Texas welcomed thousands of new students and potential scene participants to Austin, a number that was increased with the enrollments at St. Edwards University, Concordia College and other institutions. As the seat of state government Austin hosted a new legislative session every other year. The sum of legislators, their staffs, lobbyists, and an army of support personnel, temporal hires and media types represented a population spike and a boon to local businesses. Austin was home to Bergstrom Air Force Base (1943-1993), a major military installation and a significant contributor to Austin's population and local economy. Before the base was decommissioned in 1993, Bergstrom was contributing \$339 million annually to the economy of Central Texas, according to 1989 economic studies.³⁶ Historically, Austin has been a city in a perpetual state of demographic flux. Accordingly, in considering the Austin's academic, legislative and business environment, its urban and suburban evolution, its ethnographic and racial fabric coupled with the city's reaction to the larger national trends of the 1960s and 1970s, the

³⁶ From the website, "TheMilitaryStandard - Air Force Bases," <http://www.techbastard.com/afb/tx/bergstrom.php>).

Capital City was and is a difficult "place" to categorize under a single descriptive umbrella.

Scholarly sources however, seem to address "place" through a more homogeneous approach. In the example above cited by Connell & Gibson regarding the music scene in the Canadian town of Hamilton, their informant describes Hamilton as a "blue-collar town," heavily industrialized with an audience who responds to a specific spectrum of music, rock, blues or jazz, hence a unified city persona. Although Bennett & Peterson's collection of essays deals with music scenes in different geographical locations, primarily in the U.S. and Britain, and even though the topics and types of scenes are very different ranging from a local jazz club scene in Chicago during the 1950s, popular Karaoke nights in modern urban settings, or an international scene comprised of fans connected by the Internet following the career of their chosen pop star, each of these scene "sets" displayed a homogeneous fabric in the scene's cultural "setting." The analyses in the essays generally unfold in a specific location and deal with a specific type of music, like Chicago and the work of single jazz trio. Even the Internet scene is structured around a defined age group of fans and single pop idol. The essays are therefore focused on a specific place—whether that place is a specific city coupled with a specific style or a virtual environment situated around a specific performer—and rarely consider other sub-scenes and circumstances that might be bumping against each other to influence the larger aspects of the larger scene under study. Indeed, there may not have been a collection of relevant sub-scenes worthy of discussion in these specific scene settings. There was however an extensive collection of sub-scenes at play in Austin and it's necessary to consider the results of their "bumping against each other" and their "influence" in analyzing the cultural borderland that was the Austin scene during the seventies.

To be fair, both Connell & Gibson and Bennett & Peterson consider the interplay and connections between scenes in an expansive international setting. Connell & Gibson address these various "places" as creative oases and refuges of aesthetic authenticity that serve as counterbalances to the compelling consequences of globalization and highly commercialized "corporate music." In other words, national boundaries, local traditions, and musical roots have been marginalized in the tsunami of corporate ubiquity and the

smaller scenes serve as the defining engines of creativity. Bennett & Peterson's selection of essays effectively analyzes the similarities and disparities of local, trans-local, and virtual scenes and their continuing relevance in a globalized environment where "80 percent of all the commercial music of the world is controlled by five multinational firms."³⁷ The authors underscore the power of these localized music scenes where "most music is made and enjoyed in diverse situations divorced from these corporate worlds."³⁸

An additional consideration of these insightful scene treatments as they stand in contrast to this analysis of the Austin scene is rooted in their *place* on a historical and technological timeline. During the genesis of the Austin scene in the late sixties and early seventies the notion of globalization as it's currently defined was generally a twinkle in the collective eye of various corporate boardrooms, and the digital revolution and the Internet explosion was a set of theoretical connections on a binary drawing board. The Connell & Gibson and Bennett & Peterson analyses, although only twenty-five years removed from the heyday of the Austin scene, were well removed from the corporate entertainment industry template of the seventies. There was no do-it-yourself "Internet" alternative to the recording and marketing a record album for a national release. Multi-track recording in the seventies was a tremendously expensive undertaking. A typical album might involve a \$20,000 to \$200,000 investment in studio time alone. There were additional costs associated with mastering, fabrication of the actual vinyl albums, the artwork and packaging, and a substantial investment in marketing and working the product to secure radio airplay and related media coverage. This was a high-dollar commitment that usually fell under the purview of corporate entities that could afford to play the probabilities. One multi-million-selling Stevie Wonder album would more than offset the losses accrued by the label Motown through a score of other fishing expeditions and album releases in search of the next "big thing." Further, the analyses of late 20th-century music scenes through the lens of the Internet and digital technology are light years removed from the communication wherewithal of the earlier Austin scene. In the seventies there were no emails, no databases, and no opportunities to communicate with an invigorated fan base to facilitate the sales of 15,000 to 50,000 units to create a

³⁷ Bennett & Peterson, p. 1.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 1.

substantial do-it-yourself sales success of a CD release recorded in a local digital studio with an infinitely smaller recording and promotional overhead. Consequently, the efficacy of place in 1975 was much different than the efficacy of place and the interconnections of people and places in 2005.

Unlike the global approach of Connell & Gibson and Bennett & Peterson, Shank situates his study of Austin's rock 'n' roll scene of the late seventies and early eighties in a single city and largely at a specific Austin venue, Raul's, a small campus-area club that famously hosted the early punk scene in Austin. And unlike Connell & Gibson and Bennett & Peterson, Shank offers a historical perspective of his scene setting by referencing Austin's musical and cultural history in three early chapters, "Constructing the Musicalized Performance of Texan Identity," "Desperados Waiting for a Train: The Development of Progressive Country Music," and "The Collapse of the Progressive Country Alliance." But in addressing his actual early-eighties "rock'n'roll scene," the author focuses on a specific slice of the city's music history and its immediate performance space while ignoring other prolific, rock-based musical themes at play in town during the period. There is little mention for example of the popular rise of the rock & blues of the Fabulous Thunderbirds or Stevie Ray Vaughan and their multi-decade impact on popular American music or the stunning 1981 success of Austin's Christopher Cross on the international stage. Further, the author downplays the strategic influence of the previous decade in his chapter, "The Collapse of the Progressive Country Alliance" which I address in detail in the following chapter. Cohen's 1991 analysis of rock culture in Liverpool accurately casts the city as a homogeneous environment where the young, working-age population viewed a career in a rock band and a career in the local labor market with a secondary education as equal contenders for a viable future. Unlike Austin, Liverpool in the late 20th century didn't offer the diverse cultural and sociological spectrum of universities, colleges, legislative activities, verdant topographical settings, a promising technology industry and similar cultural-economic amenities that defined Austin in the seventies. These scholarly treatments of "place" in Cohen's study and other studies are insightful and functional in the spaces and periods where they are applied, but they don't necessarily transfer as an analytical template for Austin's scene during the seventies. "Place" as it applies to Austin during the progressive-country period is more

accurately assessed as a combination of place components—the mixing and matching of sub-scenes, genres, and generations coupled with larger national trends that combined to shore up a prolific climate of creativity. Because Austin's particular climate fostered an exceptional collection of songwriters and songs, "place," as it applies to Austin, should be considered on an ethereal level. The environment in which music is created or the place where a song is written can commonly factor into a composer's artistic equation and the ensuing musical offering. But the ultimate variable, the prevailing wind of Austin's songwriting climate of creativity, the ultimate "place," is the geography of the author's imagination. Consequently, the notion of place in this study will include the disposition of individual songwriters as well as the overall disposition of place as a cultural environment.

Similarly, the concept of identity in this study subtly departs from the general theme of identity presented in many of the scholarly accounts. One point of departure rests with certain authors framing identity in oppositional terms. In Bennett & Peterson for example,

This journalistic discourse [regarding scenes] not only has served to describe the music, dress and deportment appropriate to a scene, but also has functioned as a cultural resource for fans of particular musical genres, enabling them to forge collective expressions of 'underground' or 'alternative' identity and to identify their cultural distinctiveness from the 'mainstream.'³⁹

This statement typifies many of the "alternative identity" positions presented in various scholarly sources. To be sure, there were notable elements of "otherness" in the progressive country scene, but my research suggests that such "otherness" was not a unifying agent of causality. Because the Austin scene was an amalgam of sub-scenes, various notions of "otherness" were couched in different settings and there was no overriding "us" versus a ubiquitous "them." More significantly, the notion of identity as it applies to the Austin scene is more accurately framed as an individual adventure, a personal pursuit that would have taken place regardless of geographical location or contemporary cultural environment in the natural course of growing up. Inasmuch as the demographic of the seventies scene was largely college-aged students and/or young

³⁹ Bennett & Peterson, p. 2.

professionals, two groups that were in a perennial state of flux, the notion of "finding oneself," of establishing an enduring or even an ephemeral identity, was part and parcel of the socialization process and the individual's psychological growth in modern America. Consequently, the challenges associated with post-adolescent identity are more "process oriented" than "scene oriented." Thus, the cowboy hats, boots and ersatz frontier individualism at play in Austin during the seventies and the black leather jackets, pompadours, and the "quest for cool" during the late fifties were simply sartorial and behavioral accouterments of a similar maturation process.

Another departure from the scholarly sources regarding scene and identity has to do with the previous reference to a "William Jamesian habit." The substrata of Jamesian psychology is well beyond the scope of this study, but I'd like to submit my pedestrian interpretation of an aspect of William James' extensive work on the relevance of habit in human behavior by suggesting that habit, the repetition of a learned behavior, yields pragmatic results. Accordingly, people revisit a certain scene because that particular environment fulfills a certain need in the visitor. This habitual "revisiting" is not necessarily an investment in a new, encompassing identity. The act of revisiting a scene could be simply a tactical respite from the pressing issues in one's day-to-day life, a safe environment to act out an imagined ephemeral identity, or a comfortable social setting to have fun. Further, the scholarly sources I reference seem to focus on the disposition of individuals when they are actively engaged in their respective scene activities. This begs the question, "Are the participants in these various scene studies twenty-four-seven scene players, or do they have other lives and other identities beyond their scene involvement?" In my review of the texts, the "meta-scene" life of a participant is not a consistent topic of inquiry. It is difficult therefore, to assess the extent to which individuals are immersed in their respective scenes. I can however comment on the meta-scene activities of participants in Austin during the seventies. The performance component of the scene, the singers, songwriters, band members and road crews were full-time scene players. The audience component of the scene however, the participants, largely students, working people and young professionals, engaged the scene primarily as a source of entertainment, need gratification and to a smaller degree, an avenue of identity. A third component of the scene, what I'm calling the support & service component which

includes nightclubs, concert venues, artist management companies, booking agencies, studios and related production entities, was populated by individuals who had varying degrees of investment in the scene as an element of personal identity. Other than the professional musicians and their immediate professional associates whose vocations required a full-time commitment to the scene, the majority of other scene participants had other lives, other interests and other identities beyond the scope of their scene involvement.

While identity is a densely packed term that plays strongly into contemporary analyses of music scenes, identity plays an appreciably smaller role in my treatment of the Austin scene. Because the scene in question was a network of sub-scenes, because the events in Austin were driven by a post-radical consumer-based counterculture as defined by Rossinow, and because the personal identity challenges inherent in the Austin scene were similar to the identity angst common to youthful communities across the country, the notion of identity is a secondary determinant in my analysis of the Austin scene.

There is one other aspect of the Austin scene, and I believe, of music scenes in general, that's worth mentioning. Just as the term "progressive country" was coined by an Austin radio station in 1972, the overall Austin music scene has been named, branded, popularized, categorized, and historicized by third parties. I've never been comfortable with the term "progressive country." In my judgment, it doesn't reflect the style of music that was popular during the period. The music that resonates in my memory is more a combination of rock bands interpreting the work of songwriters in a folk genre, what is now commonly embodied in the term "singer-songwriter." Although many of the songs of Michael Martin Murphey, Jerry Jeff Walker, Steven Fromholz, Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Willis Alan Ramsey, and other period writers were country influenced, they were primarily folk songs. These artists, before situating themselves in Austin generally performed in folk music clubs and listening rooms rather than honkytonks and dance halls.⁴⁰ The possible exception was Willie Nelson, who certainly penned country songs. Nelson's work however, even before he moved to Austin, thrived on the borders of

⁴⁰ The exception to this collection of songwriters "who situated themselves in Austin" was Guy Clark. Clark lived in Nashville, but he played many of the same venues as his contemporaries and was a regular visitor to Austin and maintained close ties to Austin's musicians.

Nashville song templates and the staid production parameters preferred by the Music City brass. Like countless other music scenes around the world, the performers, songwriters, and musicians played a limited role in creating the public persona for "their" scene. They supplied the cultural products that media operatives and critics brought to the general population in the form of airplay, broadcast coverage, reviews and cultural criticism. Redneck Rock, often used to describe the music of the period, came from writer and journalist, Jan Reid, and Cosmic Cowboy, an extremely popular phrase associated with the scene, was co-opted by contemporary media sources from Michael Martin Murphey's song "Cosmic Cowboy, Pt. 1." This association proved to be a lingering source of irritation for Murphey, particularly when journalists and critics cast the song as an insincere attempt to remake the revered trope of the American cowboy into a countercultural, hippie spoof. Journalist Bill Porterfield, in describing the "new musical romanticism" that cast the cowboy as "a gentle knight, repulsed by arms and armor and aggression and refinery air," described the ethos of the cosmic cowboy as "a curious hallucination."⁴¹ Folklorist Archie Green went on to say, "In hindsight, Murphey averred that he had written the song tongue-in-cheek, never intending it to be taken seriously."⁴² The issue at hand, however, is not to argue the essence of Murphey's motivation in writing the song, whether that motivation was to present a serious message or a tongue-in-cheek exposé. Rather, the issue rests with the public's interpretation of the Austin scene as it was presented and interpreted through the conduit of popular media. "Cosmic cowboy" became a handy journalistic/media metaphor for the aesthetic output of an intricate scene that depicted cultural tensions and guarded degrees of resolution, an ongoing generational skirmish, and a blend of music styles and lifestyles that signified Austin music during the seventies. Further, the cosmic cowboy example underscores the diminished significance of the artist's intent in a mass-media market. Once the creative cat was out of the bag, once the aesthetic product hit the streets of pop-culture (in this case, Murphey's song), the media machine that made the aesthetic product popular—the

⁴¹ Porterfield, Bill. 1975. "In Search of the Modern Cowboy." *Texas Monthly* (October): 58-64, 88-96.

⁴² Green, Archie. *Torching the Fink Books and Other Essay on Vernacular Culture*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 90, with a quote from Jan Reid's *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, p. 264.

music critics, radio program directors, journalists, and related media sources—were the primary arbiters who shaped the public's perception. Accordingly, in this postmodern *mélange* of popular interpretation, the creator of the product was often assigned a bit role in this cultural process. One of the goals of this dissertation is to reintroduce the voices of these creators into a contemporary dialogue regarding the Austin scene of the seventies. By engaging these creative contributors, I intend to pierce the scene's media-made veil to address the inner aesthetic and social mechanics of the Austin scene.

The Austin scene shared many traits with other scenes around the world and generated certain defining traits of its own. With that in mind, I offer the following interpretation of the Austin scene as a preliminary assessment that will be expanded later in this chapter. My general impression of the Austin scene is that of a broad human network powered by the needs, aspirations and commonalities of its constituents that essentially operates as a cultural engine. This power source generates practical results in the lives of scene constituents and produces tangible cultural products that influence the ongoing currents of larger cultural ecosystems. This might be reduced to a social equation with the causal components on the left side and the pragmatic results on the right side. The left-side causal components would include the performers, the audience, and the support and service sector. The right side of the equation would include the practical results in the lives of constituents, cultural products, and influence of such results on the course of larger cultural currents. This equation operates on a micro or a macro level. The metaphor might apply to the activities of a single nightclub as suggested in the Steamboat example above, it might apply to the aggregate effect of local live-music venues, or it might apply to the musical activities of the entire city. As an application of this scene equation on a micro level that generated more far-reaching, macro results, consider Jerry Jeff Walker's 1973 *¡Viva Terlingua!* recording project.

Walker had a vision of making an album in a relaxed setting away from a structured studio environment. To that end he assembled the band, set up shop at his favorite watering hole, Luckenbach, approximately 70 miles west of Austin in the Texas Hill Country and called in a professional mobile recording company from the East

Coast.⁴³ Walker commandeered the local dance hall to create an ad hoc recording studio using bales of hay as sound baffles with mic lines running into the recording truck parked outside. The final night of the week's recording sessions was a public concert recorded live. The Luckenbach dance hall was packed, the audience became an additional instrument in the recording process, and the finale yielded two keeper cuts for the album. The multi-track masters were mixed and edited by the production crew (on Walker's insistence, there were no overdubs), MCA Records released and promoted *Viva Terlingua!*, and the album soon went "Gold" selling over 500,000 units. This abbreviated example incorporates the basic elements of the left side of the equation with the performers, the audience, and the support sector coming together to create a singular cultural scene. The right side of the equation exhibits practical results in the form of a shared identity as musicians, audience and production crew united to create a unique cultural product, *Viva Terlingua!*. Further, the overall recording project and the success of the ensuing product, signified a potential shift in contemporary music business sensibilities. Conventional wisdom held that recording projects required sophisticated studio settings and surgical recording techniques. Walker's methodology countered that thesis and to the surprise of several MCA record executives did so quite successfully.⁴⁴ Still, the *Viva Terlingua!* recording project was a single event and didn't necessarily instigate a paradigm shift in the recording industry.

But when coupled with similar successful projects, a trend began to take shape. In 1975 Willie Nelson released the story-telling or "concept" album, *Red Headed Stranger*. Nelson wanted the songs to flow smoothly from one to the next to facilitate a narrative-like presentation. *Red Headed Stranger* was recorded live without breaks from the introduction song through the final song at Autumn Sound in Dallas. The album sold over 2.5 million units in the United States and Canada alone. These two recording projects as well as similar "head-on" recordings of the era represent yet another sub-set of

⁴³ Dale Ashby & Sons were the recordists of record, arranged by Walker's manager, Michael Brovsky.

⁴⁴ In the opening song of *Viva Terlingua!*, "Gettin' By," Walker pokes fun at the MCA hierarchy by singling out the "executive-in-charge" of the recording project and assuring him that all would be well when the Luckenbach dust cleared. The final verse reads as follows: "Last week I was thinkin' / It's record time again / I can see Mike Maitland pacin' the floor. / 'Hey Mike, don't you worry / Something's bound to come out / See, I've been down this road once or twice before.'"

a larger Austin scene that labored to achieve songwriting and performance authenticity void of recording studio legerdemain.⁴⁵

The equation metaphor and the *¡Viva Terlingua!* example hopefully illustrate the multi-faceted nature of an event as it might apply to a music scene. The scholarly interpretations of place and identity certainly play into the ethnographic mix of scene studies, but there are additional causal components and results that deserve consideration. Take for example Willie Nelson's initial performance at the Armadillo that so many chroniclers consider to a defining moment in Austin music history. What were the components of the event and how did they interact? In weighing these variables, how much "scene capital" should be invested in Nelson's innate talent, his extensive experience in Nashville as a professional songwriter, or his dedicated back-up band and their accompaniment? How much emphasis should be placed on an eclectic audience invigorated by the mystique of the Armadillo as a cross-generational, cross-genre music venue? How much scene capital should be invested in the social angst that characterized the national mood of the early seventies? Were Nelson and the band trying to create a new trend? Was the hippie-redneck audience seeking a cross-cultural truce? Were members of the audience in the market for a new identity? How do of these variables factor into a "defining moment in Austin music history?" How do they factor into a scene?

I would argue that all of these variables apply in the case of the Nelson-Armadillo event, and although previous ethnographers have addressed many of these considerations, other considerations have been overlooked. What for example were Nelson's intentions? Was he consciously involved in a "scene-making" process? Did Nelson have any comments about his infusion into the Austin scene? Were there other venues that Nelson was playing in Austin that influenced his audience-artist relationship? What observations have other artists and scene operatives offered regarding Nelson's arrival? These and similar questions could be posed to any number of key participants or applied to various

⁴⁵ "Head on" is a recording term that implies that the music being recorded goes directly from the source to the magnetic recording head and then to the tape. Although there might be electronic embellishments as the signal travels from the instrument of origin through the microphone, through the recording console where audio effects like equalization, compression or similar audio devices might be added, the gist of the term implies that the ultimate sounds captured are "as played" and free from overdubs and studio tricks.

events during the genesis of the seventies' scene and are typical of the variety of themes I'll address throughout this study. In other words, I'm trying to expand the field of inquiry in my efforts to flesh out the essence of a music scene. With that in mind, I'm offering one more example of a productive sub-scene in Austin. This example is based on the activities of a group of daytime patrons at a popular bar and music venue.

I Need a New Scene!

In the early pages of this chapter I mentioned that my understanding of music scenes took shape when I began creating them to make a living. I then focused on the nightly sub-scenes at Steamboat and discussed the establishment's overall identity and relevance in the larger arena of Austin's live-music venues. I gained a broader perspective of scene dynamics when I built a new nightclub, a small listening room in South Austin called the Saxon Pub in 1990. After almost a decade at Steamboat I had witnessed Austin's premier entertainment district, Sixth Street, reinvent itself as the clubs and the clientele continually shifted in response to fashionable trends and tastes in popular culture. In 1989 I recall a creeping sense of alienation during my regular visits to the club and the street. Not surprisingly, the patrons were younger, the music was louder and I seemed to be surrounded by black leather jackets, gravity-resistant-rainbow-hued haircuts, tattoos, and body piercings—a fifties flashback with black ink and polished shrapnel. I was turning forty that year and I felt that I needed a new scene! Steamboat was running smoothly, I had a solid management team in place and I had stumbled on an excellent location for a new venue.

My accountants, Don Roberts and Joe Ables, had been handling the books for a small bar approximately one mile south of the Colorado River, then "Town Lake," on Lamar Boulevard, one of the city's most highly traveled north-south thoroughfares. They called me one afternoon to mention that this particular establishment was having major tax problems with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission and wanted to pull the plug and sell their lease. When I met my Roberts and Ables to check out the location, I was taken by the ambiance of the room. It had high, vaulted ceilings finished out with an exceptionally efficient sound-absorbing material often used in recording studios. The space was divided into two sections, a larger south-side stage and performance section

and a north-side secondary seating and game room. On the performance side as one entered the building was an elongated rectangular bar that jutted out from the back wall with ample room inside the rectangle for several bar stations, beer coolers, and inventory. Each side of the bar would accommodate six to eight stools with four at the top of the rectangle and patrons could easily communicate from one side of the bar to the other. I envisioned a stage in the southern, street-side corner. That was the natural focal point of the room and an ideal location for a stage door to facilitate efficient load-ins and set changes. All in all, the location, the inside structure, and the terms of the lease suggested a resounding Yes! I invited Roberts and Ables to join me in this adventure as minority equity partners, and by the time the sun set on another happy hour in Austin, we had something to celebrate.

For many years I'd envisioned building a first-class singer-songwriter showcase reminiscent of the venues I enjoyed playing in the late sixties through the seventies. Also, having spent four years in England during my junior high school years I harbored fond memories of these mysterious places called "pubs," these romantic spots where all the action seemed to be. The Saxon Pub borrowed from both of these themes. The initial challenge was setting up the venue for nighttime music activities. This had been my primary focus at Steamboat where we did the bulk of our business between 9:00 pm and 2:00 am when the bands were playing. In finishing out the main concert room, we allocated ample room for a stage; we carefully considered room acoustics and made a special effort to develop exceptional sound reinforcement and stage lighting systems to compliment the performance environment. As we waded through the mechanics of licenses, permits, bar equipment and related necessities, I began thinking, "What in the world are we going to do between 11:00 am when we open and show time?" The partnership discussed possibilities that included "all the usual suspects" from happy hour specials to food offerings and by the time we opened we had a number of options in place to enhance daytime business. What ultimately developed during the day however truly surprised me and represents the basis of the scene study below.

In the final stages of the build-out we addressed how the bar would look and feel—that mysterious notion of ambiance. I genuinely wanted the Saxon Pub to be many of the things that Steamboat was not—a classy watering hole, a cool, dark place, a hide-a-

way of sorts with clean and comfortable facilities, a throwback to a film noir setting, in short, a neighborhood pub. To that end we created a rich green faux marble bar top with brass fixtures embellished with grained-wood accents throughout, and sturdy, swiveling barstools designed for extended stays. In June 1990, the Saxon Pub opened featuring many of the musicians from my generation coupled with a new generation of creative players that shared an aesthetic focus on songs and songwriting. This aspect of the club's debut unfolded according to plan, but there was another aspect, one that I hadn't envisioned. It was an aspect that played an essential role in the club's longevity and in my ongoing education in scene dynamics. The Saxon Pub developed two distinct scenes. In addition to the predictable nighttime entertainment scene, a daytime scene developed that ran from 11:00 am until late evening when the entertainment began.

Day business began slowly as a few curious folks from the neighborhood or passers by dropped in to check out this new bar with a twenty-foot tin knight attached to the Saxon Pub signpost on South Lamar Boulevard. Some of the visitors had frequented the bar in one of its past incarnations, some were retirees, some were early morning construction workers or roofers who knocked off during the heat of the late Texas afternoon. Others were lawyers and accountants who kept "banker's hours" or small business owners who established their own time schedules. During the first few months the partnership experimented with some of the daytime promotions that had been on the drawing board with little notable success, but curiously, the daytime numbers kept steadily improving week by week. By the end of the first year, the day sales were steady, strong and improving which was a tremendous boost to the overall business outlook. After our first annual review, our triumvirate reasoned that the daytime business provided a vital variable in a larger success formula. The daily revenues generated before the shift change at 7:00 pm were essentially covering the majority of our fixed overhead costs. This basic economic observation, however, didn't explain how or why the daytime numbers were strong and growing. It wasn't until I was entrenched in my graduate studies in the mid-1990s focused on American popular culture that I began to make some ethnographic sense of these fortuitous daytime developments. Indeed, at that time I was developing a master's thesis around the subject of early 18th-century public houses, 19th-century saloons, and 20th-century bars as influential cultural institutions in American

history, a subject that informed my ongoing scene studies. In researching the subject I began interviewing the regulars at the Pub to ascertain what drew them to the venue, what they were looking for, what they found, how those discoveries played into their lives, and how these individual agendas blended into the general dynamic of the scene.

Many of the contributing elements of the day scene were readily evident: The Pub enjoyed an exceptional location close to some of Austin's premier attractions like Zilker Park, Barton Springs, Palmer Auditorium, Zachary Scott Theater, Auditorium Shores, and various public athletic fields. Although only minutes from downtown, the Pub was associated with the ethos of "South Austin," a blue-collar bohemia that stood in cultural opposition to the highbrow, high-dollar haunts north of the Colorado River. Further, the Pub was in striking distance of the tremendously popular entertainment, restaurant, and retail districts on South First Street and South Congress Avenue. By interviewing our patrons, I learned that the Pub was regarded as a pleasant environment to drink and socialize. Evidently the investment in "ambiance" had been worthwhile. Customers were comfortable at the Pub, they felt safe, and given the amount of time they spent there, they embraced it as "their" place. Additionally, the venue had a social director. Our daytime manager and bartender, Marina, was not only efficient and dependable, she was an amiable and informed conversationalist who interacted with those on the other side of the bar as friends rather than customers. She essentially resided over a cultural court with maternal instincts and the skills of an impromptu psychologist who successfully facilitated a secure home-away-from-home environment for the regulars. Still, many of these seminal elements could be seen in countless bar scenes around the country from the imaginary "Cheers" set in Boston to the venerable Barney's Beanery on Santa Monica in West Hollywood.⁴⁶ The significance of the Pub's daytime scene was anchored in the practical results generated through the interaction of these causal components of people and place, a scene that I labeled a "Blue-Collar Country Club." Unlike many other regional or national bar scenes, this unique assemblage of day timers

⁴⁶ At the time of this writing, Barney's Beanery has three locations in the Los Angeles area. The "signifying" location that was the hot spot for entertainment industry types was the original location at 8447 Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood. There are now locations in Burbank and Pasadena.

created a productive cultural instrument that permeated the lives of the participants beyond the confines of a small bar in South Austin.

The Pub's daytime clientele grew steadily in the initial years. It grew to include a collection of contractors, independent business owners, retirees, accountants, lawyers, real estate brokers and developers, legislators and their assistants, the occasional doctor, off-duty cops, a bail bondsman, a private investigator, and a mortician—certainly an interesting group and a reasonable cross-section of the Austin work force. The story of the genesis of this Blue-Collar Country Club in a South Austin bar is an intriguing ethnography unto itself, but the task-at-hand is to briefly examine what this cultural subset actually produced as coherent group through their personal investment in the Pub's daytime scene.

Many of the activities at the Pub like Bar-B-Que cook-offs, fishing trips, or golf tournaments were typical off-site recreational activities inherent in most "generic" social scenes. But other activities directly influenced the lives of the Pub's patrons and an extended regional audience. Because there was a selection of talents available in the scene pool, there was generally a viable candidate for any pending task that might arise. We had resident attorneys, accountants and CPAs, contractors, mechanics, and computer technicians. The daytime contingent acted as a work-force commission—essentially a job clearing hours—that provided contacts and employment opportunities for its affiliates. From time to time the group functioned as a communal safety net and ad hoc relief agency. One afternoon the daytimers learned that one of the regulars had been in a serious auto accident. Evidently Abe Montgomery, a local contractor, had sustained debilitating spinal injuries when an oncoming truck towing a trailer of building materials jackknifed and careened into his lane. Montgomery survived, but he would be confined to a wheelchair. In response, a group from the Pub coordinated with his family and retrofitted his small South Austin home with all the necessary handicapped accessible accouterments like ramps, low elevation light switches and plumbing fixtures to assuage many of the challenges he would face in his extended recovery.

In the spring of 1993 my friend and associate Steven Fromholz suggested that we gather up a large crowd from the Pub and moon the Ku Klux Klan. Fromholz had learned that the Klan was planning a rally on the south steps of the state Capitol and he

was determined to give them a unique Austin welcome. He envisioned surrounding the Klan supporters with a long line of "Mooners" who, on signal, would "drop trou" and assume the position in a display of oppositional solidarity to the Klan's message. Fromholz reasoned that such an act would "speak to them in a language they could understand." I thought it was a splendid idea, we discussed the idea with my partner, Joe Ables, and he began to organize the patrons at the Pub. We began with a sign-up sheet asking for a \$5.00 donation to cover the cost of an "I Mooned the Klan" T-shirt that would feature the names of all the participants. Fromholz called several friends in the state legislature and Terry Keel, then Sheriff of Travis County, to check on the legality and logistics of the adventure. Keel advised against any "over-exposure" that might drift into the realm of public indecency and wished us well. On the day of the event, we rented two large busses to take the throng to the Capitol grounds and return them safely to the Post-Mooning Party at the Pub featuring several Austin bands playing "moon-oriented" songs. Once on site, the Mooners formed a column around the western perimeter of the Klan supporters and on cue, they executed two pre-arranged Moon moves. The first was a simultaneous group Mooning with an embellishing butt wiggle, then, after a brief regrouping and wardrobe adjustment, the line executed a synchronized Moon Wave running from north to south as a finale. The Mooners then boarded the busses and returned to the Pub for the victory celebration.

After this successful adventure, Texas writer Molly Ivins penned a piece for *Mother Jones* magazine that described the afternoon's events contextualized through the historical antics of the first (and third) president of the Republic of Texas during the 1830s and 1940s. According to Ivins, Sam Houston was "surely the most lovable, the most human, and the funniest of all the Great Men this country has ever produced." After describing the president's comical snub of the visiting French ambassador—"Sam received the Frenchman in a log hut with a mud floor," wearing "only fringed leggings and a blanket around his big ol' hairy chest"—Ivins suggested that "our Texas freedom-fighters have been prone to misbehavior ever since." She then described the antics on the Capitol grounds that spring afternoon:

A recent Ku Klux Klan rally in Austin produced an eccentric counter-demonstration. When fifty Klansmen appeared (they were bused in from

Waco) in front of the state capitol, they were greeted by five thousand locals who had turned out for a "Moon the Klan" rally. Citizens dropped trou both singly and in groups, occasionally producing a splendid wave effect. It was a swell do.⁴⁷

The printed version of the article featured a photograph of the event with the following caption: "Moon Over Austin: Carrying on a tradition, Texas freedom-fighters showed their butts recently at an Austin anti-Klan demonstration." The image featured four participants in "full-moon" position—Levis around their knees, revealing highly decorated shorts (this was obviously a G-Rated photo selection) with one pair curiously embellished with the phrase "Support Live Music in Austin."

The "Pub-people" on site that day certainly didn't number in the thousands—two packed busses rolling across town with a small fleet of support vehicles might account for hundreds, not thousands of anti-Klan advocates. Nevertheless, the social and scene machinery of the Pub instigated and popularized the event and played a defining role in its success. This light-hearted effort illustrates the inherent potential of an informal social scene operating in an expanded cultural theater. It illustrates the potential for articulating a relevant social position through an accessible comedic format or, as Fromholz quipped, through "a language the Klan could understand!" It's the theatrical personification of a clever Ben Sargent political cartoon or, as exhibited above, a glib Molly Ivins' article. But this social and scene machinery at the Pub sometimes operated on a powerful personal level as evidenced by the following example.

Brent Thurman was one of the world's best bull riders and his father, Will Thurman, was one of the Pub's most popular and respected day timers. In mid-December 1994, the regulars gathered around the bar to watch the national rodeo championships on ESPN in Las Vegas. They erupted when the camera singled out the young 25-year-old Brent cinching up in the chute for his 10th and final ride of the tournament. According to an article in the *New York Times*, "Four seconds into the ride on Red Wolf, an 1,800-

⁴⁷ Ivins, Molly. "The fun's in the fight — Even when you can't kick the bad guys where it hurts, you still have a real gas trying." *Mother Jones Magazine*, May/June 1993. http://books.google.com/books?id=_eYDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PT17&lpg=PT17&dq=Moon+the+Klan+Austin&source=bl&ots=mHKJo2gMpu&sig=AuotHn6JN8sXjEoNxv-T5rMMe60&hl=en&ei=zd7VTbe5ENG1twfnlui3Bw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CC4Q6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=Moon%20the%20Klan%20Austin&f=false The quotes above were taken from Ivins' article.

pound horned Red Brindle crossbreed known on the rodeo circuit an 'eliminator bull,' [Brent] was bucked off, became tangled in his leather rigging, and fell beneath the rampaging bull's hooves. He never regained consciousness."⁴⁸ Brent spent six days in a coma at the University Medical Center in Las Vegas before passing. This tragic incident mobilized the Pub regulars. They immediately arranged flights for Will Thurman to travel to Las Vegas to be with his son. The Pub's Joe Ables accompanied Will on the trip. The contingent at the bar reached out to the Thurman family in nearby Dripping Springs and through the combined efforts of the Dripping Spring's community, Brent's extended Rodeo family, and private donors they raised \$72,000.00 for medical expenses.⁴⁹ The Pub's regulars were one of several support groups that staged music venue and dance hall events, held auctions, hosted dinner parties and sought out private contributions. This integrated effort continued in the aftermath of the tragedy by creating the Brent Thurman Memorial Foundation that focuses on safety issues in his challenging and dangerous support.

The daytimers are important to this study because of their productive on-site activities and their extemporaneous involvement in issues beyond the parameters of their blue-collar-country-club headquarters. The daytimers expanded the sphere of their scene beyond the comfortable bar stools and the hide-a-way ambiance of the Pub. This is a notable development for a "scene" rooted in a small South Austin bar, a social institution not commonly associated with "good works" to employ a Christian metaphor, or "pragmatic results" to reference a William Jamesian connotation. The daytime scene at the Pub is also valuable as an alternate field study to compliment and compare to the Steamboat analysis. It's a second ethnographic Petri dish that has helped temper and expand my understanding of the pragmatic utility of scenes. Additionally, it's valuable as a "start-up" scene study. I was on site as a participant observer since the opening days of the Pub and have enjoyed an insider's view of the logistical aspects, the business mechanics, and the personal dynamics of the scene as it developed. When I began my field studies as a graduate student in 1993, I was able to revisit the early Pub history

⁴⁸ From the *New York Times* article, "Austin Journal; Rodeo Star Dies, and Throng Mourns." December 23, 1994. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/23/us/austin-journal-rodeo-star-dies-and-throng-mourns.html>.

⁴⁹ Ibid. The figure of \$72,000.00 was reported in the *New York Times* article.

through the lens of an aspiring ethnographer. Finally, it's a field study situated in a third decade. There are a number of events and sub-scenes in the 1970s that I reference throughout this dissertation. The Steamboat scene provides an opportunity to monitor the musical and cultural trends of the post-progressive-country years of the 1980s, and the Pub scene of the 1990s is useful in establishing a historical perspective regarding the evolution of scenes in Austin.

During a 1995 interview with Bob and Debbie May, two of our afternoon regulars, I experienced an ethnographic epiphany. In discussing the bar and its significance in their daily routine, Bob said, "There are about two or three things that people usually do in bars, and getting a drink is about number four on the list."⁵⁰ Bob's hyperbole cleverly encapsulated many of the themes I had been considering in my scene studies. To extrapolate on Bob's statement, bars mean different things to different people. People carry their own needs and expectations into bars and leave with mixed results. If their needs are met or if they feel that there is a reasonable chance that those needs might be met in the future, they come back. If they return based on those conditions, then they are engaging in a habit. And if they interact with people who share similar motivations in their habitual visitations, then they're engaging in a scene. Bob's hyperbole suggested many of the daytime interactions at the Pub and seemed to embody the blue-collar-country-club thesis. The comment also exemplified the multi-level activities that took place on a nightly basis at Steamboat and applied to the dance-hall and bar scene at the Broken Spoke only a mile south of the Pub where cold beer and two-steppin' may not be the priority items on the patron's individual dance cards. It applied to the periodical tapings for *Austin City Limits* at Studio 6A on the UT campus where access to tickets had become a badge of patronage, support, and status. Attendance at these special *ACL* events had morphed into a social scene of recognition rather than an assemblage of music lovers intent on experiencing their favorite acts in an intimate setting.⁵¹ The hyperbole also applied to the annual scene at the Kerrville Folk Festival.

⁵⁰ Bob and Debbie May interview @ Saxon Pub, April 1995. Bob May was an Austin CPA and Debbie had been a daytime bartender. They were afternoon regulars at the Pub, and at the time of the interview, Bob was in his early fifties and Debbie was forty-two.

⁵¹ This is not to imply that the production quality or the efficacy of audience participation had suffered in this gradual transition from a fan-based to a patronage-based studio audience.

For many years, staff volunteers and regulars have arranged their day-job vacation schedules to insure that they can attend and embrace their ephemeral Kerrville identities and immerse themselves in an alternative bohemian reality where listening to folk music might not be the primary motivation for their participation.

When I reviewed the transcriptions of my interview with Bob and Debbie May and considered the context of Bob's statement, I realized that they were rooted in his regular afternoon visits to a local bar, the Boss' Office, during the early 1980s where his future wife, Debbie, was the bartender. Regarding those visits Bob said, "I was just chasing the bartender and I guess she caught me after a while!" Debbie concurred by saying, "He liked to watch me stock beer."⁵² Evidently Bob had an agenda, Debbie was a willing player, and at the time of our interview they had been married for almost fifteen years. Nonetheless, Bob's hyperbolic observation helped me understand that there was a multi-level hierarchy of personal motivations for those who engaged in bar scenes and related sub-scenes. The implications of Bob's quip had been floating around in my ethnographic ether for quite some time, but then that's what "Ah Ha!" moments are for. Coupled with subsequent research, ongoing interviews and scholarly scene-study sources, the statement helped me organize the following observations regarding the essence of music scenes:

- Scenes, like the Saxon Pub daytime bar scene, have pragmatic value and often operate on underlying levels that belie the common perception of what bars are and what bars do. To be sure, bars are state-licensed purveyors of beer, wine and libations, but as Bob May suggests, they play other roles in the lives of their patrons and in the extended environment in which they operate.

- Scenes, like the nightly activities described in the Steamboat example function as culture factories. They are power cells for social exchanges that inure to the benefit of their participants, a group that includes the entertainers on stage, the individuals in the audience, and the host venue.

Corporate underwriting and the support of generous individuals have always been essential variables in the *ACL* formula for success. The shift in audience demographics is simply a reflection of the ever-expanding underwriting requirements to maintain a world-class broadcast product.

⁵² Bob and Debbie May interview at the Saxon Pub, April 1995.

- Scenes can be compared to biological organisms whereby each sub-component has a distinct function in the vitality of a larger entity. Each small Pub scene, each individual concept night at Steamboat or the Broken Spoke or, retrospectively, each successful concert at the Armadillo or popular folk-music presentation at the Chequered Flag contributed to the overall health of a pan-Austin live-music scene. The live-music scene is an interactive component that interacts with recording studios, production and management companies and related support systems that deliver musical products to media sources that in turn present them to a public audience. The individuals of that community then judge the products through their personal processes of natural selection.

Individuals create art, but people create scenes and scenes *do* things. Scenes *accomplish* tasks, and they *fulfill* specific needs brought forth by their constituents who ultimately underwrite the efforts of the individuals creating the art. And in Austin during the early 1970s, the primary scene instigators were songwriters.

Chapter 2

THE AUSTIN MUSIC SCENE - THE CREATION MYTH

It ain't necessarily so . . .
De things dat yo' liable to read in de Bible
It ain't necessarily so . . .

George & Ira Gershwin

Lookin' for my lost jigger of salt . . .

Jimmy Buffett

The Austin music scene rose to national prominence in the early 1970s and by the end of that decade a commonly accepted account of the scene's genesis had been firmly established. This basic account has endured over thirty years; it regularly resurfaces in popular reportage, it's repeated in scholarly treatments, and in the new millennium it reigns as the popular story of record. This chapter presents an encapsulated version of what I'm calling the creation myth, it offers a literary review of additional sources rooted in this commonly accepted genesis account and goes on to highlight specific counter arguments to the popular myth.

The Encapsulated Myth and a Literary Review of Subsequent Iterations

Beginning in the early 1960s, folk musicians from the UT campus ventured north to Threadgill's, a gas station and beer bar on the outskirts of town that featured local country musicians. The venerable proprietor, Kenneth Threadgill, who enjoyed singing in the Jimmie Rodgers yodeling style, hosted an open mic for musicians on Wednesday nights and a small cross-cultural and cross-generational scene developed when young "folkies" from UT came up and swapped songs, sounds, and attitudes with the conventional country music crowd. As the scene percolated at Threadgill's, several enterprising young hippies who wanted to establish a regular venue for local rock acts, opened the Vulcan Gas Company in 1967.⁵³ Although this cavernous concert hall at 316 Congress Avenue lasted only three years—the downtown merchants had little patience for a countercultural smorgasbord on their commercial turf—it provided a popular

⁵³ The Vulcan Gas Company opened in the fall of 1967 and closed in the summer of 1970.

showcase for young, up-and-coming rockers and allowed them to meet and mingle with many of America's most revered blues masters who regularly played the Vulcan.

After the Vulcan closed, several of its stakeholders moved the scene south across the Colorado River to an abandoned National Guard armory and established Armadillo World Headquarters in 1970.⁵⁴ The "Dillo" famously presented a diversified talent lineup ranging from local groups to high-profile touring acts and actively pursued a program of eclectic cultural events that might feature a Latin-flavored dance band on a Saturday night, the Austin Ballet Theater on a Sunday, and an art show during the week. When Willie Nelson played the Armadillo in 1972 he drew a strikingly disparate crowd of hippies and rednecks. The hippies identified with Willie's long hair and love of cannabis, the rednecks identified with his history of mainstream country hits popularized not only by Willie but by country icons like Patsy Cline, Faron Young and Ray Price,⁵⁵ and their mutual reverence for this unique entertainer sparked a cultural synthesis. In short, Willie reified the convergence of the musical and cultural left with its counterpart on the right and gave rise to the hybrid "progressive country" genre. As Steven Fromholz, a prominent singer-songwriter of the era has often quipped, "The hippies were smoking joints, the rednecks were drinking longnecks, they got together for a Willie

⁵⁴ The Armadillo World Headquarters officially opened on August 7, 1970.

⁵⁵ During the 1960s Willie Nelson had a number of his songs successfully recorded by popular country artists: Patsy Cline's version of "Crazy" was the second hit from her 1961 Decca album, *Patsy Cline Showcase*. The first single, "I Fall to Pieces," rose to number one on the Billboard Country Chart followed by "Crazy" which reached the top five. Billy Walker had a national hit with "Funny How Time Slips Away" in 1961. The song was eventually certified as a "Million-Air" recording by BMI for receiving over a million "spins" or radio airplays. BMI (Broadcast Music Incorporated) is a licensing agency that collects fees on behalf of songwriters, composers and music publishers and distributes them as royalties to its members whose works have been played on the radio or other broadcast formats and in commercial venues. Capitol Records country artist Faron Young, popularly known as the "Hillbilly Heartthrob," recorded Nelson's "Hello Walls" on his 1961 release of the same name. The single enjoyed success on the Billboard Country Chart reaching number one and crossed over to the Billboard pop charts to reach number twelve. Ray Price recorded "Night Life" on his 1963 Columbia album of the same name in 1963. The single reached number one on the Billboard Country Chart. Reputedly, "Night Life" was one of the most "covered" country songs of the late 20th Century. The term "cover" refers to artists recording songs by other songwriters. Roy Orbison recorded "Pretty Paper" on his 1964 Monument album, *More of Roy Orbison's Greatest Hits*. Although "Pretty Paper" was never released as a single and consequently never had a run on the national charts, it became a Christmas classic in the rock and country world.

show at the Armadillo and switched!"⁵⁶ The result of this signifying exchange has been embraced as a defining moment in the commonly accepted genesis of the Austin music scene of the 1970s.⁵⁷

This abbreviated account, for the most part, is drawn from the work of Jan Reid whose 1974 book, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, was the first and I believe the best analysis of the emerging Austin scene.⁵⁸ *The Improbable Rise* provided the basic schematic for subsequent historiography and journalistic treatments of the extremely productive decade that established Austin as a major climate of creativity in late twentieth-century American popular music. By claiming *The Improbable Rise* as the historical Ur-source, why am I equating this well-researched, well-written and well-respected book to the term "myth?"

First, the term myth is not intended as a pejorative. The context of the term used herein connotes a series of events that, over time, have been commonly accepted as the genesis of the Austin scene. With that in mind, I make the connection between myth and *The Improbable Rise* based on the following assumptions:

- Myths often have a core source, a factual basis.
- Myths are a function of time.
- Myths are a function of popular repetition.

Reid's research and results are not in themselves a myth; they are simply the core source, the seminal factual basis that explain how the Austin music scene took root and flourished. Prior to the publication of *The Improbable Rise* in 1974 the story of the Austin music scene that began with a small beer bar in north Austin and its yodeling proprietor had yet to be written. Reid's book laid the foundation for subsequent additions and modifications. Certainly there are pre-1974 popular references to key elements of

⁵⁶ As a sideman, a producer and an agent for Fromholz since 1970, I have heard Fromholz make this comment many times. I'm not implying that Fromholz created the idea that hippies and rednecks experienced some sort of cultural exchange in the presence of Willie Nelson at the Armadillo, but the clever quip that they achieved a peaceful co-existence through the exchange of intoxicants is the product of his wry wit and stage humor.

⁵⁷ For future reference, the term "Austin music scene" refers to the music scene of the late 1960s and 1970s.

⁵⁸ Reid, Jan. *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*. Austin: Heidelberg Publishers, Inc. 1974.

Reid's narrative: Threadgill's, for example, in all its popular incarnations, had been on Austin's cultural map since 1933 as a popular night spot and country music venue. Some of the regular musicians at Threadgill's like country-blues stylist Bill Neely, fiddler Cotton Collins, and of course the yodeling proprietor, "Mr. Threadgill," had garnered adequate public attention to establish the tavern as a popular music venue in the late fifties and sixties. With respect to the role played by UT students, the periodical musical gatherings or "Folksings" at the Chuckwagon at the Student Union were widely recognized as a liberal counterpoint to the conservative fraternity and sorority campus environment. The Vulcan was considered the "hippie haven," and the Armadillo was the logical heir to this unique cultural confluence. The components for what would become the commonly accepted genesis of the Austin scene were all in play in the early 1970s, but it was Reid who assembled them into a coherent narrative in *The Improbable Rise*. The cause and effect relationship of the genre and generation fusion at Threadgill's, the founding of the Vulcan as the Mecca for the musical counterculture, and the grand synthesis at the Armadillo with Willie Nelson's now-famous performance in 1972, had never been suggested prior to Reid's account. These clubs became the triumvirate of venues and their patrons and performers became the principal protagonists of the creation myth.

The Improbable Rise was a snapshot of a promising scene as it existed in 1974 and as such—assuming myths cannot be spontaneously generated—the account could hardly be considered a "myth." A myth is a function of time. Furthermore, myth is a highly charged cultural term. In common usage it means different things to different people, definitions vary from society to society, and the term has encompassed a diverse cache of meanings through several generations of scholarship. On one point however, most would agree: It takes time for an idea, a set of circumstances, or a specific account to become a myth. Just as the report of a current event is considered journalism and the interpretation of that same event fifty years later is considered history, Reid's snapshot provided the fundamental facts that would evolve in the ensuing decades into the scene's creation myth.

Having read the book in 1974 when I was an active participant in Reid's narrative, having revisited the original Heidelberg Press edition through the years as a research tool

and reference source, and having studied the new edition published by the University of Texas Press in 2002, I'm convinced that the author gave an adequately accurate account of the history of the Austin music scene as it was commonly perceived in 1974.⁵⁹ Threadgill's, the Vulcan, the Armadillo and those who populated these trendy settings were key components of the popular perception of the early 1970s. As this study will illustrate however, they weren't the only determinants of this highly creative music scene. Still, Reid didn't set out to write the definitive account of the genesis of the Austin scene. Rather, as evidenced not only by my interpretations but by recent interviews with the author, Reid's abbreviated "snapshot" was a necessary prelude to his larger mission: To present a study of the lives, the times, the music, and the songs of the primary participants—Jerry Jeff Walker, Steven Fromholz, B.W. Stevenson, Willis Alan Ramsey, Bobby Bridger, Rusty Wier, Kinky Friedman, Michael Martin Murphey, and Willie Nelson—and their contribution to a significant and creative phase of Texas-based music and by extension, the course of American popular music.⁶⁰

Reid's account has endured as the widely accepted story of record; it has been referenced time and again by journalist and scholars for over thirty-five years. Presenting examples of these iterations will illustrate not only their quantity and regularity but also their direct link to Reid's seminal account. Moreover, these subsequent accounts will flesh out the abbreviated creation myth that is presented above.

An Early Academic Iteration: Archie Green - 1981

Folklorist Archie Green published an extremely helpful etymological essay regarding the term Cosmic Cowboy in 1981. "Austin's Cosmic Cowboys: Words in

⁵⁹ In addition to the Heidelberg Press edition, *The Improbable Rise* was republished as a paperback in 1977 by De Capo Press. The 2002 University of Texas Press edition contains new information and insights. According to the dust jacket of the 2002 UT edition: "In this new edition, Jan Reid revitalizes his classic look at the Austin music scene. He has substantially reworked the early chapters to include musicians and musical currents contributed to the delightful convergence of popular cultures in Austin. Four new chapters and an epilogue show how the creative burst of the 1970s directly spawned a new generations of talents who have carried on the tradition—Lyle Lovett, Stevie Ray Vaughan, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Robert Earl Keen, Steve Earle, Jimmy LaFave, Kelly Willis, Joe Ely, Bruce and Charlie Robison, and the Dixie Chicks."

⁶⁰ Discussions with author Jan Reid, April 2009, November 2010.

Collision,"⁶¹ traces the origins of the words "cosmic" and "cowboy" while exploring the cultural significance of their synergistic "Collision" in the context of Austin's music scene. To this end, Green provides a succinct history of the settings and events that prompted this unlikely confluence which subsequently underscore several of the main themes presented in Reid. In describing the cultural synthesis of the early 1970s, Green writes:

While the Kingston Trio defined folksong for most American students, a handful of Austin dissidents turned to mountain ballads and frolics or to bluegrass, often hootenanny flavored. Local folk buffs performed in off campus pads, at the University of Texas Union, and at the now legendary gas station/hillbilly beer joint, Threadgill's. The Waller Creek Boys — Janis Joplin, Lanny Wiggins, Powell St. John — played there, meeting uncompromising country musicians out of blue-collar life.⁶²

After establishing the role of Threadgill's in the story and identifying several of the prominent players, Green follows the course of development through the contributions of the popular rock bands of the time with a special reference to Shiva's Headband. This unique group signified the blending of genres by incorporating a typical rock rhythm section—guitar, bass, drums and keyboards—with the creative guidance of the classically trained violinist, songwriter and vocalist Spencer Perskin. The result was a musical hybrid that captured the imagination of Austin's counterculture as well as music business executives at the national level. Perskin had been an active participant in the folk music scene in Denton at North Texas State University with fellow players Steven Fromholz, Michael Murphey and other musicians who eventually gravitated towards Austin. Shiva's secured one of the first major recording contracts in Austin with Capitol Records, the monolithic, Hollywood-based record label largely responsible for breaking the Beatles in the United States. The band, managed by another North Texas State ex-

⁶¹ Archie Green's essay was originally published in the book, *And Other Neighborly Names*, edited by Richard Bauman and Roger Abrahams. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982. The edition that I reference for this study comes from a collection of Green's essays: *Torching the Fink Books & Other Essays on Vernacular Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

⁶² Green, Archie. *Torching the Fink Books & Other Essays on Vernacular Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001, p. 80.

student, Eddie Wilson, ultimately elected to use funds advanced by Capitol as start-up capital for the Armadillo:

Some of the young Texan musicians in the Elevators and Conqueroo knew and played country music, but none was ready to go beyond exciting and liberating rock to country. However, a few members of Shiva's Headband helped nudge Austin toward recognizing its own crossover music. In 1969 this band had performed the Vulcan Gas Company — a "hippie spot" tolerant of dope — which closed down after conservative criticism. Homeless, Eddie Wilson and Spencer Perskin both associated with the Vulcan and Shiva [sic], opened the Armadillo World Headquarters in August, 1970. Originally conceived as a rock club, the 'Dillo soon turned to other musics and community arts. In one of the first attempts to explain the Armadillo to a political audience, *Texas Observer* reporter Henry Staten noted that Wilson wished to avoid the Vulcan's insularity and consciously sought to "break down some of the barriers between hip and straight in Austin."⁶³

In this passage Green verifies the "triple-shrine" observation in Reid's account, an observation that situates Threadgill's, the Vulcan, and the Armadillo as the causal venues in the genesis of the Austin music scene.⁶⁴ The author then verifies another key component in Reid's narrative by introducing Willie Nelson. Both Green and Reid offer similar accounts of the circumstances surrounding Nelson's move to Austin. Green's survey is presented through the eyes of the well-respected *Austin American Statesman* music journalist, Townsend Miller, whose advocacy of Austin's developing aesthetic arena contributed greatly to its popularity:

On August 12, 1972, the born-again Nelson played at the Armadillo World Headquarters. Miller was struck particularly by the incongruity of seeing Willie on psychedelic posters, possibly for the first such depiction of a country star. Knowing that students and street people — regulars at the 'Dillo— would surely turn out, Miller appealed to "conservative,

⁶³ Green, Archie. *Torching the Fink Books & Other Essays on Vernacular Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. pp. 82-83. Also quoted in Green's quote: Staten, Henry. 1971. "Armadillo World Headquarters." *Texas Observer* 63 (February 12,): 18-19.

⁶⁴ Regarding the use of the phrase, "triple-shrine," I borrow the word "shrine" from Reid's 2004 edition of *The Improbable Rise* in which he described Threadgill's as it stood in 1974 in reverential tones: "The shrine of Austin music was a decaying husk of a service station that hadn't pumped gasoline in forty years." (Reid 2004, p. 17.) Given his designation of Threadgill's as a "shrine," I take the liberty of referring to the Vulcan and the Armadillo—the two other primary historical venues that Reid references—as "shrines."

traditional fans" to join the "young liberal fans" at the concert. Miller decried self-segregation for country music, and used his column deliberately to narrow such esthetic and generational gaps.⁶⁵

Archie Green's insights and Townsend Miller's heartfelt and informed boosterism, both of which play an essential role in the development of this study, indicate early reinforcement of Reid's influential appraisal of the genesis of the Austin scene.

Reinforcing Reid Through Images and Insights: Larry Willoughby - 1984

In 1984, ten years after the initial publication of *The Improbable Rise*, Tonkawa Free Press, a subset of Texas Monthly Press, published a splendid pictorial survey of Texas music by singer-songwriter and historian, Larry Willoughby. *Texas Rhythm Texas Rhyme: A Pictorial History of Texas Music* is a brief yet comprehensive survey of Texas music from the late nineteenth-century through the dawn of the popular Texas blues scene in the 1980s.⁶⁶ The author begins by citing the contributions of Scott Joplin, generally recognized as the creator of the Ragtime genre, and the work of the obscure yet influential Texas composer, David W. Guion, whose arrangements of songs like "The Yellow Rose of Texas" and "Home on the Range," are enduring melodic and lyrical staples of the Texan identity. He moves through the singing cowboys—popular figures like Gene Autry and Tex Ritter as well as the scholarly work of ballad collector and archivist John A. Lomax—and presents an encapsulated and balanced survey of twentieth-century Texan music touching on the early urban blues players and rural songsters, the strong influence of Latin derivatives, the contributions of Texas musicians to the jazz and Big Band styles, and the rhythm and blues-rockabilly roots of Lone Star rock 'n' roll. In his final chapter, "The Austin Legacy: I want to go home with the Armadillo," Willoughby endorses many of the fundamental aspects in Reid's narrative:

Kenneth Threadgill has been a major force in the evolution of country music in Austin. While perpetuating traditional country styles with his versions of Jimmie Rodgers' yodels, his honky-tonk provided an outlet for

⁶⁵ Green. p. 84. Also contained in Green's passage were the quotes from Townsend Miller's newspaper column: Miller, Townsend. "Willie Brings 'Em All Together (and Ain't It Wonderful)." *Austin American Statesman* (August 12) 1972. p. 37.

⁶⁶ Willoughby, Larry. *Texas Rhythm Texas Rhyme: A Pictorial History of Texas Music*. Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1984.

younger musicians to experiment with variations of country laced folk, blues and rock.⁶⁷

Willoughby references Reid's depiction of Janis Joplin, her affiliation with other UT "folkies" and their collective bohemian cultural niche, and her relationship with "Mr. Threadgill" and the musicians at his bar:

Janis left Port Arthur in the summer of 1962 and moved to Austin. She believed that the environment at the University of Texas would be different [from what she perceived as a hostile environment in Port Arthur]; she was wrong. The fraternity-sorority complex dominated the campus, and conservatism and conformity ruled the future social oasis of Texas. Janis lived on the fringe of university life with "the folkies" who set up residence at UT's Union Building as if it were their own Greenwich Village. On her arrival, Janis joined Powell St. John (later of Mother Earth fame) and Lanny Wiggins to form the Waller Creek Boys. They sang folk, bluegrass, a little country, and a lot of blues. The Waller Creek Boys were regulars at the UT Union and a refurbished old gas station named Threadgill's. Its owner was Austin resident yodeler and country music legend, Kenneth Threadgill. Threadgill befriended Janis at their first meeting and he was one of the few people whom she always referred to with genuine affection.⁶⁸

Willoughby then comments on the Vulcan, "The club most symbolic of the late-sixties acid rock era" that "gave credence to Austin's reputation as a wide open [sic], experimental community where young minds would face establishment-threatening values" and moves on to the essential institution in the Austin scene's creation myth, the Armadillo where Willie Nelson initially revealed the power of uniting genres and generations:⁶⁹

After the Vulcan closed its doors in 1970, an Austin trio (Eddie Wilson, Jim Franklin, and Mike Tolleason) became the guiding forces behind the single most important music hall in Austin's, if not the entire state's history. The Armadillo World Headquarters opened for business in the summer of 1970. For the next ten years the Armadillo delivered Texas music with a personality true to its namesake—fiercely independent, oblivious to the abuse coming its way, and always moving with deliberate speed in no particular direction. The Armadillo was soon christened the

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 16

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 90.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 114.

creative home of Austin music, and indeed, its role was more than symbolic. It was the location where Willie Nelson first revealed his country magic to a predominately young, rock-oriented audience.⁷⁰

With these observations, Willoughby presents another early iteration of Reid's analysis in *The Improbable Rise*. Once again the triumvirate of Austin music venues, Threadgill's, the Vulcan and the Armadillo figure strongly in an early interpretation of the scene and Willie Nelson's "country magic" is touted as a decisive event in the scene's evolution.

Bill Malone and *Country Music U.S.A.*, the "Bible" of Country Music History

The next example of the literature that underscores Reid's account comes from the esteemed scholar Bill Malone, who, unlike all other examples depicted herein, was actively involved in the Threadgill's scene as a graduate student and musician at the University of Texas in the late fifties and early sixties. In the 1985 revised addition of *Country Music U.S.A.*, Malone speaks of a musical synthesis:⁷¹ "The mating of rock and country . . . was most strongly effected in Austin, Texas."⁷² And like Reid, Malone believes that the formative years of the scene were not only a blending of genres, they were a blending of generations by "bringing youth and adult audiences together in a commonly shared musical environment."⁷³ Malone also agrees with Reid regarding the venue that offered this "commonly shared musical environment:"

The vigorous and eclectic music scene found in Austin in the seventies was anticipated at Threadgill's Bar in the previous decade. Threadgill's was the scene of a meeting, if not mating, of cultures in which college students and "rednecks" enjoyed musical communion with each other. Kenneth Threadgill, the proprietor and bartender of a honky-tonk housed in an abandoned gas station in North Austin (allegedly the recipient of the first beer license granted in Travis County after Prohibition repeal), was a singer and yodeler in the Jimmie Rodgers tradition. He made his establishment available to anyone who wanted to sit around his big round tables and pick and sing, and, when time permitted, Threadgill would also

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 114.

⁷¹ Malone, Bill C. *Country Music U.S.A.* (Revised Edition). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.

⁷² Ibid, p. 393.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 393.

sing and yodel, still wearing his apron and invariably clutching a bottle of beer in his hand.⁷⁴

Malone then continues with the common thread that depicts Threadgill's as a "refuge" in the early sixties for UT students who were adopting the "folk music revival" populated by figures like Janis Joplin along with a "coterie of young musicians," that included Malone himself as a doctoral candidate at UT.⁷⁵ The author ties this series of events together by referencing the Armadillo as the new home for the cultural confluence that began at Threadgill's:

The Armadillo World Headquarters, housed in a former national guard [sic] armory, was the center and symbol of this new musical culture. When it was established in August 1970, the club was intended as a forum for rock bands (such as Shiva's Headband) and as a refuge for Austin's hippie, or "freak," community. The Armadillo, however, also featured an occasional country band, and so cowboys and rednecks began to rub shoulders with the long-haired counterculture community. Gradually a music culture emerged which enveloped them all, and one which reflected a curious combining of images and symbols: hippie, Texan, and, above all, cowboy (a usage which arose from the desire to find an indigenous and binding metaphor). The wearing of cowboy costumes, clubs with cowboy names (such as Split Rail, Broken Spoke, and Soap Creek Saloon), and the use of logos which suggested the Texas mystique (armadillos, Lone Star Beer, Longhorns), all became part of the country/rock scene.⁷⁶

These samplings from Bill Malone's revised edition of *Country Music U.S.A.* illustrate the parallels between his interpretation of the early Austin scene and that of Reid. It's worth mentioning that *Country Music U.S.A.* was originally published in 1968 under the title, *Country Music U.S.A.: a Fifty-Year History*.⁷⁷ The 1968 edition however, did not include the material regarding the Austin scene and Malone comments on his subsequent research in the Preface to the 1985 revised edition:

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 393.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 393-394.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 394. A note on The Broken Spoke: Unlike the other venues with "cowboy names," "The Spoke" was an established venue when the progressive country movement took root in Austin. The Spoke opened in November 1964 as a quintessential Texas dance hall and has remained true to that identity for over 40 years. Although James White, the enduring proprietor of the hall booked the occasional "progressive country" act, the talent line up, then and now, was geared to traditional and popular country dance hall music.

⁷⁷ Malone, Bill C. *Country Music U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1968.

When I began my research [in 1961], Austin had not yet become a hotbed of live music performance. I was far removed from people who did serious collecting or scholarship in the field of country music and was largely unaware of their existence. The two country music repositories, the John Edwards Memorial Foundation and the Country Music Foundation, did not exist when I began my research in 1961 and were still in their infancy by the time the book was published in 1968. Research material was extremely limited. In the sixteen years that have passed since the original publication there has been an explosion of scholarship, and new writers, both academic and popular, have entered the field, bringing new information and fresh perspectives. Country music itself, as a dynamic and ever-changing facet of American popular culture, has burgeoned since the late sixties. The careers of some musicians have faded, while others have blossomed; others will have bloomed and faded by the time this revised edition appears.⁷⁸

To present excerpts of Malone's work is not to imply that his comments were a rehash of Reid's 1974 version of the genesis of the Austin scene. As a participant-observer, Malone certainly has his own primary sources and recollections and his first-class scholarly research has established *Country Music U.S.A.* as one of the best and long-lived sources on the subject. Regardless of Malone's sources, his data largely confirm several key themes in Reid's original account. Further, Malone's astute word choice in one of the passages quoted above is particularly significant. Specifically, "The vigorous and eclectic music scene found in Austin in the 1970s was *anticipated* at Threadgill's Bar in the previous decade."⁷⁹ (Italics are mine.) The incorporation of the verb "anticipated" is both insightful and accurate. The musical environment at Threadgill's is more accurately represented as a brief preview of the 1970s. This famed musical environment didn't necessarily "create" a new genre, a new music scene, or a paradigm shift in the popular music of Austin. To be sure, the new generation of players at Threadgill's like Janis Joplin, Powell St. John, Lanny Wiggins and others did not remain in town and didn't participate in Austin's progressive country era. Like their fellow Texans Steve Miller, Boz Skaggs, and Doug Sahm, they sought their futures in California. The older generation of Threadgill's' players like Bill Neely and Cotton

⁷⁸ Malone, Bill C. *Country Music U.S.A.* (Revised Edition). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985, p. x.

⁷⁹ Malone (1985), p. 393.

Collins continued in their country niche and the music-loving academics like Malone, Stan Alexander, and Roger Abrahams pursued their academic careers. The only prominent player that remained in Austin and factored into the scene that ultimately generated national attention was Mr. Threadgill. The scene at Threadgill's signified an initial spark in a chain of events that would eventually yield a paradigm shift, a shift that came to be known by the media-generated term "progressive country." The scene at Threadgill's must be considered in the context of subsequent venues like the Vulcan, the Armadillo and, *as importantly*, a host of other variables that will be presented in subsequent sections of this study. Threadgill's closed in 1974 after the death of the proprietor's wife, Mildred. The property lay dormant through the 1970s until purchased by Armadillo co-founder Eddie Wilson, who remodeled, reopened and resuscitated Threadgill's and its brand as a restaurant in 1981.

Jan Reid incorporated the same attention to detail, the same delicate nuance represented by Malone's word choice of "anticipated" in his reference to this venerable site in the 2002 publication of *The Improbable Rise*. In the opening lines of his chapter, "A Yodeler and the Queen," Reid described the relationship between Kenneth Threadgill and Janis Joplin, and depicted the filling station/bar as follows:

The shrine of Austin music was a decaying husk of a service station that hadn't pumped gasoline in forty years. A fallen television antenna resided on its overhang; a restroom door flapped in the wind. A sign staked out from offered the place for sale. Dust prevailed.⁸⁰

This statement is the opening salvo in Reid's creation account and it suggests that Threadgill's, as a shrine, was at least to some degree symbolic. Like Malone, I believe that Threadgill's anticipated future events.

The Creation Myth and Two Popular Music Journalists in 1990

In August 1990, the celebrated Dallas-born guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan was killed in a post-concert helicopter crash in Wisconsin. In 1993, Texas writers Joe Nick Patoski and Bill Crawford released their book, *Stevie Ray Vaughan: Caught in the*

⁸⁰ Reid 2004, p. 17.

Crossfire, documenting the life and career of this exceptional musician.⁸¹ The authors offer the following insights regarding the musical history of Vaughan's adopted hometown:

The man most responsible for creating the vibrant Austin music scene that Stevie Vaughan walked into was a portly, white-haired gentleman named Kenneth Threadgill. In 1932 he opened a little combination beer joint and gas station on North Lamar Boulevard, the first establishment to secure a license to sell beer following the repeal of Prohibition.⁸² Threadgill's joint did a nice business, but the proprietor wasn't all that keen to be peddling longneck bottles of beer for a living. His real passion was hosting hootenannies once a week in his place, informal picking and singing sessions that drew a sizable contingent of musicians, bohemians, and other music lovers from the university.⁸³

After positioning Threadgill as the progenitor of the "vibrant Austin music scene," Patoski and Crawford describe the activities at the club and the players who gathered at "the epicenter of Austin music."⁸⁴ Predictably, they referenced many of the same individuals originally singled out in *The Improbable Rise*—Jimmie Rodgers (as Threadgill's primary influence), country-blues guitarist Bill Neely, local folk music aficionado John Clay and his associates from the UT campus, Powell St. John, Lanny Wiggins, and others. The authors then focused on the Vulcan Gas Company, the hippie haven built by Houston White and Sandy Lockett in 1967 where "music, not booze, not

⁸¹ Patoski, Joe Nick & Crawford, Bill. *Stevie Ray Vaughan: Caught in the Crossfire*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993.

⁸² This passage not only supports Reid's story line in *The Improbable Rise*, it echoes the popular story that Kenneth Threadgill secured the first post-Prohibition beer & wine sales permit in Travis County. The romantic appeal of this account is intriguing: Threadgill's, with the first beer & wine license in Austin, give rise to a nationally acclaimed music scene. The Threadgill's beer license claim has never been substantiated and continues as a "myth within a myth." This popular story is best depicted by scholar Barry Shank who reports in his book, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene In Austin, Texas*: "An oft-repeated legend (in fact almost always acknowledged as a legend when repeated) insists that Kenneth Threadgill bought the first beer and wine license issued in Travis County in 1933." (*Dissonant Identities*. p. 39) Also, Patoski & Crawford's claim that "in 1932 he opened a little combination beer joint and gas station on North Lamar Boulevard . . ." calls for clarification. State conventions didn't ratify the Cullen-Harrison Act until 1933. It's possible that Mr. Threadgill opened his establishment in 1932 and applied for a license in 1933, or, as is more commonly reported, that he opened the establishment in 1933.

⁸³ Patoski & Crawford. p. 49.

⁸⁴ Patoski & Crawford. p. 50.

dope, not money, was the motivating force," and then move on to the Armadillo, the final venue in Austin's influential nightclub triumvirate:⁸⁵

By 1975, the rest of the world was beginning to discover the hip little music scene that was going down in Austin, thanks to the Armadillo World Headquarters, a converted armory at the corner of Barton Springs Road and South First Street.⁸⁶

The authors then complete their parallel interpretation of Reid's account by establishing the procuring cause of the cross-cultural, cross-generational music scene of the 1970s:

The turning point came when Nashville renegade Willie Nelson moved to Austin in 1972 and booked into the Armadillo. Willie was from the old school of country music singer/songwriters who did not try to disguise the accent in their voices. But Willie was a hipster, too, who appreciated the righteous weed as much as he enjoyed a shot of tequila. By playing the 'Dillo he confirmed the suspicion that hippies — Texas hippies, at least — could dig real kicker music under the right conditions. Out of this strange cultural cross-pollination sprang the Cosmic Cowboy, a weird half-breed who was part longhair, part goat roper, steeped in rural country traditions but open to new ideas spawned by the LSD generation.⁸⁷

Patoski & Crawford's account not only draws heavily from Reid, their account significantly embellishes the creation myth. To cast Kenneth Threadgill as the "man most responsible for creating the vibrant Austin music scene;" to claim that the "rest of the world was beginning to discover the hip little music scene" by 1975 "thanks to the Armadillo World Headquarters;" and to contend that the "turning point" in the popular development of the scene came when "Nashville renegade Willie Nelson moved to Austin in 1972 and booked into the Armadillo" are all Olympic-sized historical leaps. Claims of this nature underscore the need for a reassessment and objective expansion of the creation myth. To illustrate aspects of my counterclaims let me begin by offering the following observations regarding Mr. Threadgill. I will then address the dominance of the Armadillo in that national discovery process, Willie's gig at the Armadillo in 1972 as

⁸⁵ Patoski & Crawford. p. 51.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 78.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 79.

the "turning point," and then briefly comment on the national discovery of the Austin scene by 1975.

Kenneth Threadgill was a generous, open-minded Texas gentleman whose contribution to the early Austin music scene was as much symbolic as substantive. Born in 1909, he was in his mid-fifties during the era of his mid-week jam sessions and regular weekend nights with his small country band, the Hootenanny Hoots. He had long gray hair, oversized bushy sideburns, a pronounced beer belly, and as the tavern's proprietor and designated Wednesday night master of ceremonies he had all the attributes of a venerable grandfather. Threadgill was a competent, self-taught singer who adopted the Jimmy Rodgers' yodeling style but he was not an exceptional vocalist by classical or popular music standards. Yodeling involves singing an elongated note with the pitch oscillating by alternating between the two primary vocal ranges, the diaphragm or chest register (an operatic delivery) and a falsetto or head register common to popular music styles (*think* Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons). American adaptations of the style are largely associated with European Alpine folk music and can be extremely intricate with sixteenth-note staccatos and precise pitch delivery despite the multi-octave nature of the passage. The best example of a virtuoso style of yodeling in modern Texan music is the work of Don Walser, a popular Austin singer during the 1990s.⁸⁸ Threadgill's style, however, was much simpler and displayed none of the exceptional nuances of Walser's expertise. Essentially, Threadgill covered Jimmy Rodgers' songs and the classics of other

⁸⁸ Donald Ray Walser, born in Brownfield, Texas in 1934 was a life-long student of classic country music styles and became an accomplished guitarist, vocalist, and songwriter. At age 16 his first band, The Pan Handle Boys shared the stage with another young Texas musician, Buddy Holly. Despite these early brushes with fame, he elected to remain in the Texas Panhandle, raise a family and continue his career as an auditor with the Texas National Guard. Through the years he remained active as a moonlighting musician, constantly expanded his country music repertoire and maintained an active performance schedule. His work with the National Guard took him to Austin in 1984 and upon his retirement in 1994 he devoted himself to his longstanding musical passion. With the support of Ray Benson of Asleep at the Wheel, Walser recorded a series of albums, developed a strong fan base and a litany of stellar reviews and honors. Credible music critics touted Walser as "the Pavarotti of the Plains" (*Playboy* magazine), "the last of God's great pure country singers" (John Morthland, *Texas Monthly*), and "a national treasure [that] qualifies as Texas folk art" (Eric Hage, *Allmusic*). He was voted "Best Performing Country Band" at the Austin Music Awards, top country band of the year by the *Austin Chronicle* in 1996, and received a lifetime "Heritage" award from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2000. As a lifetime professional musician I considered Walser's vocal skills simply stunning and was saddened by his death in 2006.

traditional songsters from the early popular country music period. Consequently, Threadgill assembled an extensive repertoire over his multi-decade tenure as an amateur singer. He had an amiable stage persona, not particularly exciting or dynamic, but he could light up his characteristically younger audiences with a light-footed, old-school jig enhanced by his endearing smile.

His debut on the national stage came in the early 1980s when he and Willie Nelson appeared together on the soundtrack album for Nelson's film *Honeysuckle Rose*. According to writer Alan Lee Haworth in his "Kenneth Threadgill" article published in *The Handbook of Texas Music*,

He was quiet on the national scene until his first movie soundtrack and album in the early 1980s, when he and Willie Nelson appeared together and sang in *Honeysuckle Rose*. For the soundtrack, Threadgill sang "Coming Back to Texas" and "Singing the Yodeling Blues." He received \$3,000 for acting and \$4,000 for the songs.⁸⁹

Mr. Threadgill was not commonly known as a songwriter, he wasn't an instrumentalist, and didn't release his first major label record album, *Long-Haired Daddy*, until September 1981. This long-awaited release was reviewed by Pepi Plowman in the article, "Twelve-Pack to Go" in the June 1982 edition of *Texas Monthly*:

The years have passed, but the 72-year-old grandfather of the Austin music scene has kept right on singing. At long last, we have a good record, *Silver-[]Haired Daddy* (ARLP 80-1), as his legacy to us. Backed up by some fine musicians, including Johnny Gimble on fiddle and mandolin, Bonnie Hearne on piano, Bill Hearne on acoustic rhythm guitar, and Rene Best on guitar he sings his favorites ("Peach Pickin' Time in Georgia," "Down in That Old Cherry Orchard," and "Waiting for a Train," to name just a few), keeping the original flavor of the songs intact. This music — unlike some done by commercially oriented charlatans such as the Kingston Trio and Peter Paul and Mary — is real folk music.⁹⁰

Threadgill's received no special treatment from the local Austin press during the 1960s until Janis Joplin, at one time a regular at the club's Wednesday night improvisational

⁸⁹ Barkley, Roy; Barnett, Douglas E.; Bringham, Cathy; Hartman, Gary; Monahan, Casey; Oliphant, David; Ward, George B. (Eds.) *The Handbook of Texas Music*. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), p. 326, from the article, "Threadgill, Kenneth," by Alan Lee Haworth.

⁹⁰ Plowman, Pepi. "Twelve-Pack To Go," *Texas Monthly*, Austin Texas. June 1982. p. 204.

soirees, captured the attention of a national audience with her successful San Francisco studio recordings.⁹¹ Only after Joplin's meteoric popular ascendance did the local and national media focus on her connection to the North Austin club and her affection for its father-figure proprietor. This was the major boost to the Threadgill's roadhouse brand and the mythical legacy of its in-house impresario. By the time of Joplin's untimely death in October 1970, the younger participants that populated the cross-generational and cross-genre scene of the mid-1960s had moved on to individual music and academic careers in various parts of the country. Few of these Threadgill's-era constituents remained in Austin to participate in the genesis of the progressive country scene of the 1970s.

Threadgill is accurately characterized again in the *Handbook of Texas Music* as "a unifier of Austin's past and present," a fitting description considering his long-standing love for Old Time country music, particularly Jimmy Rodgers' tunes, and his irrepressible love and dedication to Austin's aspiring young musicians.⁹² In a March 2009 article in the *Austin Chronicle*, music critic Margaret Moser wrote, "Even if Kenneth Threadgill had never mentored the Austin folk scene that included Janis Joplin or lent his name to two nationally successful restaurant/venues, he'd still be a top name in the local who's who."⁹³ If Moser is referring to Threadgill as "mentor" from the perspective of an unselfish advocate for a new generation of musicians learning their trade in Austin during the mid-1960s through the early 1970s, then I wholeheartedly agree. Mr. Threadgill was not however a mentor in the sense of teaching the mechanics and intricacies of music as a learned art.

⁹¹ Joplin's rise to fame and her connection to Threadgill's has been told and retold in many accounts. Joplin's initial national recognition came with her work with the San Francisco blues/rock band, Big Brother and the Holding Company (1967-1968), her debut solo release, *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mamma!*, in 1969, and her hugely popular posthumous release, *Pearl*, in 1971.

⁹² Barkley, Roy; Barnett, Douglas E.; Bringham, Cathy; Hartman, Gary; Monahan, Casey; Oliphant, David; Ward, George B. (Eds.) *The Handbook of Texas Music*. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), p. 326, from the article, "Threadgill, Kenneth," by Alan Lee Haworth.

⁹³ From the article, "Kenneth Threadgill," by Margaret Moser, March 11, 2009 as presented in the *Austin Chronicle*, Austin Music Database Online:
<http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/AMDB/Profile?oid=oid:422226>

As a "latecomer" to the Austin scene in 1967, I didn't attend any of the famed Wednesday night "hootenannies," but I shared the stage with Threadgill on various concerts when he appeared on the bill with the acts with whom I played guitar. I recall visiting with him during the early Kerrville Folk Festivals in 1972 and 1973. I was taken by his sincere joy in being part this curious musical renaissance, an experience that he sometimes referred to as his "second life."⁹⁴ I considered Kenneth Threadgill a friend, and I came to know him on a new level in the mid-1970s when I became his booking agent at Moon Hill Management. When I began working with him, he had closed the bar and was eager to take on new performance bookings. We spoke regularly on business and musical matters and I would look forward to his regular Monday morning visits to my office. He would dutifully come in with his commission remittances, a separate check for each date all tediously made out in the vibrating cursive script of an elderly hand, with all the financial information about the engagement that any accountant might need crowded into the check's "For" section. He was honest, he was humble, and he reveled in his "second-life" incarnation, and he genuinely enjoyed the young musicians he had befriended and supported. Still, I don't believe that the historical record supports Patoski & Crawford's claim (along with other such claims) that Mr. Threadgill was "the man most responsible for creating the vibrant Austin music scene," and I certainly can't imagine him supporting such a claim.

Regarding the other "Olympic-sized historical leaps," Patoski & Crawford's declaration that the "turning point" in the Austin scene came when "Willie Nelson moved to Austin in 1972 and booked into the Armadillo" is an essential component of the creation myth. The significance of Nelson's return to Texas and subsequent Armadillo appearances has been recycled in the majority of the genesis accounts and is characteristically presented as a special watershed moment in Austin's music history. Even Jason Mellard's excellent account, definitely the best scholastic research I've encountered on the period, begins with Nelson's 1972 Armadillo show:

Late in December 1972, two Texas singer-songwriters stood backstage at the Armadillo World Headquarters nightclub in Austin. They knew each

⁹⁴ Per casual conversations with Mr. Threadgill at public venues and during my relationship with him as his booking agent at Moon Hill Management.

other from their time together in Nashville, until one of them left, frustrated with his uncertain prospects as a leading man amidst Music City's glitzy production values. The defector had move to Austin earlier in the year. Soon thereafter, he called the Texan still in exile to let him know that he had "found something" down here, which is why they were backstage at the Armadillo. The two had played any number of dubious honky-tonks and dance halls across the country, but peering out at a screaming crowd of long-haired cosmic cowboys and peasant-bloused honky-tonk angels, Waylon Jennings just was not sure what to make of it all. He turned to his friend, visibly worried. "What the hell have you got me into, Willie?"⁹⁵

Although Mellard doesn't represent this date as a definitive "turning point," by situating it as the lead narrative of his Introduction he accents the importance of the show. Another problem inherent in the "turning point" claim rests with the obscurity of this seminal date. Nelson played five shows at the Armadillo in 1972, the first on August 12, a two-day run on September 15 and 16, another on November 4, and a fifth, the subject of Mellard's account, on Friday, December 1.⁹⁶ The question is further clouded by Reid's account of Nelson at the Armadillo. In the opening chapter of *The Improbable Rise*, "The Gay Place," Reid frames the cultural climate of Austin in the early 1970s and mentions that Austin's "most popular spectacle was no longer football or political chicanery, but live music." Through the "interest of a curious national press and the word-of-mouth communication by touring musicians," Reid said, "Austin gained almost overnight a reputation as one of the most exciting centers of musical activity in the country."⁹⁷ He then immediately segued into an account of Nelson's Armadillo performance on April 4, 1973. It is during this narrative that the author describes the confluence of the contrasting "redneck" and "hippie" contingents at play in Austin at that time:

⁹⁵ Mellard, Jason Dean. *Cosmic Cowboys, Armadillos, and Outlaws: The Cultural Politics of Texan Identity in the 1970s* (Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin, May, 2009), p. 1. Mellard assembled this account from two sources: Jennings, Waylon with Kaye, Lenny: *Waylon: An Autobiography* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 195-196 and Nelson, Willie with Shrake, Bud. *Willie: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 171.

⁹⁶ From the Armadillo Booking Calendar as prepared by several of the venues operatives and presented on the Armadillo World Headquarters Website, "1970 - AWHQ - 1980" <http://www.armadilloworldheadquarters.com/awhq.htm>

⁹⁷ Reid (1974), p. 3.

As remarkable as Nelson's act that night was his audience. While freaks in gingham gowns and cowboy boots sashayed like they invented country music, remnants of Nelson's old audience had themselves a time too . . . A booted, western-dressed beauty for Waxahachie drove 150 miles for the show, and she said, "I just love Willie Nelson and I'd drive anywhere to see him . . . but you know, he's sure been doin' some changin' lately." She looked around. "I have never seen so many hippies in my life." Be that as it may, she abandoned her date to dance a good part of the night away with one of them, a brawny thirty-year-old named Sunshine who used to ride broncs and play football for Texas Tech before he underwent some changes of his own.⁹⁸

Like Mellard, Reid does not specifically define this April show as a definitive "turning point," but in keeping with Mellard's account, it's reasonable to attach considerable historical import to both examples. This in turn suggests the question, "When was this so-called 'turning point?'" Was it one of the five nights in 1972? Was it in fact an extended five-month period from August to December in 1972, or was it the April 1973 date that Reid describes? I maintain that it doesn't matter. Willie's fateful Armadillo appearance operates much like the assertion that Mr. Threadgill was the "man most responsible for creating the vibrant Austin music scene." It operates as a composite metaphor, a reification of a series of events, circumstances and personalities that have been packaged into an accessible, popular public symbol. Just as there were many mentors during Threadgill's tenure, there were many contributing factors in Austin's national paradigm shift in the early 1970s and to associate the shift with a particular date is neither accurate nor helpful. Such a single-night or a single-progenitor argument is however, extremely convenient and makes for a powerful storyline in the popular press.

My review of the published genesis narratives coupled with my discussions and interviews with assorted fans and observers of the 1970s scene suggest that there is a pervading perception that Willie Nelson's arrival in 1972 kick-started the progressive country era. This underscores the power and ubiquity of the creation myth as well as its durability. Nelson himself, however, denies this interpretation. In interviewing Nelson for her book, *Telling Stories Writing Songs*, Kathleen Hudson suggested that he had "de-

⁹⁸ Reid (1974), pp. 3-4.

colonized" country music and "brought it back to its roots," and in essence was the main source of the change.⁹⁹

I didn't really change anything. I came back to Texas when the music scene was already going on. Everybody says I started something, but I didn't start anything so much as join an already growing movement, a legion of people who like good music, no matter what kind, who like to listen to and play whatever they want to.¹⁰⁰

Nelson's observation fortifies my thesis that his return to Texas was one of many procuring causes, just as Threadgill's, the Vulcan Gas Company, and the Armadillo were "joint venues" among many establishments that, beginning in the 1960s, offered their stages to an extensive collection of talented musicians "who like[ed] to listen to and play whatever they want to."

Patoski & Crawford's comment that the "rest of the world was beginning to discover the hip little music scene that was going down in Austin" by 1975 "thanks to the Armadillo World Headquarters" is problematic for several reasons. It is at odds with the historical timeline regarding the popular hit songs of the period, it invests far too much historical capital into a single venue, it overlooks the power of the national press, and it bypasses the power of mass media, specifically, radio airplay and subsequent album sales. Consequently, it casts the music, the songs, and the artists as secondary players in the scene's international ascendance. The Armadillo didn't put Austin on the national map; the music did.

By 1975 Michael Martin Murphey's albums *Geronimo's Cadillac* (1972) and *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* (1973) had garnered considerable national airplay and press coverage; in 1975, his single releases, "Wildfire" and "Carolina in the Pines" were on their way to top twenty positions on the national pop charts.¹⁰¹ Jerry Jeff Walker's 1973

⁹⁹ Hudson, Kathleen. *Telling Stories Writing Songs*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 14. It's unclear as to when she conducted her interviews with the various songwriters. She mentions in her Preface that she began her "oral history adventure" in 1986 and that "every interview in [the] collection was conducted in the field," but there is no specificity as to the dates of individual interviews. Consequently, I can only assume that her interview with Willie Nelson took place between 1986 and the publication date of the book in 2001.

¹⁰⁰ Hudson, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰¹ Murphey's "Wildfire" reached #3 on the national pop charts and "Carolina in the Pines" reached #21 that same year.

album, *¡Viva Terlingua!*, was extremely popular in the national market as were Nelson's albums *Shotgun Willie* (1973) and *Phases and Stages* (1974). Nelson's 1975 release, *Red Headed Stranger*, was climbing the national country charts on its journey to number one with more than two million album sales. By 1975 there had been abundant press coverage of the Austin scene, Bill Arhos at Austin's Public Television Station, KLRN, had sold the Willie Nelson pilot to the PBS network, and the station was in production for their first *Austin City Limits* series. In short, the Austin scene had secured an appreciable niche in the public imagination by 1975.

There is little doubt that the Armadillo was nationally publicized as Austin's premier performance venue but there were other venues and live music scenes that played strongly into the Austin's national ascendance. The Armadillo claim overlooks such seminal 1970s' Austin venues like the Chequered Flag, the original Saxon Pub, Castle Creek, Soap Creek Saloon, and the Texas Opry House. It overlooks developing scenes like the Kerrville Folk Festival created in 1972, the Dripping Springs Reunion launched the same year that set the stage for Willie Nelson's 4th of July Picnics, and by 1975 the Texas Hill Country hideout of Luckenbach, the scene of Walker's *¡Viva Terlingua!* recording was the go-to getaway for regional artists and dedicated fans. The popularity of this sleepy little watering hole was sufficient to inspire two Nashville songwriters, Chips Moman and Bobby Emmons, to write the song "Luckenbach Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)" that featured Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson inviting an international audience to "go to Luckenbach Texas, with Waylon and Willie and the boys" that topped the national country charts at #1 in 1977.¹⁰² Carlyne Majer, the co-founder and talent coordinator for Soap Creek Saloon that opened in 1972, offers an important observation about the Armadillo World Headquarters and its role in the early Austin scene:

Armadillo World Headquarters really was catering to Van Morrison and the Pointer Sisters and a lot of major artists and they did at times have opening slots. They didn't really have a local club. So I [through Soap Creek Saloon] really wanted to cater to local and regional artists. Bobby

¹⁰² "Luckenbach Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)" by Chips Moman and Bobby Emmons published by Sony/ATV Songs D/B/A Tree Publishing, copyright 1976. Released on the album, *Ol' Waylon*, RCA Records 1977.

Bridger played Soap Creek. We had Cosmic Cowboys there, we had pure country there . . . We wanted regional talent from different areas of the country. But I specifically wanted to develop over time the Austin music community . . . What I really wanted to do was offer local musicians what really wasn't accessible or available at the time.¹⁰³

Majer's comment is insightful and accurate regarding Armadillo's role in the growing Austin scene. This cavernous venue, certainly progressive in its cultural vision by presenting everything from popular Cosmic Cowboy acts to the electric blues of Freddie King, ballets and art shows coupled with their presentations of national touring acts, was an important cog in Austin's developing aesthetic wheel, but the larger vortex included many other cogs that have been underrepresented in the popular creation myth.

Patoski & Crawford's assessments are representative of many interpretations that accentuate my concern with the omnipresence and popularity of the creation myth and its perpetual iterations since Reid's original 1974 account. In fairness to Patoski & Crawford, what I'm calling their so-called "Olympic-sized historical leaps" were simply derivatives of the popular creation myth and were not the product of their specific historical research. Their focus was Stevie Ray Vaughan and their assessment of "pre-Stevie" Austin music history was simply a background sidebar. Still, that underscores the point at hand. The creation myth has maintained its vitality for so long that it's generally taken at face value, it has been neither substantively challenged nor enhanced, and it's exceptionally convenient as source material.

Notes from a Sociologist and Austin Music Participant

In 2000, a small publishing house in Cedar Park, Texas released *Music in the City: A History of Austin Music*, written by Alan C. Turley, an assistant professor of sociology at the State University of New York, Brockport who earned his Ph.D. at the University of Texas. According to the author's bio on the back cover of the book, Turley had "spent over fifteen years in the Austin music scene as a fan, band member, music engineer, and band leader."¹⁰⁴ Turley's assessment of the Austin scene during the 1970s is drawn almost exclusively from Reid and Shank. References to these two authors are

¹⁰³ From my November 1993 telephone interview with Carlyne Majer (Majewski).

¹⁰⁴ Turley, Alan C. *Music in the City: A History of Austin Music*. Cedar Park: Duckling Publishing, 2000.

too numerous to list—Turley's account is largely a paraphrase of their work—but two specific quotes epitomize his reliance on Reid's seminal model of the three key entertainment venues coupled with Nelson's first appearance at the Armadillo. First, Turley references the sacred triumvirate that was originally developed by Reid:

I maintain that the Armadillo World Headquarters was the logical progression and ultimate beneficiary of the clubs that had preceded it, especially Threadgill's open acceptance of the original folksinging club and the Vulcan Gas Company's role as the alternative life-style and cultural center. The success and acclaim of the Armadillo World Headquarters attained was ultimately built on this foundation of innovative club and musician interaction.¹⁰⁵

After a brief synopsis of Nelson's Texas roots and his Nashville-based career path, Turley addresses Nelson's move to Austin and his debut performance at the Armadillo:

He "officially" moved to Austin shortly after [the release of *Shotgun Willie*], and the Cosmic Cowboys had their icon to adore from the stage of the Armadillo World Headquarters. Many fans trace the real momentum of the progressive country movement to Willie's first appearance at the Armadillo on August 12, 1972 . . .¹⁰⁶

Shotgun Willie was Nelson's first release on his new record label, Atlantic, after an extended run with RCA in Nashville. It proved to be a landmark album in Nelson's career, but it was released in 1973, not 1972. Nonetheless, Turley's account of the initial Armadillo show was another iteration of the storyline originally advanced in *The Improbable Rise*. Turley's assessment of the progressive country period illustrates the durability and ubiquity of the creation myth. Admittedly, the story of the 1970s in Austin is only one small piece of his larger work in presenting *A History of Austin Music*, and, because Turley was not a scene participant during that period, he relied on secondary sources. Therein lies the significance: Turley, obviously a well-trained scholar, sought out the commonly accepted history, and that history was (and I would argue *still is*) the historical account of record.

A Scholarly Survey of Texas Music

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 46.

Another account regarding the genesis of the Austin scene comes from Professor Gary Hartman of Texas State University with his 2008 publication, *The History of Texas Music*.¹⁰⁷ Curiously, before Hartman's book, a comprehensive survey of the state's intriguing musical background had yet to be written. Hartman's work draws largely from the diversity inherent in the cultural evolution of the state and the ensuing blend of the fundamental distinctions, social mores, attitudes, and ethnic musical styles that ultimately define "Texas music." In Hartman's chapter, "Anglo American Music in Texas," he singles out progressive country and describes it as "a combination of honky-tonk, folk, rock & roll, swing, boogie-woogie, blues, and other styles that would prove to be the most eclectic form of country music to emerge from Texas since Western swing in the 1930s."¹⁰⁸ After listing some of the key players—Willie Nelson, Jerry Jeff Walker, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Michael Martin Murphey, Marcia Ball and others—Hartman describes why Austin became the "epicenter of this new progressive phenomenon:"¹⁰⁹

With at least six major colleges and universities in the immediate area, the capital city of Texas had a large population of well-educated, socially and politically progressive young people, many of whom had grown up listening to both their parents' country music and the rock & roll of their own generation. In addition, there were thousands of musicians and music fans who were not students but had simply converged on the city because it provided a cultural oasis of sorts in the midst of a socially and politically conservative state."¹¹⁰

The author then suggests that, beyond the appeal of a cultural oasis, Austin was a city that offered a number of venues that enabled these talented performers to ply their trade and present their cross-genre styles to a receptive audience:

Unlike most other Texas cities at that time, Austin of the 1960s and 1970s had a vibrant and dynamic live music scene made up of dozens of nightclubs, dance halls, coffee houses and other venues that hosted a diverse range of performers. The Chequered Flag, the Vulcan Gas Company, Castle Creek, the Armadillo World Headquarters, the Split Rail, the Austin Opry House, the One Knight, the Hole in the Wall,

¹⁰⁷ Hartman, Gary. *The History of Texas Music*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 165.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 165.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 165.

Spellman's, the Austin Outhouse, the Broken Spoke, Antone's, and Cheatham Street Warehouse (in San Marcos), along with a number of local festivals, street dances, and neighborhood concerts, all provided a remarkable mix of country, blues, conjunto, Cajun, Zydeco, folk, rock & Roll, Western swing, R&B, gospel, jazz, reggae, and other styles."¹¹¹

Hartman's list of diverse venues and the music they presented is helpful in understanding the extensive scope of the cultural explosion that erupted in Austin during the late 1960s and 1970s. The Austin scene signified a musical "big bang" that was as multifarious as the progenitors of the songs and the sounds. Contemporary trends in the marketplace and other aspects of popular-music causality propelled progressive country music onto the national stage in the early years of the 1970s, but other equally worthy styles were waiting in the wings for their day in the international spotlight.

Although Hartman only briefly references Threadgill's—the venue that the myth singles out as the first cross-genre and cross-generational site of cultural confluence—he clearly establishes the Armadillo as the era's essential venue in the progressive country gene pool. "Of all the live music venues in Austin during the 1970s," Hartman reports, "the Armadillo World Headquarters was probably the best known and most popular." The author then goes on to describe the genesis of the venue and goes on to comment on the eclectic musical menu at the Armadillo:

Although the cavernous room, which held around fifteen hundred people, had less than ideal acoustics, the weekly lineup of musical acts was remarkable, featuring a broad range of blues, jazz, gospel, country, rockabilly, conjunto, folk, rock and other styles. Texas artists, including Willie Nelson, Freddie King, Marcia Ball, Lightnin' Hopkins, ZZ Top, Kinky Friedman, Alvin Crow, Flaco Jimenez, Mance Lipscomb, Asleep that the Wheel, Clifton Chenier, Kenneth Threadgill, Johnny Winter, Doug Sahm, Joe Ely, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jerry Jeff Walker, and Greezy Wheels, shared the stage with national touring acts such as Bruce Springsteen, the Pointer Sisters, Frank Zappa, Earl Scruggs, Taj Mahal, Leo Kottke, Ravi Shankar, Bill Monroe, Fats Domino, Gram Parsons, Emmylou Harris, Van Morrison, Linda Rondstadt, and the Grateful Dead. Because it helped bring together an eclectic mixture of styles on a grand scale, the Armadillo provided a unique musical environment that helped launch the progressive movement and pave the way for the diverse and dynamic scene that continues in Austin today.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp. 165-166.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 166.

The "weekly talent lineup" and in fact, the extended talent lineup over the Armadillo's ten-year reign was truly "remarkable." It reads like a 1970s' "who's-who" of American popular music and exemplifies the aggressive and encompassing booking policy of the venue's management. And it clearly demonstrates that the Armadillo did not focus on progressive country acts. An analysis of the acts that comprised the "Decade of the 'Dillo" reveals that only 15 percent of those acts could be classified as "progressive country."¹¹³ I'm suggesting that this eclectic and innovative talent lineup was an intuitive and knowledgeable policy on the part of the Armadillo's hierarchy. Given the benefit of hindsight, it would have been folly for the club to over-invest in one particular genre or contemporary trend. Beyond any doubt, Austin was splitting at the seams with innovative new acts, but the Armadillo was a national venue, and the national scene was similarly splitting at the seams with innovative new acts. Further, in considering Austin's audience demographic of the period where students and members of the work force were arriving from all points of the Texan and national compass, the ephemeral market demanded a broad scope in talent selection. The city's live-music landscape of the 1970s is littered with failed clubs that tried to make a branding connection to the progressive country train.¹¹⁴ This eclectic booking policy by the Armadillo's informed staff illustrated that the unique cultural experiment in South Austin was much more than a

¹¹³ I derive this figure by studying and comparing several sources: the Armadillo Booking Calendar, a document that meticulously lists the ten-year inventory of performers on a night-by-night basis, and several online sources that provide lists of notable acts that appeared at the venue during its tenure. By identifying the acts on any given list that could be considered progressive country and dividing that number by the total acts featured on that list, I derived several percentages, and in balancing these factors, the ratio of progressive country acts to the sum of all acts booked averaged 15%.

¹¹⁴ Examples of high-capacity ephemeral music venues during the 1970s include Alliance Wagon Yard in the downtown 6th Street entertainment district, Third Coast, a large venue in North Austin that favored a progressive-country format, and the Bull Creek Party Barn, immediately west of town on Lake Austin that featured an indoor and an outdoor stage for large weekend concerts. Additionally, there were smaller venues that invested in Austin's national notoriety only to discover that nightclubs, even in a supercharged music scene, were extremely high-risk ventures. Nonetheless, many of these short-lived nightclubs made worthy contributions to the strategic development of progressive musical trends in Austin.

single-genre showcase and, by extension, that the Armadillo was not the focal point of the progressive country phenomenon.¹¹⁵

Hartman's observations certainly support his claim that "Austin became the epicenter of the new progressive country phenomenon," and the majority of these observations are derivatives of Reid's seminal account.¹¹⁶ Hartman's depiction of the wide variety of talent that frequented the Armadillo stage illustrates the venue's contribution to the "dynamic scene that continues in Austin today."¹¹⁷ That helpful disclosure also supports my argument that the venerable 'Dillo was home to a collage of genres and styles and was not concentrating on progressive country music.

Interpretations a Long-Time Rocker Turned Music Journalist

Rick Koster's 1998 book, *Texas Music*, is an overview of Texas music from the 1920s through the 1990s and like many contemporary writers he recognizes the convergence of genres and generations in the early Austin music scene.¹¹⁸ He claims that

¹¹⁵ There was an ebb and flow in the relationships between the Armadillo and a number of the progressive country acts. Willie, for example, stopped playing there to support the Texas Opry House, a large concert hall and entertainment business facility that he co-owned with a contingent of other members of his immediate business circle, most notably Tim O'Connor. Tim had owned Castle Creek, the first venue that Willie played when he initially came to town. According to Tim, Willie showed up at Castle Creek one night and mentioned that he was looking for a place to play in Austin, and Tim essentially said, "mi casa es su casa" and a long-term relationship was born. The Austin Opry House, which was previously a sprawling hotel complex and convention center immediately south of Town Lake just off South Congress Avenue on Academy Drive, became a direct competitor of the Armadillo. The Austin Opry House played a noteworthy role in the Austin live-entertainment story: It had two large ballrooms (1,600 seats and 800 seats), it hosted a variety of national acts, it was home to Arlyn Recording Studios, owned by Willie's nephew, Freddy Fletcher, it was home to Nelson's Lone Star Record label, it rented office space to countless Austin music business ventures, and even hosted the Armadillo Christmas Bizarre after the demise of the Armadillo. Michael Murphey developed a strained relationship with the Armadillo and had a major falling out with Eddie Wilson. Interestingly, a verbal exchange between Murphey and Wilson (recorded by Wilson) was reported by Jan Reid in the second edition of *The Improbable Rise* (2000). The essence of that kerfuffle had to do with Murphey playing the Austin Opry House in lieu of the Armadillo where Murphey had been scheduled to perform. The situation was not resolved to the satisfaction of either party. There was friction between Jerry Jeff Walker and the Armadillo, evidently regarding some of Walker's backstage antics. I recall that Walker did not perform at the Armadillo for quite some time.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 165.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.165-166.

¹¹⁸ Koster, Rick. *Texas Music*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998. According to the back cover of Koster's *Texas Music*, the author "spent fifteen years as a working rock musician before his hair turned gray and he became a writer. A native of Texas, Koster now lives in New London,

the progressive country movement altered "the face of both country and western and rock," and that "folksingers began the subtle evolution that would result in the tag 'singer/songwriter.'"¹¹⁹ He goes on to report that during the early 1970s:

Austin was quickly establishing itself as the heart of all things musical at that point, a reputation that certainly included the singer/songwriter movement. An enterprising bar owner/folk enthusiast named Ken Threadgill was influential. His gas station-turned-beer bar would be a home-away-from-dorm for two generations of UT music lovers. Threadgill and his own new-folk outfit, the Hootenanny Hoots, made noise on the national scene, and Threadgill's is of course famous for giving Janis Joplin her first real club exposure. Joplin frequently appeared with Lanny Wiggins and Powell St. John (who were some to be semifamous [sic] as members of a rock/soul outfit called Mother Earth with another ex-folkie, Tracy Nelson).¹²⁰

Although Koster doesn't single out the Vulcan Gas Company, he highlights many of the performers commonly associated with the venue like Johnny and Edgar Winter, the 13th Floor Elevators, the Conqueroo, as well as various blues artists like T-Bone Walker, Big Momma Thornton, Mance Lipscomb and Big Joe Turner. Koster addresses the post-Vulcan years beginning in 1970 by focusing on the Armadillo and describing it as the "symbolic center of the Austin attitude," where "formally antagonistic subsets—bikers, hippies, rednecks, acid heads—found themselves dancing, drinking, getting high, and laughing together."¹²¹ Koster then continued his analysis of the Armadillo's unique cultural mosaic by referencing the significance of Willie Nelson:

It was the ultimate coexistence, lacking only a musical figurehead. Earlier that year [1972], Nelson had headed up an outdoor show at Dripping Springs called the Dripping Springs Reunion, which was a financial disaster, but an eclectic lineup including Loretta Lynn, Tex Ritter, Kris Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings, Billy Joe Shaver, and Leon Russell had created an energy and vibe that seemed to flow promisingly enough. So when Willie played his first show at the Armadillo on August 12, 1972 (with the quintessential Willie Nelson band: his sister Bobbie on piano, bassist Bee Spears, guitarists Jody Payne and Grady Martin, percussionist

Connecticut, with his wife, where he covers music and books for *The Day*," the region's popular daily newspaper.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 209.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 209.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 36.

Billy English, harmonica wizard Mickey Raphael, and drummer Paul English), the spirit of the Dripping Springs [Reunion] seemed to have found a home and, thereafter, the phenomenon known as progressive country, redneck rock, and/or the cosmic cowboy movement began to percolate.¹²²

Koster's observations constitute another rehash of Reid's original assessment by featuring Mr. Threadgill and his establishment, the musicians associated with the Vulcan, Nelson's celebrated Armadillo performance, and other familiar scene developments. His characterization of the Armadillo as the "symbolic center of the Austin attitude" however, is worth noting. The Armadillo is accurately cast as the "*symbolic center*" of a pervasive "*Austin attitude*" rather than the *definitive center* and the *birthplace* of the "Austin attitude" as has been portrayed by many of the journalistic sources of the period.¹²³ The Armadillo was generally perceived as the showcase venue of the region and it was publicly linked to the union of rednecks and hippies that rests at the core of what Koster's calls "the Austin attitude."¹²⁴ But a closer examination suggests that there were many sub-scenes and cultural themes at play during the tenure of Austin's iconic concert hall. As previously reported by Soap Creek owner, Carlyn Majer, the Armadillo generally focused on high-profile national touring attractions.¹²⁵ Local acts were booked to open shows and select Austin acts sometimes served as headliners, but a great deal of the creative exchanges that shaped Austin's musical climate and the evolution of styles were taking place in smaller clubs like Soap Creek Saloon, Castle Creek, the Saxon Pub, and the Split Rail where players regularly sat in and shared songs. Further, a great deal of the creative heavy lifting took place in more intimate settings like local rehearsal halls and recording studios, spontaneous pickin' sessions, and late-night gatherings where musicians stretched out and exchanged ideas and influences outside the spotlights of the concert stage.

¹²² Ibid, p. 36.

¹²³ The italics in this sentence are mine.

¹²⁴ As mentioned, the Austin Opry House (1975-1983) was a viable competitor with the Armadillo.

¹²⁵ I agree with Majer's report and her comment regarding the Armadillo seeking out the prominent draws was not contextually pejorative. Indeed, as a retired club owner who recognizes that the struggle to keep a club's doors open can be a day-to-day challenge, I certainly understand the need to secure popular shows to generate the numbers necessary to sustain operations.

Koster's observation regarding the term "singer-songwriter" is also worth exploring. The author claims that the Threadgill's scene where UT folkies joined country musicians in impromptu jam sessions coupled with the subsequent birth of the progressive country trend represented a "subtle evolution that would result in the tag 'singer/songwriter.'"¹²⁶ There is a lingering significance in Koster's focus on "the tag 'singer-songwriter,'" an etymological significance that emphasizes creative currents in Austin's musical evolution. In considering the context of the comment in Koster's narrative, he's not suggesting the incarnate singer-songwriter was the product of the Austin-based Threadgill's-progressive-country musical *mélange*. Rather, he's pointing out that the *phrase* singer-songwriter entered the common music vernacular during this prolific decade. The notion of the singer-songwriter has a long history in the evolution of modern music. The commonly shared perception of a singer-songwriter depicts a peripatetic composer of songs, usually self-accompanied, who performs publicly to promote and market his or her music and compositions. The singer-songwriter has traditionally made a living through performance fees, by offering their music and lyrics for sale through printed song sheets, and more recently, through the sale of audio reproductions of their work.

The historical figure of the singer-songwriter dates back to archaic Bardic cultures and their early European Renaissance counterparts like the troubadours and jongleurs. (The history of songs and songwriters is addressed at length in Chapter 5, "Songs Matter.") Some students of the song would argue that the singer-songwriter has even earlier origins. Michael Martin Murphey maintains that "Jesus," in all probability, "actually *sang* the Sermon on the Mount" rather than narrating his message. Murphey suggests that "Homer was a singer-songwriter," and explains that his classical verse was written to be delivered in a melodic, metered and musical fashion. "The Bhagavad Gītā," Murphey also notes, "is essentially an extensive song with [700] verses," and that the poem's title, "Bhagavad Gītā," translates as "Song of God" from the original Sanskrit." Finally, Murphey argues that, "it all goes back to the song, the blend of verse and music;" and that "the song represents the origins of [Western] literature and music traditions."¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Koster, p. 209.

¹²⁷ Interview with Murphey in Austin, Texas on March 5, 2011.

Regardless of which historical yardstick one might choose, it reasonable to assume that the efficacy of poetry and music unified as "song" has long played an important role in the evolution of modern culture.

Why then is this subtle point about terminology—the "subtle evolution that would result in the tag 'singer/songwriter'" —important? It's important because the etymological shift illustrates the dichotomy between the actual music-making process of the period and the popular reportage that fundamentally fueled the creation myth. In the ferment of the developing Austin scene, journalists, writers, and contemporary music critics readily recognized that something new was percolating which sparked considerable local and national news coverage. The creation myth was a product of this surge of reportage, and, as this dissertation argues, many of the salient aspects of scene causality have emerged through the years as journalism has segued into historiography. Nonetheless, the emerging events in Austin during the early 1970s required an updated jargon. Indeed, popular new genres demand popular new names. The term "singer-songwriter" was not in common use at that time and as Koster notes above, the term "evolved" into a common "tag" during the 1970s. Contemporary terms like "psychedelic" or "acid rock" obviously didn't apply and "country rock" had been adopted for artists like the Byrds, Gram Parsons, the Flying Burrito Brothers, and the Eagles among other California-based groups. Even the established term "folk" didn't adequately depict the musical ethos of the era. Nashville veteran Willie Nelson as a homecoming Texas "folkie" or Jerry Jeff Walker as a sing-a-long leader at the local college hootenanny weren't convincing images. American folk music certainly informed Nelson's and Walker's formative music sensibilities, and artists like Murphey, Fromholz, and Van Zandt could qualify as "progressive folk singers," but the term folk music was a term in transition during the early years of the Austin scene and carried its fair share of typological baggage. In its early iterations, folk music suggested an extended array of songs and sounds imported from Europe, Africa, and Latin America that developed unique characteristics in the new American 19th-century environment. Later, folk music signified the post-Depression-era protest songs of Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie and shortly thereafter it was identified by the folk music revival of the 1960s exemplified by acts like Peter, Paul and Mary and ultimately Bob Dylan. Consequently, as writers and critics searched for novel

expressions to describe the promising developments in Austin, the neologisms "progressive-country," "cosmic cowboy," "redneck rock," appeared and served as the principal modifiers of the decade.

In the early 1980s when the creative smoke cleared and the popular buzz of the 1970s wound down, these monikers faded from the public imagination as music media critics, writers and related audio pundits moved on to cover new trends in modern music. The major protagonists of the early Austin scene, however, continued their longstanding vocations, several achieved unprecedented international success, but they all went about the business of writing, recording, and performing songs. With the "moniker makers" other directed and with the term "singer-songwriter" ebbing ever stronger into the current of popular parlance, Nelson, Walker, Murphey, Fromholz, Van Zandt, Clark, Ramsey and others settled in as "singer-songwriters." By the 1980s the terms coined in the early 1970s—"progressive-country," "cosmic cowboy," "redneck rock"—were regarded as yesteryear's modifiers, but by and large the critics of the 1980s readily adopted the term singer-songwriter in their contemporary assessments of the original Austin crew. Accordingly, the popular reportage of the late 1970s and 1980s engaged in a retrofitting process opting for the new term to replace the period tropes when revisiting subjects relevant to the previous era. The adopted phrase, singer songwriter, not only better described the protagonists and their work; the phrase more accurately reflected the self-images of the early song crafters.¹²⁸ Walker, Murphey, Fromholz and others were certainly more comfortable with the phrase singer-songwriter than cosmic cowboy. More significantly, however, this retrofitting in terminology suggests the need to reexamine the

¹²⁸ This claim comes from my experience as a sideman working for Fromholz, Murphey and Walker during the period. Categorically, these artists shied away from "pigeon-hole" descriptions of their work. When asked to describe his music Fromholz would characteristically quip, "It's free-form jazz, country, rock, folk, science-fiction, gospel-gum, bluegrass, classical music," or some similar nonsensical and humorous description that defied the very notion of categorization. Murphey was troubled by the term "Cosmic Cowboy" as a description of his work arguing that his song of the same name was a whimsical metaphor not to be taken seriously as a genre, and Walker generally shrugged off such probing questions and ordered another drink. In short, as developing public personalities and songwriters in a competitive national environment consciously developing their unique brands, they preferred to have their compositions described as "Fromholz," "Murphey," and "Walker" music respectively. Having worked in a guitar-playing and/or production capacity with other artists like Rusty Wier, Keith Sykes, Alex Harvey and B.W. Stevenson, I imagine a similar response, though Willie Nelson's extended creative history defies specific typology.

tenets of the creation myth. The etymological shift illustrates the dichotomy between the actual music-making process of the period and the popular reportage that fundamentally fueled the creation myth. Just as the original language used to describe the early scene changed with the prospective of historiography, the creation myth must be addressed through a similar discovery process. The following pages present additions to and expansions of this popular history in an attempt to better understand the wide range of activities, circumstances, and events that defined one the most prolific climates of creativity in Austin's aesthetic evolution.

Challenging and Expanding the History of Record

The accounts above span over thirty years, they come from qualified sources, and they illustrate the staying power of Reid's original account. The core elements—three influential venues and a charismatic leader—have endured largely unchallenged since the mid-1970s, they've been regularly repeated, not only in the accounts above, but in other books, magazines, and newspaper articles through the years.¹²⁹ Publications like the *Austin American Statesman*, *The Austin Chronicle*, *The Daily Texan*, *Texas Monthly*, *The Austin Sun*, *Third Coast Magazine*, *Billboard*, *Rolling Stone*, the *Houston Chronicle*, *The Dallas Morning News* and others have featured articles that reference aspects of Reid's seminal research. Considering the three assumptions regarding the nature of myths set forth earlier—that myths generally have a factual basis; that they are a function of time and a function of repetition—Reid's account and its subsequent iterations undoubtedly qualify. Still, the passages above, as mentioned in the opening paragraph of this chapter, represent only "an encapsulated version of this commonly accepted story." Many of these accounts offer additional information regarding Austin's debut on the national stage. Although they all fundamentally agree that the mixing of genres and generations in the three prominent clubs coupled with Nelson's Armadillo performance certify the

¹²⁹ Other examples of books that reflect the story of record include *Eye Mind: The Saga of Roky Erickson and the 13th Floor Elevators*, *The Pioneers of Psychedelic Sound* by Paul Drummond (Los Angeles: Process Media, 2007.); *Music From the Heart: The Fifty-Year Chronicle of His Life in Music (With a Few Sidetrips!)* by Rod Kennedy (Austin: Eakin Press, 1998.); *The Handbook of Texas Music* edited by Ray Barkley, Douglas E. Barnett, Cathy Bringham, Gary Hartman, Casey Monahan, Dave Oliphant, George B. Ward (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003.); *Telling Stories Writing Songs: An Album of Texas Songwriters* by Kathleen Hudson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

genesis of progressive country music, they differ in the detail, emphasis, and ancillary aspects of the scene's origins. It's important therefore to present an expanded account based on these sources to offer challenges and amendments to the commonly accepted history.

Such challenges suggest one of the basic theses of this study: The creation myth, overlooks and/or under-represents vital aspects of the Austin music scene in the late 1960s. Reviewing this segment of Austin music history is essential in understanding the success of the Austin scene on the national stage during the 1970s. The general myth, albeit fundamentally accurate, is myopic. This enduring history of record slips into the realm of myth not because of fictitious foundations or fabrications but because of substantive omissions, many of which fall in period prior to the arrival of the singer-songwriters in the early 1970s. The generally accepted history of record falls short by overlooking the dynamic interplay of talent, popular music-business institutions, and contemporary media support during the late 1960s that served as the underpinnings of the 1970s. At bottom, there's another story to be told, a story that must be layered into the existing myth to create a comprehensive history. This retrospective story, a survey of Austin during the late sixties as an exciting hotbed of bands and exceptional young musicians who would ultimately make their mark on the course of popular culture, is addressed in detail in Chapter 4. The final pages of this chapter address specific observations in Reid's account that describe the fabric of the Austin scene during the period immediately before the arrival of the singer-songwriters in the early 1970s.

Reid accurately points out that by 1970, "Music had long been a part of Austin life."¹³⁰ He describes Austin as "the most bohemian city in a very conservative state," and that "artists of all stripes were naturally inclined to think that they could find an amiable climate and perhaps a receptive audience there."¹³¹ He reports however that the capital city was not a destination for national touring acts and that Austinites "contented themselves with what was available locally:"¹³²

¹³⁰ Reid 2004, p. 4.

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 4.

¹³² Ibid, p. 4.

Folksingers strummed their guitars for nickels and dimes in the university area. Rock and rollers lived communally, tried to imitate their heroes' best licks in free concerts in the park, and paid their bills by playing rubber-stamped dance music for fraternities and sororities. Rhythm-and-blues bands played wherever they could, which was usually limited to the black east side. Country bands played in beer taverns as waitresses circled the room with tambourines in their hands, soliciting donations for the musicians. Any of those musicians might attract spirited local followings, but they knew, and their followers knew, that if they were going to make any sort of national impression, one day they would have to try their luck in the major music centers—New York, Los Angeles, Nashville.¹³³

These statements suggest that prior to the national acclaim achieved during the progressive country years, the Austin scene languished in musical mediocrity and lacked the infrastructure for success on a national level. Beyond any doubt, Austin was not a "major music center" but the commentary above downplays many of the town's positive aspects and opportunities for aspiring musicians in the late 1960s. Indeed, in the second decade of the 21st-century Austin is still not a "major music center," but that doesn't imply that Austin's climate of creativity didn't significantly contribute to notable innovative trends that have shaped the current of popular music culture. With respect to folksingers strumming for nickels and dimes, the avenues around UT hosted their fair share of buskers and the pay scale for local folkies was meager at best. Nonetheless, there was a vibrant folk music community powered by several popular entertainment venues that provided a public forum. Beyond the gatherings at the Student Union, commercial clubs like the 11th Door and the Chequered Flag coupled with concert productions at Austin's Municipal Auditorium and the Zilker Park Hillside Theater, all presented local favorites like Carolyn Hester, Big Bill Moss, and Allen Damron, as well as national acts like Tom Paxton, Gordon Lightfoot, Jimmy Driftwood, Townes Van Zandt and Jerry Jeff Walker. Moreover, Rod Kennedy, the Austin-based concert promoter who co-founded the Chequered Flag, went on to shape elements of this viable acoustic troupe into the Kerrville Folk Festival in 1972, one of the most enduring and successful cultural institutions in contemporary American music history.

Reid's censorious comment about the "rock and rollers" trying to "imitate their heroes' best licks" and paying their bills by "playing rubber-stamped dance music for

¹³³ Ibid, pp. 4-6.

fraternities and sororities" overlooks the utility and significance of this practice.¹³⁴ Copy bands are the vehicle by which young rock musicians learn their trade. This is how aspiring bands make a living while developing their own catalogue of songs, sounds, and styles. The fraternity and sorority circuit in Texas during the late sixties was a farm league for the major league rock stars of the future. One example serves for many: During this period Don Henley was the drummer and singer for a copy band called Felicity based in East Texas that played regional nightclubs and the frat and sorority circuit in Texas college towns. These "frat gigs" were high-paying weekend bookings that sustained bands like Felicity in their quest for a national recording contract. The party budgets in Austin's frat and sorority circuit surpassed those of other college towns and Felicity was a regular attraction in the UT market. In 1969, while playing a date in Dallas, Henley met popular recording artist Kenny Rogers who was looking for talented new groups to record, and on Rogers' invitation Felicity traveled to Los Angeles in 1970 to try their luck in the studio.¹³⁵ Although the ensuing recordings provided no major breakthroughs for the band, Henley soon hooked up with fellow singer-songwriter Glenn Frey, formed a new band and along with Bernie Leadon and Randy Meisner, and released their debut album in 1972, *The Eagles*. By supplying bands like Felicity with substantial weekend paychecks, fraternities and sororities provided an ad hoc economic platform that facilitated artist and repertoire development and career opportunities for young musicians in the Texas entertainment industry.

Reid's claim that, "Rhythm-and-blues bands played wherever they could, which was usually limited to the black east side," inadvertently minimizes the vitality and long-standing success of the east-side scene. First, the term "rhythm-and-blues," like most terms assigned to musical styles, doesn't encompass the variety of styles regularly performed in Austin's east-side clubs during their halcyon days of the 1950s and 1960s.¹³⁶ There were a number of musics performed east of IH35 during this period—

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

¹³⁵ Kenny Rogers was on tour at that time with his group, The First Edition. When Henley and the band traveled to Los Angeles to record with Rogers, they changed the name of the group from Felicity to Shiloh. Under Rogers' direction, they recorded a self-titled album that was released on Amos Records with no appreciable commercial impact.

¹³⁶ Rhythm and blues is a musical marketing term coined by the venerable popular music producer Jerry Wexler in his early career during the late 1940s. Wexler used the term to replace

popular soul and Motown hits, various gospel and traditional folk ballads—and east-side musicians were quick to differentiate between blues and "rhythm-and-blues." According to Donald "Duck" Jennings, the established trumpet player who was a regular performer in the East Austin nightclubs like Charlie's Playhouse, the IL Club, the Victory Grill, and the after-hours venue Ernie's Chicken Shack, "R&B's a little different from solid blues."¹³⁷ Jennings equates the term "R&B" with interracial bands that developed after the demise of the all-black East Austin scene in the late sixties and early 1970s. The term more commonly associated with the east side prior to the birth of progressive country is "Austin's blues and jazz scene" which included an eclectic and extremely talented group of players like pianist and disc jockey Dr. Hepcat (Albert Lavada Durst),¹³⁸ jazz keyboardist and bandleader, James Polk, pianist/singer Ernie Mae Miller, electric blues guitarist T. D. Bell, barrelhouse pianist Robert Shaw, itinerate piano man Grey Ghost, blues guitarist "Blues Boy" Hubbard, boogie-woogie blues piano stylist Erbie Bowser and many others.

Reid's contention that "rhythm and blues bands played wherever they could, which was usually limited to the black east side" implies a limited market that offered few opportunities. That was not the case. The vitality of Austin's African-American music of the period is best explained by Harold McMillian, the founder of DiverseArts, an Austin-based organization founded in 1990 to "promote and expand cultural awareness" through a series of projects that extend "a view that is multicultural and

the phrase de jour, "race music," to describe the music made by and for African Americans. Like most genre signifiers, and as argued throughout this dissertation, it's a term that is best defined through the sensibilities, tastes, and the style references of the listener. Suffice it to say that rhythm and blues, or R&B, included a number of styles and textures generally associated with an expanded orchestral rendition of the basic format of classic blues numbers that focused on a simple three-chord format in keeping with late 19th century rural folk structures. Such structural considerations are addressed in forthcoming section, "The DNA of Western Music."

¹³⁷ This quote by Jennings comes from an article by Roger Gatchet, "Whose Blues?: Race Relations and Segregation on the East Austin Blues Scene" as referenced on the DiverseArts web page www.diversearts.org/BFT/bft_about.shtml. Gatchet's article appeared as part of the Project in Interpreting the Texas Past, directed by Martha Norkunas. It was produced in the fall of 2008 for the graduate seminar, "Cultural Representations of the Past."

¹³⁸ From "The Handbook of Texas Online" under the listing: DURST, ALBERT LAVADA [DR. HEPCAT] (1913–1995). Dr. Hepcat was the first black disk jockey in Texas. Web location: www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/fdu65.html

multidisciplinary in scope" with a special focus on "programming efforts [that] are directed to the traditional music and culture of African Americans."¹³⁹

In Austin's Jim Crow past, the social segregation that relegated most African Americans to East Austin neighborhoods also spawned a community with strong cultural institutions, two colleges, commerce and a lively nightlife. In its heyday, the 11th-12th Street Corridor [sic] was indeed the home of Austin's most lively music scene. With desegregation, also came the gradual disintegration of the cultural core of Black East Austin, hence the obliteration of the East Side music scene. Unfortunately many of Austin's pioneering blues and jazz artists never found sufficient work or acknowledgement once the music scene moved west of Interstate Highway 35 (the Tracks). And, because the legacy of this creative community was rarely documented in the popular press or by scholars, histories of Austin—the Live Music Capital of the World—seldom acknowledge Austin's true community of jazz and blues pioneers.¹⁴⁰

McMillian's observation that "the legacy of this creative community [has been] rarely documented in the popular press or by scholars" cannot be overemphasized, particularly if one believes that Austin's musicologists should strive for a balanced assessment of the city's musical past. Although addressing this omission is beyond the scope of this study, the history of Austin's east-side music scene certainly deserves independent treatment.¹⁴¹ There is however one east-side development that relates directly to the business at hand. Specifically, there was a link between the east-side entertainment venues and west-side UT fraternity and sorority weekend party market and, by extension, the development of the Austin music scene. The historical context of this east-west connection, a connection that is overlooked in the creation myth, is worth mentioning.

¹³⁹ From the DiverseArts website: www.diversearts.org/ABOUT/about_da_mission.shtml, as stated in their Mission statement.

¹⁴⁰ From the DiverseArts website in explaining the "Blues Family Tree Project:" To wit: "The Austin Blues Family Tree project (ABFT) was conceived as an oral history project intended to capture a vanishing, but distinct cultural community in East Austin, Texas. Harold McMillan, a University of Texas graduate with an MA in American Civilization, recognized the need to create, as well as preserve, documentation about the lives and work of African American blues/jazz/gospel musicians in Austin. These individuals not only helped develop the unique sound of Austin blues, but also nurtured young white musicians, newly awakened to the music long familiar to segregated Texas black communities."

¹⁴¹ I would refer any interested scholars to the ongoing work of Harold McMillan and his research through DiverseArts.

Lyndon Johnson's Civil Rights Act of 1964 represented the legislative reversal of "separate but equal" defined by Plessy vs. Ferguson in 1896 that was judicially set aside by Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954. Characteristically, the decisions of the Supreme Court and the acts of Congress represent cumbersome paradigm shifts that unfolded slowly on Main Street, particularly when these mandated readjustments played out on both sides of the racial divide. Curiously, such a Main Street shift occurred in Austin during the sixties thanks to a television show entitled "Now Dig This." On Saturday mornings, a local Austin station broadcast a program that featured blues acts that were popular in Austin's east-side clubs. This caught the attention of the party-conscious fraternity and sorority contingent at UT resulting in a number of queries about hiring these bands for their weekend party events. Charlie's Playhouse was one of the most popular venues of the period, and when the west-side Greek social directors sought out these hot east-side bands, Charlie's Playhouse fielded many calls requesting the services of the east-side groups. According to "Blues Boy" Hubbard, the leader of the house band at Charlie's Playhouse, ". . . what happen was, they started calling the East Side clubs for the bands that they [saw] on TV, you know . . . Then somebody would, whoever it was, told them, 'Call Charlie's Playhouse,' you know, and they did."¹⁴² This initial connection led to a cross-town exchange whereby Blues Boy Hubbard and the Jets began playing at the frat and sorority houses and the affluent UT student's began to frequent Charlie's Playhouse. This influx from the west side was an economic boon for the club and its owners, Charlie and Ira Gilden, as prosperous Delts and Tri-Delts packed the Playhouse on weekends. According to Blues Boy Hubbard, it got "to the point where if you went to Charlie's on a Friday or Saturday, the place . . . would be like ninety-eight percent white."¹⁴³ Hubbard and his band, the Jets, shared in this newfound prosperity. They were in high demand for top-dollar parties in the West Campus fraternity and sorority houses and began accepting lucrative dates in other Texas college towns. Other popular east-side bands followed suit to benefit from the private party market while other

¹⁴² From the article, "The History of Charlie's Playhouse" by Margaret Gibson as it appeared on the DiverseArts website in the "About The Blues Family Tree Project: www.diversearts.org/BFT/articles/bft_charlies.shtml#_edn12

¹⁴³ Ibid

east-side establishments shared in the trend as "go-to" hot spots for the well-heeled UT Greek crowd.

This example suggests several noteworthy cultural observations. The shifting clientele at Charlie's Playhouse and the expansion of black bands like Blues Boy Hubbard and the Jets into the predominately white college market marks a move toward desegregation in Austin beginning in the early sixties. On many levels, this might seem a positive development in the history of race relations in Austin, but many of the Playhouse regulars felt that the "progressive" posturing of venue owners Charlie and Ira Gilden was profit-motivated and an affront to the local black community. Hubbard reported that "Charlie and Miss Ira, being businessfied [sic] people, you know, if you came to their club and you were black, and you were sitting at a table that was for five," Charlie would ask you to move to a smaller table because "he had five whites that wanted that table."¹⁴⁴ On busy weekends, many black patrons were turned away because the UT crowd had reserved the all tables and were eager to spend their money at this exciting and exotic venue. In her article, "The History of Charlie's Playhouse," Margaret Gibson offers this succinct explanation:

Tommy Wyatt, a young African American man from the East Side neighborhood, remembers the growing tensions of the situation at Charlie's Playhouse: "The thing about it was that because he had such a large clientele of UT students on Friday and Saturday nights African Americans could hardly get in the club, although it sat right in the middle of our community . . . We couldn't go into any club on the west side, but yet we couldn't go to our own clubs on the east side on Friday and Saturday night."¹⁴⁵

There's little doubt that the black-white dynamic at Charlie's Playhouse and the ensuing cross-town racial exchange represented a shift on Main Street America as Texas edged toward an integrated society. Ironically, these developments also signified the demise of the extraordinary climate of creativity that had long flourished in East Austin. Prior to the gradual integration process in Austin during the sixties, the east side of IH35 was a booming self-sufficient community. According to cultural historian Harold McMillian, during its zenith, "black East Austin had two colleges, lots of churches,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

barber shops, theatres, hotels, doctors [and] grocery stores."¹⁴⁶ McMillian equates this environment in part to the segregated nature of the city which codified the east side as "the only place [where blacks] could do business in Austin," a phenomenon that, "had its advantages culturally."¹⁴⁷ The vitality of East Austin diminished in proportion to the slow grind of desegregation in the Capital City during the sixties. As opportunities for African Americans increased on the west side, black businesses began to close and the demographics of segregated neighborhoods shifted in keeping with the transformation of the city's ethnic landscape. Charlie's Playhouse closed in 1970 "with Blues Boy Hubbard and the Jets playing out the last set."¹⁴⁸

More relevant to the early-seventies music scene in Austin however is the underlying catalyst for the scene-shaping events at Charlie's Playhouse. The racial confluence between East and West Austin was fundamentally powered by the economic wherewithal of the UT fraternities and sororities west of IH35. The buying power of these elite organizations played a noteworthy role in the desegregation of the Austin music scene beginning in the early sixties just as they provided a viable economic platform for many Texas copy-rock bands (almost exclusively white Texas rock bands) in their pursuit of national recognition and strategic success in the entertainment industry. The aspiring bands, both black and white, followed the money.

According to Reid, "Country bands played in beer taverns as waitresses circled the room with tambourines in their hands, soliciting donations for the musicians." This might have applied to certain nightclubs, but his description hardly depicts the healthy country-music market of the 1960s in Central Texas. Country bands—local, regional, and national—had been playing in Austin's commercial venues throughout this tumultuous decade earning appreciable paychecks. The Broken Spoke, established in 1964, regularly hired national attractions like Bob Wills, Ernest Tubb, Tex Ritter, and Ray Price as well as aspiring local acts that rounded out the club's weekly music format.

¹⁴⁶ From the article, "Whose Blues? Race Relations and Segregation on the East Austin Blues Scene" by Roger Gatchet as it appeared on the DiverseArts website in the "About The Blues Family Tree Project: From the article, "The History of Charlie's Playhouse" by Margaret Gibson as it appeared on the DiverseArts website in the "About The Blues Family Tree Project: www.diversearts.org/BFT/articles/bft_charlies.shtml#_edn12.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ From the article, "The History of Charlie's Playhouse" by Margaret Gibson.

The Spoke was one of many local venues that presented regional bands that catered to the traditional country crowd during this era.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, there was a large regional dance hall circuit dating back to the 19th century that catered to the two-step country crowd. Anhalt Hall (1875) built by the Germania Farmer Verein (the farmer's cooperative society), Fischer Hall (1875), Dessau Hall (1886), the Coupland Inn and Dance Hall (1886), and Club 21 (1887) are examples of going concerns that thrived on country acts during the sixties. Additionally, Willie Nelson was an attraction at several of these venerable dance halls and honky tonks like the Broken Spoke, Floores' Country Store in Helotes, Dessau Hall in northeast Austin, and Big G's in Round Rock before and during his transition back to Texas.

Reid maintains that in 1970, two developments began to change the complacent scene of the late sixties: First, a number of musicians "already battered and bruised by the major music centers began to settle in Austin," and second, the Armadillo opened that year. These two developments, the migration of "battered and bruised" musicians and the advent of the Armadillo fueled Austin's rise to national prominence. Regarding the influx of "songwriters and singers of varied experience and potential," Reid offered the following list and accompanying comments:¹⁵⁰

The younger performers had also skinned their noses on the pavement of the major music centers, and like Nelson, they came to Austin to rescue their self-respect and sanity. Michael Murphey was a factory songwriter for Screen Gems before he returned to Texas. Jerry Jeff Walker was a jail-bent drifter who took a beating in New York. Steve Fromholz was the victim of a transcontinental shift of his recording company's offices. B.W. Stevenson stalked the sidewalks of Los Angeles in search of a music businessman who would listen. Willis Alan Ramsey was turned down by James Taylor's producer. Bobby Bridger was manipulated by his Nashville recording company. Rusty Wier auditioned for talent scouts but made his living in bars.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Other popular nightclubs of the era included the Lumberyard, Big G's in Round Rock, the Silver Dollar, the Split Rail, Floores' Country Store in Helotes, and many more. There were also a number of VFW Halls, community centers, and various service organization venues that regularly hosted country dances.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 13.

The notion that these artists were seeking refuge in Austin after arduous experiences in the major music centers deserves clarification. Murphey's tenure with Screen Gems had been both professionally and financially rewarding. He enjoyed a strong reputation in the entertainment industry as a songwriter and as active player in the live-music circuit in Southern California performing with contemporaries Mike Nesmith (later of the Monkees), John McEuen (co-founder of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band), and guitar wizard and fellow songwriter Boomer Castleman. Murphey's songs had been recorded by the Monkees ("What Am I Doing Hangin' Round?" on their 1967 album *Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn & Jones Ltd.*), by country singer George Hamilton IV ("West Texas Highway," 1971), by John Denver, "Boy from the Country," and other prominent recording artists. Murphey's compositions appeared in various movies, television scores and by the time he moved to Austin in late 1971, he was wrapping up a double-album project entitled *The Ballad of Calico* with Kenny Rogers and the First Edition with material he had co-written with Los Angeles arranger and composer Larry Cansler.

In the fall of 1971 Murphey had booked a series of shows in small listening rooms in Colorado and Texas. He was accompanied by fellow Texan, bass player and songwriter, Bob Livingston, and at the onset of the tour, I joined Murphey on lead guitar. While in Austin, I introduced Murphey to Gary P. Nunn and these two exceptionally talented musicians soon developed a solid musical bond. I believe that this connection with Nunn combined with Murphey's efforts to develop his solo career contributed to his decision to move from California to Austin. Personal reasons also factored into the move. Murphey, his wife Diana and their young son, Ryan, lived in the small town of Wrightwood in the San Gabriel Mountains above San Bernardino. Wrightwood was on the San Andreas Fault, and after the 1971 San Fernando Earthquake, Murphey and family along with fellow Wrightwood resident Bob Livingston decided they would all feel more comfortable on the benign Balcones Fault in Central Texas.¹⁵²

Jerry Jeff Walker was not nursing music-business wounds sustained in New York when he relocated to Austin in the early 1970s. Any bumps or bruises he might have sustained on the folk-singing trail were assuaged by the songwriter's periodical royalty

¹⁵² From an Interview with Livingston on May 10, 2010.

checks he received in the wake of his tremendously popular song, "Mr. Bojangles." His Manhattan-based manager, Michael Brovsky, had negotiated a new and favorable recording contract with MCA Records after a seven-album run with the Vanguard and Atco labels. The new recording contract was a favorable development for Walker. The MCA affiliation guaranteed him artistic control over the recording process, a liberty that he would freely exercise in the years to come. In 1972 Walker was living in Key West, Florida, and shortly after the ink had dried on the MCA deal, he was on his way to Los Angeles to begin work on a new album. During his cross-country drive, he stopped in Austin to visit Michael Murphey and other friends. There, he befriended Murphey's back-up band that included Bob Livingston, Gary P. Nunn, Michael McGeary and me, and Murphey encouraged Walker to linger in Austin and considering using his group for the his upcoming recordings. Walker acquiesced, decided to stay and record in Austin and took Murphey up on the "loan." Several months later, Walker, the band, assorted support players and manager-producer Brovsky were huddled in an ad hoc recording studio on West 6th Street in Austin.

The recording process was quintessential Walker. Every evening the band wandered into to the "studio," Walker brewed up a large vat of Sangria wine, we'd kick around songs and arrangements, various other players floated in and out of the sessions, while Brovsky and the recording crew scrambled to get this eclectic cacophony on tape. Given the circumstances, that was no simple task. The parenthetical [?] "studio," like the project itself, was a work in progress. This proto-studio was housed in an old dry-cleaning establishment, "Rapp Cleaners," that the studio owners were in the process of remodeling this new room to expand their Odyssey Sound Studios situated next door.¹⁵³ Although the proto-studio had a state-of-the-art 16-track Ampex tape recorder, there was no recording console, and the microphones went directly into the machine.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Interestingly, Odyssey Sound Studios was the first 24-track studio in Texas and was built by Austin recordists Jay Aaron Podolnick and Steve Shields. At the time of the Walker sessions, there was a complete studio next door, but because the recording console was built into the structure of the control room, it couldn't be moved to accommodate the needs in "Rapp Cleaners" next door.

¹⁵⁴ Technically, the microphone signals didn't travel directly to the Ampex tape recorder. Low impedance studio mics require a "preamp," a preliminary amplifier that elevates the information captured by the microphone to a level capable of producing a viable electronic imprint on the oxide-coated recording tape. Such preamps are routinely built into recording consoles and are

Nonetheless, Walker thrived on the energy of the set-up with the players assembled in a large circle putting down tracks in a live-band format. The sessions were successful, there were several high-energy cuts, and Walker delivered exceptional, heartfelt performances on emotionally charged songs. Also worth mentioning is Walker's inclusion of two songs by a young songwriter, Guy Clark, "L.A. Freeway" and "Old Time Feeling." Brovsky took the tapes to New York for additional overdubs and what must have been a challenging mixing process. Walker toyed with the idea of naming the album "Live from Rapp Cleaners," but executives at MCA recognized the name recognition that Jerry Jeff "Mr. Bojangles" Walker enjoyed in songwriting and folk music circles and the extensive fan base he had built up around the country. Walker's first release on MCA was simply titled, *Jerry Jeff Walker*. If, as Reid suggested, Walker had taken "a beating in New York," he certainly wasn't feeling any pain during the recording sessions at Rapp Cleaners.

Like Murphey and Walker, Fromholz had been a regular attraction in clubs and concert halls in Texas before the progressive country scene of the 1970s. In 1969 Fromholz and Dan McCrimmon, his partner in the folk duo "Frummox," released the album *Frummox: Here to There* on the ABC Probe label. The album featured Fromholz's timeless "Texas Trilogy," arguably the best musical interpretation ever written about life in a small Texas town.¹⁵⁵ *Frummox: Here to There* included other exceptional titles that survive as essential contributions to the canon of American folk-music classics. After forty-two years the *Frummox* album is considered an essential collectable in the misty ethos of under-recognized Americana essentials. The album undoubtedly suffered from realignments in the ABC corporate structure but even as the release fell off the label's promotional priority list, Fromholz was on the cusp of a significant breakthrough in the

commonly known as "phantom power." As mentioned, there was no recording console. Brovsky therefore enlisted New York recording engineer, Steve Katz, who had developed a noise-reduction preamp system called DBX, the precursor to the now ubiquitous "Dolby" recording technology. These sophisticated audio components provided the necessary preamp function and electronically reduced extraneous ambient noise that would have otherwise been recorded on the master tapes.

¹⁵⁵ For more information and insights into the significance of Fromholz's three-song collection in Texas music history and the history of small rural communities in American culture, see: *Texas Trilogy: Life in a Small Texas Town*. Hillis, Craig D. & Jordan, Bruce F. (Photography). (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

music industry. In the summer of 1971, Stephen Stills of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young-fame recruited Fromholz as a founding member of his new band Manassas. Fromholz shared front-man honors during the group's initial international tour and benefited significantly from this exceptional exposure. During this hyper-experience in the world of high-dollar, high-drama global rock 'n' roll, a segment of the concert program was dedicated to Fromholz performing his songs in a solo setting, he was prominently featured in press releases and concert reviews, and there was talk of a "Stephen (Stills) and Steven (Fromholz) album. Fromholz's tenure as a global jet-setting rock icon however was short-lived. After the grinding summer and fall schedule with Stills and Manassas when the band was recording a new album in Miami in late 1971, Fromholz checked out of the rock 'n' roll Hilton and went home to Gold Hill in the mountains above Boulder, Colorado. There he formed his own band that played Colorado, Texas and the Southwest, and was a frequent visitor to Austin where he drew strong and consistent crowds. His popularity in the Austin market was enhanced by the success of the *Frummox* album, the buzz surrounding his adventures on the road with Stills, and of course his catalogue of first-class songs and his tremendously entertaining stage persona. Fromholz relocated to Austin in the summer of 1974. His band resided in Austin, his management company, Moon Hill, was located in Austin, he was on the verge of securing a recording contract with Capitol Records, and the majority of his lucrative performance dates were in Texas. Fromholz's return to Texas is more accurately described as a homecoming rather than respite.

B.W. Stevenson did in fact "[stalk] the sidewalks of Los Angeles looking for a music businessman who would listen," but his efforts were soon rewarded. He was signed by RCA in 1971, recorded his first album in 1972 and achieved regional success with the single, "Say What I Feel," a tune penned by his friend and fellow Dallas native, Michael Murphey, a song that described the efficacy of songwriting and setting a spontaneous flow of feelings to lyric and melody. This set the stage for subsequent releases culminating with his top-ten hit, "My Maria," released in 1973. Stevenson was tremendously popular during this period, one of the largest regional draws in Texas, and when local television producer Bill Arhos wanted to film a pilot for a PBS series called *Austin City Limits*, he tapped Stevenson. Because the pilot was a live shoot without

remixing or editing options, Arhos elected to secure a back-up act for a second evening of filming and booked Willie Nelson. Stevenson's initial pilot suffered its fair share of technical challenges commonly associated with an "opening night" in a new production facility, but the primary problem was location. Although Stevenson commanded large crowds in Austin and "My Maria" was enjoying national airplay, the local fans simply weren't familiar with KLRN's sound stage on the 6th floor of the Communications Building on the UT campus.¹⁵⁶ Consequently the first night was poorly attended and lacked the visual spark that Arhos knew was necessary for a successful television pilot. The production staff at KLRN was able to amend this shortcoming by the second evening with help from local media and an intense afternoon telephone campaign. Nelson brought his tried and true following and the second episode was well attended and became the program's official pilot. Despite the turn of events at KLRN, Stevenson maintained his powerful commercial draw in Texas and in markets around the country and enjoyed a fruitful career for years to come. More importantly, when Stevenson moved to Austin from Dallas in the early 1970s he had a lucrative recording, a history of hit releases, and a contract and a bright future with RCA Records. Reid is correct in pointing out that Stevenson had "stalked the sidewalks of Los Angeles in search of a music businessman who would listen," but that effort had paid off by 1971 and Stevenson arrived in Austin on an upswing in his recording career.

Shortly after the turn of the decade, Willis Alan Ramsey made a noteworthy debut on the national recording scene. In 1971, only two years out of high school, Ramsey hardly cut the figure of a hardened survivor of the back-alley battles in the music industry. He was however a veteran of lyric and melody and had written an exceptional catalogue of original material and like his contemporary songwriters, he was in search of a national recording deal. To that end, Ramsey sought out Leon Russell after a 1971 Austin concert, knocked on the door of his hotel room, played Russell several of his songs, and secured a deal with Russell's Shelter Records. The album, *Willis Alan Ramsey*, was released in 1972 and became a cult classic. In 1973, the popular soft-rock band, America, covered Ramsey's song, "Muskrat Candlelight," under the revised title

¹⁵⁶ During the formative years of the *Austin City Limits* program, the call letters for Austin's PBS affiliate was KLRN. It was not until 1987 that the station changed its call letters to KLRU and at that time, the San Antonio PBS affiliate adopted the call letters KLRN.

"Muskrat Love," with encouraging results and in 1976, Captain & Tennille released their version of "Muskrat Love," which peaked at #4 on the national charts. Since his national debut, Ramsey's songs have been recorded by Jimmy Buffet, Eric Clapton, Jerry Jeff Walker, Waylon Jennings, Shawn Colvin, and Jimmie Dale Gilmore. Ramsey may have been "turned down by James Taylor's producer" as reported by Reid, but he found a powerful alternative in his own back yard.

Bobby Bridger is one of many talented songwriters who have been "manipulated" by Nashville record companies. Unlike Los Angeles and New York, where executives seek out and sign a broad spectrum of talent and styles, Nashville operates on a platform of well-researched formulas that target specific demographics overseen by an entrenched coterie of corporate executives and record producers. In his insightful song about the music business in Nashville, "Late Night Neon Shadows," Steven Fromholz describes some of the nuances of trying to make music in Music City U.S.A.:

Try to put Nashville in a nutshell,
It's a hard-sell town where the dollar is the king.
When you're drunk and cold and standin' in the rain
It really doesn't matter how well you can pick and sing.
It's who you know and what you say
To the record man that's in the way of the song.
The moon is high and so am I, the stars are out
I pray they guide me home.¹⁵⁷

To the benefit of Austin and to the benefit of Bridger's career, now in its fifth decade, the stars did indeed guide Bridger to Austin in 1970. Bridger's break with Nashville's hit-formula hierarchy was not an untoward career development; it was an artistic surge forward in his pursuit of unique aesthetic agenda.

A native of Louisiana, Bobby Bridger, logged his time in Nashville in the late 1960s. He signed with Monument Records in 1967 and recorded three singles while maintaining his ties with the academic community by graduating from Northeast Louisiana University in 1968 and teaching art at West Monroe High School. In 1969 he released an album for RCA in Nashville and went on to record a final album for RCA in 1973. During this flurry of activity, Bridger continued with his "unique aesthetic

¹⁵⁷ From the song, "Late Night Neon Shadows" by Steven Fromholz, copyright 1979, Prophecy Music. The passage above is the third verse.

agenda." Since 1963 he had been researching the life and times of his great granduncle, the early 19th-century mountain man, trapper, and explorer, Jim Bridger. The move to Austin in 1970 enabled Bridger to focus on this extensive work, an effort that would encompass several major themes in the history of the American West that solidified as *A Ballad of the West*.¹⁵⁸ *A Ballad of the West* is a multimedia triad of music, verse and narrative delivered in two movements, "Seekers of the Fleece" and "Lakota." In a solo performance of *A Ballad of the West*, Bridger would sing songs, recite poetry, and tell stories with each performance style highlighting a specific aspect of *A Ballad's* historical plot. In a group or theatrical performance, those responsibilities would be allocated to various cast members. Dale Wasserman, the playwright of *Man of La Mancha* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, eloquently described Bridger's epic ballad:

A Ballad of the West is poetry to be chanted, sung, and acted. It calls to mind the great mavericks Whitman, Sandburg and Earl Robinson. The form is speechsong, written for both eye and ear. It also happens to be electrifying theater.¹⁵⁹

The first segment of this epic work, "Seekers of the Fleece," according to the American Indian historian and theologian Vine Deloria, Jr., "assumes the awesome task of bringing the diverse expressions of the mountain man era into an experiential unity by combining music and epic poetry in a drama exploring and explaining the life of his great-uncle Jim Bridger." In this effort, Bridger "probes into the feeling of adventure of the young man and the sad nostalgia of the ancient elder."¹⁶⁰ The second segment, "Lakota," presents the history of the Lakota Sioux during the Indian Wars of 1860 through 1890. In "Lakota," Bridger's lyrics "invoke the mysterious ways of the Lakota and suggest another reality which transcends and directs our lives."¹⁶¹

Bridger recorded *A Ballad of the West* in 1975 with the Lost Gonzo Band—all veteran "cosmic cowboys"—with actor Slim Pickens narrating. Over the last thirty-five years Bridger has successfully continued his historical "seeking" as a singer, songwriter, and a published author. *A Ballad of the West* was adapted to a stage play that enjoyed

¹⁵⁸ Bridger, Bobby. *A Ballad of the West*. (Austin: Augustine Press, 1993).

¹⁵⁹ Bridger, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Bridger, pp. 9-10, from the Forward by Vine Deloria, Jr.

¹⁶¹ Bridger, p. 10, from the Forward by Vine Deloria, Jr.

popular runs every summer between 1988 and 1994 at the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody, Wyoming, featuring such celebrities as Joe Sears (*Greater Tuna*), Wes Studi (*Dances with Wolves*, *Last of the Mohicans* and *Geronimo*), Austin arranger and Grammy nominee Bill Ginn, and singer-songwriter-actor Steven Fromholz. "We're going into our seventh year," Bridger said in 1994, "and we're now officially recognized as Wyoming's premier outdoor drama."¹⁶²

Reid's comment that Bridger was "manipulated by his Nashville record company" is true, but the same could be said of countless artists who sign with major labels. Large record companies don't generally sign artists to make art, they sign artists to make money, and if the Cartesian coordinates of art and money fall on the plus side of the corporate profit & loss statement, the artist will live to fight another day and record another album. Bridger did not come to Austin to heal from record business misfortunes. He came to Austin to expand his artistic parameters. Bridger knew that Austin offered an assortment of venues to play, a wide variety of musicians to play with, and an opportunity to generate a steady performance income. In Austin, Bridger maintained a comfortable lifestyle while he pursued specific writing and research projects. In regard to this singular combination of appealing economic, aesthetic and environmental aspects, Austin was unlike any other city in America. This claim will be argued at length later in this dissertation, but I'm convinced that Bridger embraced this point of view when he moved to Austin in 1970. I base this assertion on discussions with Bridger throughout our long association that began in 1972. During this early period of the Austin scene, I shared a house with Michael Murphey on Comanche Trail at Lake Travis west of Austin and Bobby Bridger had a house just down the road. Both Murphey and Bridger were avid students of the history of the American West, we commonly spent time together, and conversations between these two productive songwriters generally drifted "west." I remember the passion Bridger exhibited in presenting his leather bound volumes of meticulously hand-written prose and poetry with pages of research on Jim Bridger and the American West. His enthusiasm for the project was palpable and as the course of his career indicates, *A Ballad of the West* has been the Ur-source and centerpiece of an

¹⁶² Interview with Bobby Bridger, November, 1993.

extensive body of work that took shape on Comanche Trail on Lake Travis during the early 1970s.

In addition to bringing *A Ballad of the West* to life in a series of well-touted theatrical performances, Bridger has been a tireless advocate for developing the Austin music business into a nationally competitive, productive, artist-oriented operation. His long-standing affiliation with the Kerrville Folk Festival dating back to the festival's second season in 1973 has inured to the benefit of both parties. Bridger initiated the concept of the "Ballad Tree," a key song-sharing aspect of the folk festival whereby participants gather around the sprawling oak, put their name in the hat, and perform one of their original songs by the luck of the draw. This productive mix of professional and amateur singer-songwriters that has yielded many new songs and new writers who have contributed to the current of creativity in Kerrville and the flow of popular music in Texas. Bridger also wrote the festival's anthem, "Heal in the Wisdom," which has embodied the spirit of the festival for several generations of "Kerrverts" since its inauguration in 1979. Finally, Bridger has made notable contributions to the literary arts with his *Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill: Inventing the Wild West* (UT Press, 2002), which won the *ForeWord Magazine's* Book of the Year Golden Award in 2002. His second publication, *Bridger: An Autobiography* (UT Press, 2009) was well received, and Bridger has recently completed the second draft of the manuscript, *Seeking History's Heartsong*, scheduled for publication with UT Press. Like many creative figures who have gravitated to Austin in the last half of the 20th century, Bridger's aesthetic awareness confounded the hegemonic hierarchies of the music industry. This intrinsic friction helped energize his relocation to Austin and contributed to the creative critical mass of the Austin scene in the early 1970s.

Rusty Wier was unique among his progressive country contemporaries: He was an Austin native.¹⁶³ Wier established solid entertainment credentials during the 1960s as the drummer and singer for an exceptionally popular local band, the Lavender Hill Express. This group featured some of the founding members of the progressive country movement, notably Gary P. Nunn, Layton DePenning, and Leonard Arnold. They had

¹⁶³ Rusty Wier was born in Corpus Christi on May 3, 1944, but moved to Manchaca, a small town immediately south of Austin several days after his birth.

several regional hits on Bill Josey's Sonobeat Records and were one of the leaders of Austin's successful rock 'n' roll scene of the late 1960s that provided the foundation for the progressive country trend of following decade. As I argue in Chapter 4, the splash of the seventies had two catalytic components, the Austin rock scene in which bands like Lavender Hill played a significant role, and the influx of the singer-songwriters. Interestingly, Rusty was the lone figure who had a stake in both camps. In 1969 Rusty abandoned the drums, advanced to center stage as a solo artist, built a reputation as an exceptional showman and began developing a loyal fan base in Austin. He established an aggressive touring schedule in Texas and the surrounding states and played countless small venues building a loyal following one fan at a time. In the early 1970s he united with Lavender Hill band mate Layton DePenning and Austin guitarist John Inmon to form Rusty, Layton and John. Wier's representatives, Moon Hill Management, successfully shopped this powerful trio to Chalice Productions, an independent production company in Los Angeles. This relationship culminated in a recording contract with ABC Records and in 1974 Wier, accompanied by DePenning and Inmon, released Rusty's first solo album, *Stone, Slow, and Rugged*.

In assessing Rusty's role in the genesis of the seventies scene, Jan Reid said, "Rusty Wier auditioned for talent scouts but made his living in bars." Like other aspects of the creation myth, Reid's statement is true but would benefit from enhanced context. Rusty was "auditioning" by way of his demo tapes through the efforts of Moon Hill and secured a major label deal shortly after Reid interviewed him for *The Improbable Rise*. In the following statement, Reid expands on his original comment regarding Wier "auditioning for talent scouts:"

When things finally broke for Wier, they broke in a hurry. Shortly after I talked to him, he signed with Chalice Productions [and recorded his first album in Los Angeles], and after eight weeks in the studio, the results were surprising. Much of the material was country, but it was more of a rock album than anyone in Austin expected. Much of the credit for that went to guitarist John Inmon. He was one of the younger members of the Interchangeable Band. He wasn't as introspective a guitarist as Leonard Arnold, and he didn't strive for as much as Craig Hillis, but he was more inventive than either, and he covered more ground. Inmon 's guitar play, DePenning's tenor accompaniments, and all of that commercial rock talent

surrounding Wier's rough-edged voice resulted in a sound so wildly hybrid that it was almost disorienting.¹⁶⁴

With this account, Reid accentuates the connection between the progressive-country sound and the earlier rock scene in Austin. Many of Wier's songs had a country flavor, but his long history in rock bands was the primary influence in his recordings. In fact, many of Rusty's songs that could be called country in a classic Nashville sense were jocular cuts like "I Heard You've Been Layin' my Old Lady" with a chorus that chanted,

I hear you been layin my old lady
Times must be gettin' hard everywhere!
I heard you been layin' my old lady
I like you Joe, but wives are hard to share!

While other songs Wier wrote for future albums embraced countrified themes common to the pop-country style. In his recording of "Cheryl Doreen" he sampled typical country tropes to describe the quintessential honky tonk queen:

She's Cheryl Doreen, she's my rodeo queen
Poured in her britches, boy they're tight!
She's from Southern Oklahoma and she comes across the border,
Every other Saturday night.

These examples are not offered to denigrate the aesthetic value of the straight country motif. The emotion inherent in country classics can be as touching as that of the most sophisticated orchestral score. Scholars and music critics have accurately pointed out for decades that sincerity in lyric and delivery are fundamental aspects of the style. The practical emotional value of any particular musical work lies in heart and sensibilities of the listener and in country music there is an indelible link between artist and audience, a link that underpins Nashville's formula for the hit song. Wier's country compositions are examples of a lighter approach to classic country, an approach that was common during the period. The aforementioned examples simply suggest that the straight country format was one of several influences at play in the eclectic songwriting mix of the period. Classic country was not the principal style that fused with rock 'n' roll in the progressive country equation. Folk music, or what now more commonly falls

¹⁶⁴ Reid (2004), p. 174.

under the "singer-songwriter" banner, was the main co-catalyst in the original equation. Further, the classic country connection was as much about symbols and scene accoutrements as it was about actual musical hybrids; it often served as image-oriented window dressing rather than the melodic, harmonic and chordal structure of the songs that characterized the era. This assertion hints at several of the underlying arguments that appear throughout this study: The so-called "progressive country" period in Austin was not a musical blend of popular country music and rock 'n' roll. The term "progressive country" was a media generated term, a handy moniker that inaccurately describes the sounds emanating from the studios and stages of the period. There was undoubtedly a strong "country" influence but that influence was largely rooted in quixotic associations common to the notion of country *and* western music—the pop-country sounds of Nashville and the treasure trove of tropes associated with the romantic American West. The creation myth is steeped in references to country music and the imagery of the American West. This blend also represents the intersection of music and identity, a Cartesian connection examined in depth in Shank's *Dissonant Identities* that I address in the next chapter.

Wier's album, *Stoned, Slow and Rugged* shared a common theme with other albums released by other Austin's singer-songwriters of the era. Rusty's debut album featured the work of his songwriting contemporaries. Three of the ten selections on *Stoned, Slow and Rugged* were written by Austin songwriters—"Texas Morning," by Michael Martin Murphey, "Painted Lady," by Willis Alan Ramsey, and "Railroad Man," by John Inmon. Similarly, B.W. Stevenson's early albums featured titles from fellow Texans. "Say What I Feel," the first successful single from his 1972 RCA debut album, *B.W. Stevenson*, as well as "Texas Morning" (also recorded by Stevenson), were both Murphey compositions and "Maybe Mexico" on his second album, *Lead Free* (RCA 1972), was written by Jerry Jeff Walker. Walker tapped two tunes from Guy Clark, "That Old Time Feeling" and "L.A. Freeway" for his initial Austin-based album, *Jerry Jeff Walker* (MCA, 1972). His landmark effort, *jViva Terlingua!* (MCA, 1973), featured Clark's "Desperados Waiting for the Train," Ray Wylie Hubbard's "Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother," Michael Murphey's "Backsliders Wine," and Gary P. Nunn's "London Homesick Blues." Even Michael Murphey's debut album, *Geronimo's Cadillac* (A&M

Records, 1972), included a song I co-wrote with Murphey, "Crack Up in Las Cruces." The practice of acknowledging and embracing one's fellow songwriters was common fare during the progressive country years.

To Reid's credit, he mentions the multilevel practice of song sharing and co-writing. Through the simple act of reporting the who, what, when, and where of the songs and the various record albums, a music critic reveals this basic information and song genealogy: record albums released for public distribution by major labels routinely list the titles of the songs, the songwriter and the publishing company that controls the copyright. But the significance of this practice of "song swapping" as it applies to creative essence of the early Austin scene presents a singular opportunity to explore a facet of the progressive country phenomenon that sets it apart from other prominent commercial music scenes of the day. The "song-swapping" scene in Austin was appreciably different than the "song-swapping" scene in Nashville, New York or Los Angeles. In Nashville for example, placing songs with major record labels and high-profile recording acts was a surgical enterprise. An established Nashville publishing house like Tree International is in the business of placing their writers' songs with popular recording artists, record producers and prominent record companies. On a typical business day at Tree International the company's executives and song pluggers know who is currently in the studio recording, what producers are in the market for the right song for their artist and which acts are being signed by the major labels. In the main meeting room is a large blackboard with a schematic depicting the current state of song, studio, label and artist activity in Nashville. A typical note might read "Crystal Gayle @ Jack's Tracks - Allen Reynolds producing - United Artists label - release date, late October" or "Columbia signs southern rock group, 'Dixie Stompers' - to begin recording August - two Tree titles under consideration." Tree International exercises all opportunities to increase their share of the supply side of the song placement formula. If, for example, the staff at Tree knows that a country icon like George Jones is currently in Studio A at Columbia working on his new album on Epic Records with a high-level Nashville producer, they might send over a demo tape they recently recorded with a song or two by their new writer Guy Clark for the consideration of Jones and his producer. Tree representatives routinely mail out publishing demo tapes to producers, record labels,

artists and their managers, they periodically visit the record and production companies, or they might invite artists, producers and record executives to listen to the latest additions to their catalogue at their in-house studio on Music Row.¹⁶⁵ In Austin however, Jerry Jeff Walker might hear the same Guy Clark song during Clark's set at a popular nightclub and hangout like Castle Creek. Walker would get together with Clark after the gig (Clark might very well be staying with Walker during his Austin visit), learn the song, put his creative imprint on the arrangement, and record it for his new album. Austin's recording artists and producers didn't check their mailboxes for the latest hot tunes from an established publishing operation and there were very few formal publishers making the rounds in Austin with a briefcase full of publishing demos.¹⁶⁶ The principal forums for presenting new material were nightclubs, concerts and festivals, and pickin' sessions.

In 1985 Fromholz and I made a trip to Nashville to explore the possibilities for a new recording contract and to present some of Fromholz's newer songs to various interested parties in Music City U.S.A. Our main objective was meeting with Roger Sovine, the vice president at Tree International, who we had worked with during the Moon-Hill years in the 1970s. Sovine, a prominent figure in the Nashville hierarchy, had been very supportive of our Austin-based artist-management company, he genuinely appreciated Fromholz's skills as a songwriter and entertainer, and was a powerful ally in Nashville.¹⁶⁷ We spent several days with Sovine as Fromholz presented new material and Sovine suggested songs from the Tree catalogue that might suit Fromholz for a new recording project. To this end, we visited the in the in-house Tree recording studio where

¹⁶⁵ This is a hypothetical example. Tree International is a prominent international publishing company and of course Guy Clark is an esteemed songwriter, but this is not to imply that Jones was in main studio at Columbia or that Clark was signed to Tree. It is however a plausible example of the mechanics of the publishing game in Nashville.

¹⁶⁶ In the 1970s the only "nine to five" publishing operation I was aware of was the publishing department at Moon Hill Management. Moon Hill and their publishing operation are discussed in Chapter 7.

¹⁶⁷ As the son of country music entertainer Red Sovine, Roger has been around the music business his entire life. He began his career at Cedarwood Publishing Company in Nashville in 1965 and later joined Show-Biz Publishing and South Publishing Productions. After his first stint at BMI (1972-1979) as Assistant Vice President Writer/Publisher Relations, he joined the Welk Music Group as Vice President, Professional Services. He later became Vice President of Tree International (now Sony/ATV). He re-joined BMI in 1985 as Vice President, Writer/Publisher Relations. (From: BMI News, October 12, 2000 upon his retirement from Broadcast Music Incorporated: <http://www.bmi.com/news/entry/200109>).

Fromholz provided vocal overdubs for previously recorded publishing demos. This was a fascinating process and an excellent example of the "surgical enterprise" that typified the Nashville publishing business.

Tree International, like other world-class publishing operations in Nashville (and beyond), routinely recorded new songs by their resident writers on a multi-track format whereby the recording engineers left an open track that enabled prospective vocalists to record their version of the song on the preexisting rhythm tracks. After listening to songs and discussing which songs might be appropriate for Fromholz to sing and "make his own," we agreed on several titles that suited Fromholz's style and overdubbed the vocal performances. The result was a five-song publishing demo that Sovine shopped to the major labels in an attempt to secure Fromholz a new recording contract. Despite Sovine's sincere efforts, Fromholz didn't land a big Nashville recording contract. The songs chosen were composed by contemporary Nashville writers and reflected the fabric and feel of the country charts of the mid-1980s.¹⁶⁸ The titles of some of the top country hits of 1985 reflect that *fabric and feel*: "I'm the One Mama Warned You About" (Mickey Gilley), "Working Man" (John Conlee), "Betty's Bein' Bad" (Sawyer Brown), "You Make Me Feel Like a Man" (Ricky Skaggs), "She's Single Again" (Janie Fricke), "It's a Short Walk from Heaven to Hell" (John Schneider), "Dim Lights, Thick Smoke (and Loud Loud Music)" (Vern Gosdin), and "Between Blue Eyes and Jeans" (Conway Twitty).¹⁶⁹ Evidently, Fromholz's professional persona and the Nashville "hot picks" were not a winning combination in the local corporate boardrooms. After returning to Austin, Fromholz reflected on the experience at Tree International:

It was like "song in the box!" The only thing that was missing was the drive-through window! Things have sure changed from the early days in Austin . . . I'd bet that there were more songs [written by Texas songwriters] that were traded and recorded [as a result of] the pickin'

¹⁶⁸ The five songs that Fromholz recorded vocal tracks for are as follows: "Save That Dress" (middle-aged couple going through belongings and the husband finds a sexy dress that his now rotund wife used to wear . . . The dress was a "moo-moo!"); "May I Borrow Some Sugar from You" (man falls for the pretty neighbor in the apartment upstairs); "Heart vs. Heart" (divorce song); "I Think I Want my Rib Back!" (disgruntled male lover, angry with the entire female gender makes a Biblical reference to the creation of that gender); "Trailer in the Rain" (Loving couple reminisces about their first home, an aluminum Airstream).

¹⁶⁹ From the Billboard Top Country Singles Charts, 1985.

sessions at Darrell and Edith [Royal's] than through "Nashberg's" song factories!¹⁷⁰

The "pickin' sessions" at Coach Royal's house—or, as Royal called them, "guitar pulls"—became an Austin tradition and were representative of similar gatherings around town during the period. A typical after-the-gig gathering at the Royal's might include Willie Nelson, Steven Fromholz, Billy Joe Shaver, Alex Harvey, Larry Gatlin, and from time to time, a few guitar-wielding sidemen. The sessions ran into the early hours of the morning and Coach Royal was very serious about keeping the chatter to minimum when songwriters sang their songs. There was no regularity to these singular sub-scenes; they were impromptu affairs that depended on who was in town and who might be passing through, but the focus was clearly on the song and Royal insured that each word, each guitar phrase and nuance could be clearly heard. It was the best "listening" gig in town!

The guitar-pull format soon found its way to a national audience. Coach Royal was a regular at the early *Austin City Limits* tapings, particularly when the performers were country songwriters, and his attendance signified a conservative, "establishment" imprimatur to the proceedings at Studio 6A.¹⁷¹ In 1980 during their fifth season, *Austin City Limits* presented their first "Songwriter's Special." Program #503 featured Willie Nelson, Floyd Tillman, Hank Cochran, Red Lane, Sonny Throckmorton, Whitey Shafer,

¹⁷⁰ From my conversation with Fromholz in April 1985.

¹⁷¹ In his 1987 book, *Austin City Limits: The Story Behind Television's Most Popular Country Music Program* (Austin: University of Texas Press), Clifford Endres commented on the role that Darrell Royal played in the nascent Austin music scene. His initial comment places Coach Royal at the Armadillo World Headquarters in the early 1970s when he attended shows featuring a classic country act: "Some nights you could have seen the sainted Texas football coach, Darrell Royal, in the back of the hall—the rough equivalent of discovering John Wayne at a gathering of Hobbits." (Enders, p. 13). Enders goes on to reference Royal's role as an advocate of *Austin City Limits*: "Retired Texas Longhorns coach Darrell Royal, of whom it has been said that in Austin "not even the Pope could be more venerated," praises the *ACL's* audiences as instrumental in the success of the series." (Enders pp. 32-33.) Enders described Royal coming to the aid of the program, "not for the first time," when country music icon George Jones wouldn't leave the shelter of his tour bus to go on stage for the taping: "The legendary football coach, a long-time fan of country music, had befriended a bevy of country musicians, including Jones (not for nothing had Royal once described himself as 'Austin's biggest groupie'). Now, exercising his redoubtable skills, he managed to coax Jones out of his bus, into the studio, and finally onto the stage." (Enders, p. 33) Thanks to Royal, the taping was a success and although he graciously deferred to the enthusiasm of the *ACL* audience, it was his "redoubtable skills" that facilitated the storybook ending. Similarly, it was Royal's "redoubtable" credibility that fashioned a viable link between vested cultural interests in Austin and the burgeoning coterie of talented Texas singer-songwriters.

and Hank Thompson. All of these gentlemen were prominent country songwriters with strong Texas connections, they were all influential contemporaries of Willie Nelson, and many of these venerable tunesmiths were veterans of Coach Royal's guitar pulls. Program # 503 was the first of many subsequent *ACL* Songwriter's Specials.¹⁷²

Both song-swapping techniques—the Nashville surgical approach and the Austin grass-roots approach—generated practical results, and even though the aforementioned examples are over-simplified, they do highlight the real-world differences between the staid structures of Nashville and the laissez faire ethos of the Austin scene. The song-swapping business in Austin didn't adhere to a nine-to-five format; songs traveled between artists in Austin through a personal exchange network that was characteristic of Austin's live-music scene of the 1970s.

Austin's laissez faire ethos also applied to the live-music environment and its role in the careers of Austin transplants like Bobby Bridger, mentioned above, and many other active scene constituents. Reid's comment that "Rusty Wier auditioned for talent scouts but made his living in bars" rings true, but the bar circuit was an asset, not an indication of failure in securing a recording contract. Wier's busy booking schedule allowed him to sustain his band, keep them working while they were recording the demo tapes that

¹⁷² The Songwriter Showcases became a regular staple in the *ACL* programming lineup. Subsequent shows include: Show #609 (1981) with a repeat of the 1980 participants; Show #802 (1983), the West Texas Songwriter's Special with Townes Van Zandt, Butch Hancock, David Halley, and Jimmie Dale Gilmore; Show #804 (1983), Songwriter's Showcase with Rodney Crowell, John Prine, Billy Joe Shaver, Bill Caswell, and Keith Sykes; Show #1112 (1986), Songwriter's Special with Emmylou Harris, Rosanne Cash, Gail Davies, Lacy J. Dalton, Pam Rose, and Mary Ann Kennedy; Show #1408 (1989), Songwriter's Special with Harlan Howard, Don Schlitz, Mike Reid, Kye Fleming, and Mark Wright; Show #1410 (1989), Texas Showcase with Robert Earl Keen, Rosie Flores, Tony Perez, Jimmie Dale Gilmore; Show #1701 (1992), Songwriter's Special with Nanci Griffith, Indigo Girls, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Julie Gold; Show #1908 (1994), Songwriter's Special with Willie Nelson, Lyle Lovett, and Rodney Crowell; Show # 2202 (1997), Songwriter's Special with Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson, Kimmie Rhodes, and Billy Joe Shaver; Show #2513 (1999/2000), Lyle Lovett with special guests: Guy Clark, Robert Earl Keen, Michael Martin Murphey, Eric Taylor, Vince Bell, Steve Fromholz. This show closed out the 20th century of *ACL* songwriting shows and signified a full circle of a generation of songwriters. The show was dedicated to Lyle Lovett's double album, *Step Inside This House*, where Lovett recorded the songs of songwriters who had been influential in his career. Missing from this *ACL* taping were Willis Alan Ramsey, who was unable to attend, Walter Hyatt who died tragically in an airplane crash on May 11, 1996 at the age of 45 and Townes Van Zandt who died on January 1, 1997 at the age of 52. All of the songwriters on *Step Inside this House* except Lovett's contemporary, Robert Earl Keen, were key participants of the Austin scene of the early 1970s.

eventually landed Wier a deal with ABC. In this respect, Austin was a bush-league gold mine.¹⁷³ During the early seventies Austin was replete with music venues, ad hoc concert sites, weekend frat parties, and high-dollar private functions that provided the venture capital for start-up recording careers. Making a "living in bars" was a tactical consideration on an extended strategic path. Further, the overall cultural and economic environment of Austin was a plausible component of the career-start-up formula. Living expenses in New York or L.A. were prohibitive and there were few live-music venues in Nashville in the early seventies.¹⁷⁴ In this regard, Austin provided a workable survival environment with "cheap rent, cold beer for two bits a bottle, and ten-dollar lids."¹⁷⁵ By hosting a healthy roster of venues where an aspiring musician could earn a living wage on the path to the big time, Austin was unique among other music scenes in America.

This chapter has been an attempt to present, amend, and expand the creation myth. One of the key objectives in looking beyond the commonly accepted history is to insure that the building blocks of the scene—the individuals, the ideas, the places, the products, and the institutions—are adequately represented in the overall analysis. Only by assembling the building blocks can I effectively move toward an analysis of the song

¹⁷³ This observation comes from Merlin Littlefield, a Nashville business executive who maintained close ties with the Austin music scene during the seventies. Indeed, Littlefield was one of the catalysts in the formation of the Austin-based management company, Moon Hill, and spent considerable time in Austin in search of new acts and innovative musical trends. He maintained that Austin was the most vibrant "bush league" innovative music environments in the country. I interviewed Littlefield in 1993 during an Austin South by Southwest visit when he was the co-director of the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) in Nashville. Littlefield interview: March 23, 1993 at the Four Seasons Hotel in Austin.

¹⁷⁴ The hub of the music business in New York was Manhattan, one of the most expensive places to live in the country and Los Angeles was similarly expensive and lacked the concentration of music business concerns in a centralized location. An aspiring artist in L.A. might have a booking agent in Hollywood, a management company in Burbank, and a regular gig in Huntington Beach forty-five miles south on the Pacific Coast Highway. Curiously, there were very few live-music venues in Nashville during the early 1970s. During this period I routinely visited Nashville on recording and music business trips and was continually surprised by the lack of clubs and hangouts! There was the famed showcase room, the Exit Inn, a few Holiday Inn or hotel lounges that featured live music, a small collection of tourist-oriented music cafes, but compared to the nightlife in Austin, it was a live-music desert. Austin musicians of the era who visited Nashville would quip, "There are two things to do in Nashville: Make records or go bowling!"

¹⁷⁵ This comment in various iterations was common in observers who recalled that period. It's been credited to Eddie Wilson, a proprietor of the Armadillo, music critic John T. Davis and many other active scene participants and observers.

as the primary bonding agent for these discrete scene components. I continue with the effort to amend and expand source material by addressing positions argued in Shank's *Dissonant Identities*. His 1994 study is the first comprehensive Austin scene study since *The Improbable Rise* in 1974 and provides an opportunity to consider the progressive country era through a twenty-year retrospective lens. Although certain references to Shank channeling the creation myth appear above, the next chapter focuses on specific claims in *Dissonant Identities* and weighs their accuracy and significance in the evolving story of Austin music, now in its thirty-seventh year after the initial publication of *The Improbable Rise*.

Chapter 3

A POSTMODERN GLANCE AT THE COSMIC COWBOYS

Barry Shank earned his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1991 with a dissertation titled *Identity, Community and Postmodernity: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*.¹⁷⁶ During the mid-eighties he lived in Austin, attended the undergraduate American Studies program at UT and played guitar in clubs affiliated with Austin's burgeoning punk rock and "New Sincerity" scenes. By 1994 he had shaped his dissertation into a book, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin Texas*.¹⁷⁷ Shank's study focuses on two aspects of Austin's popular music of the 1980s. The first was punk scene, a disruptive musical performance style that began in 1978. Austin's answer to punk was fashioned after the confrontational musical styles of groups like the New York-based Ramones and their British counterparts, the Sex Pistols, and was popular in the late 1970s through the early 1980s. The principal punk venue was Raul's, a nightclub on the northwestern border of the UT campus, and the primary players were largely young university students uninterested in or weary of the progressive country music of the 1970s. During the mid-1980s a second scene coalesced around the New Sincerity bands, young musicians alarmingly concerned with the emotional authenticity of their performance and recordings.

Shank refers to *Dissonant Identities* as a "postmodern ethnography" and asserts that in writing the book he "struggled to construct a theory of identification in musical practice that is based in the poststructuralist appropriation of Lacanian psychoanalysis" to extend his two determining arguments.¹⁷⁸ As mentioned in the introduction of this work, his first argument suggests that "the performance of rock 'n' roll music in the clubs of Austin create[ed] an environment conducive to the exploration of new identities" and that such explorations and subsequent identities are the "defining characteristics[s] of *scenes*

¹⁷⁶ Shank, Barry. "Identity, Community and Postmodernity: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas. A dissertation prepared for the University of Pennsylvania, 1991. Reprinted by U.M.I. Dissertation Information Service, University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1991. Shank's dissertation was later adapted to the book published as *Dissonant Identities The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

¹⁷⁷ Shank, Barry. *Dissonant Identities The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

¹⁷⁸ Shank, p. x.

in general as well as their most important cultural function."¹⁷⁹ The italics are the author's, and his perceptive connection between music venues and the construction of new identities is a topic that will be revisited through the course of this analysis. Shank's second argument links the history of making music in Austin with a collective desire on the part of those involved in the scene to realize a degree of recognition through the practice of their reshaped musical identities, or, as Shank frames it, "to affirm the value of that practice in the complexly structured late-capitalist marketplace."¹⁸⁰ He goes on to explain:

My second argument in this book is related to the historical context of the Austin scene. I argue that a major transformation has taken place in the organization of music-making in Austin. During the mid-1980s, the production of popular music in Austin became more closely linked with the requirements and values of the national recording industries. This resulted in a shift not only in the economic organization of the city's rock'n'roll scene, but also in the musical and cultural aesthetics of that scene and, therefore, in the subjective qualities of any identities it might produce.¹⁸¹

Shank's dual mission—constructing a theory of identification in musical practice and arguing that a major transformation took place in the organization of music-making in Austin in the post-progressive-country decade—provide the framework for his "postmodern ethnography" and his analysis of the rock scene in Austin during the 1980s. In this effort, he turns his ethnographic tools on the previous decade and presents certain findings that I find somewhat perplexing. My observations as a participant observer during that period are notably removed from many of Shank's observations and conclusions. My "perplexity" is not rooted in a "this-happened-and-then-that-happened" disagreement regarding people, places and events. I appreciate that "facts" can be moving targets in any ethnographic or historical account. My perplexity lies in what I perceive to be the author's assessment of fundamental scene causalities: What were the personal, aesthetic, and cultural forces that powered the activities of the primary participants of the 1970s scene? What were their artistic Ur-sources; what charged their

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. x. The italics are the author's.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. x.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. x.

creative batteries; and by extension, what do such creative currents have to do with the larger questions of creating art in "individual" or "scene" settings? What are the durable impressions, products, or institutions that survive a specific scene that live on to affect the cultural evolution of others? What are the pragmatic results of a scene? Before addressing these questions, it's necessary to weigh Shank's analysis against the popular history of record.

Shank mentions that his thesis is linked to "the historical context of the Austin scene" and that context looks backs to the popular trope of the American cowboy that has been addressed by many other scholars. In his second chapter, "Constructing the Musicalized Performance of Texan Identity," he establishes the mythological cowboy—"the image of the cowboy as an independent entrepreneur, a strong masculine hero freely participating in the creation of Texas Society"—as the defining metaphor in the lifeline of Texan aesthetic creativity:¹⁸²

In its most elaborated narratives, the popular history of music-making in Austin looks beyond the disruption of tradition at Raul's, back through the cosmic cowboys performing a reconstructed tradition at the Armadillo, back through the psychedelic fires stoked at the Vulcan, back beyond even the self-conscious revival of folksinging at Threadgill's and traces its powerful articulation of performed song and performed identity to the folkloristic construction of the singing cowboy.¹⁸³

Although the image of the romantic cowboy is widespread in the public imagination and commonly surfaces in scholarly treatments of Texas music history, I believe it is overstated and over-applied to the Austin scene of the 1970s and offer various arguments to support this position throughout this study. More significant at this point, though, is Shank's reference to reaching back to the "folkloristic construction of the singing cowboy." His "folkloristic construction" offers a reverse time line that maintains that the "cosmic cowboys" at "the Armadillo," the "psychedelic fires" at "the Vulcan," and the "revival of folksinging at Threadgill's" are all determining factors in the evolution of Austin music-making. These references draw directly from Reid's historical schematic, specifically his triumvirate of essential venues. Shank continues to reference

¹⁸² Ibid, pp. 20-21.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 20.

The Improbable Rise in his third chapter, "Desperados Waiting for a Train: The Development of Progressive Country Music," in his analysis of the Austin scene in the 1970s. The chapter begins with the Texas Legislature's reaction to the national repeal of prohibition in 1933, Kenneth Threadgill's purchase of a beer and wine license, the proprietor's affection for Jimmie Rodgers and country music, and the bar's subsequent evolution into a blue-collar music venue on the outskirts of town. The story moves forward to the late fifties when graduate students from the University of Texas like country music scholar Bill Malone and traditional folk music enthusiast and academic Stan Alexander "discovered the pleasures of the low-brow" by joining regulars like country blues player Bill Neely and fiddler Cotton Collins at Threadgill's.¹⁸⁴ Shortly thereafter in 1960, Roger Abrahams, a new professor at the UT English Department and accomplished folksinger, joined Malone and Alexander in their working-man's music adventures. As Shank reports, Abrahams became the faculty sponsor of folk music club that met at the Student Union and enticed undergraduate students to visit the festive atmosphere at Threadgill's where patrons swapped songs and cross-cultural sympathies:

By reputation, the Wednesday night gatherings at Threadgill's were dominated by bluegrass music. As the most accomplished performer of this genre among the undergraduates, Lanny Wiggins was the first of this group to venture out to Threadgill's. But he was quickly followed by other members of his band, the Waller Creek Boys (Powell St. John and Janis Joplin) and then John Clay and Tary Owens. Eventually these younger student musicians became part of the regular performers at Threadgill's, joining Bill Neely, Cotton Collins, Shorty Ziegler, and the graduate students.¹⁸⁵

Having established Threadgill's role in the timeline, Shank lists other music venues that served as scene incubators during the mid- to late-1960s. He cites examples like the 11th Door, the "first explicitly commercial venue for folksinging in town," the Chequered Flag, founded by the future Kerrville Folk Festival impresario, Rod Kennedy, the I.L. Club, a black east-side establishment that bravely hosted the young rock band, Conqueroo, and the Jade Room, home to local copy-rock bands grooming their original-

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 39.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 41.

song repertoire.¹⁸⁶ He then moves on to the founding of the Vulcan in October of 1967 and mentions that the concert hall established a unique identity beyond the format usually incorporated by live music venues of the era:

The home for the freaks made no attempt to obtain a liquor license. Rather than set itself up as another rock'n'roll club, the Vulcan tried to establish itself as an alternative "community center," holding silent film festivals and bake sales in addition to hosting music performances. For a short while, the Vulcan provided a space for rock'n'roll performance that was distanced from the honk-tonk economy.¹⁸⁷

This observation foreshadows the format that would soon define the entertainment and cultural mission at the Armadillo, the next major stop on Shank's historical path. After recounting the demise of the Vulcan and pointing out that "the regular business community would avoid entering into economic relations with the Vulcan," thus rendering conventional advertising sources like the *Austin American-Statesman* and regional radio stations out of reach, he focuses on the rise of the Armadillo.¹⁸⁸ Fueled by Eddie Wilson's unique combination of swagger and tenacity combined with the availability of an abandoned 30,000 square-foot armory just across the Colorado River from the Vulcan, Armadillo World Headquarters opened its doors in the summer of 1970 underwritten largely by funds from Shiva's Headband's signing advance from Capitol Records.

Shank continues with an informative account of the early Armadillo years, the important role played by KOKE FM radio with their introduction of the term "progressive country" and then turns to the event that reigns as the accepted apex of the

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 50. Shank often refers to the "honky-tonk" economy. By this term, he's referring to the nightclub environment in Austin of the seventies that hosted not only country bands, but bands of all stripes including the so-called progressive-country bands, rock and other bands that derived a viable source of performance income through this collection of venues.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, pp. 50-51. During the tenure of the Vulcan, established media sources like the local radio stations, the *Austin American Statesman*, and related print publications would not carry the club's advertisements. This spurred an alternative form of local advertising that had worked successfully on the West Coast, particularly in the nightclub and concert scene in San Francisco, specifically, poster art. The infusion of this medium into the Austin music milieu would have a profound effect on the fabric of the Austin aesthetic scene for decades to come. From this advertising paradigm shift came some of Austin's great graphic artists like Jim Franklin, Danny Garrett, Guy Juke, Kerry Awn, Bill Narum, Micael Priest, and other tremendously creative contributors.

cross-generational, cross-cultural confluence that signified "progressive country" and the early Austin scene: Willie Nelson's performance on August 12, 1972 at the Armadillo. After presenting an extended quote from Reid that described Nelson's show, Shank offers his interpretation of the significance of Nelson's performance (and continuing performances) at the Armadillo:

Nelson's shows at the Armadillo contained and resolved through musical performance all the contradictions that were conjured up by the concept of progressive country music. His band featured the singing pedal steel guitar and the thump-thump rhythm section that signified country music. Yet his appearance and his outspoken fondness for nontraditional intoxicants appealed to younger fans who had previously thought of country music as entertainment for rural squares. This constellation of contradictory cultural signifiers was transformed into a synthetic resolution by means of Nelson's ability to perform "sincerity" for every group in his audience. Through his ability to seemingly make personal contact with every individual who watched him perform, Nelson could embody the traditionally masculine center of moral authority respoken for a new audience of country and western music fans in a reconstructed post-hippie honky tonk community. The new Anglo-Texan cowboy had long hair and smoked marijuana, but he was still recognizably the same good old boy who was admired for his ability to meld his own sincere desires with those of the group and then transform those desires into profit.¹⁸⁹

This observation encapsulates Shank's two basic arguments as stated in the preface to *Dissonant Identities*, specifically, that music-making in Austin "is characterized by the productive contestation between these two forces: the fierce desire to remake oneself through musical practice, and the equally powerful struggle to affirm the value of that practice in the complexly structured late-capitalist marketplace."¹⁹⁰ In other words, reinvent yourself and market the package. Shank's position of reinvention as a component for career advancement accentuates Reid's original position that Nelson's Armadillo performance was the signifying public act that unified the disparate mores of rednecks and hippies in Austin. Indeed, the format and substance of Shank's chapter "Development of Progressive Country Music" draws significantly from Reid's arguments in the *Improbable Rise*. Shank expands on Reid's original by introducing new people and places and presents valuable insights from interviews he conducted with key participants

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, pp. 59-60.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. x.

of the early 1970s scene.¹⁹¹ I believe that Shank's account is the most comprehensive and accurate of the "post-Reid" renditions.¹⁹² Still, Shank essentially frames his narrative on Reid's basic format by referencing the sacred venue triumvirate of Threadgill's, the Vulcan, and the Armadillo and by situating Nelson as the public mediator between generations and genres and as the de facto messiah of a new cultural movement.

As suggested above, Shank's expansion on the creation myth and his introduction of additional information and new players into the popular 1970's storyline is helpful, but his examination of this period through his postmodern ethnographic lens renders key components of the era culturally impotent and insignificant. The author's initial argument as it applies to the 1970s invests in the idea that the progressive-country scene was an anti-modernist movement rooted in resistance to hegemonic social structure and that its constituents were driven by the "desire to remake [themselves] through musical practice."¹⁹³ Shank maintains that this was accomplished through "Constructing the Musicalized Performance of Texan Identity," or as stated more simply by long-time Austin drummer, singer, and scene historian Tommy Taylor, "putting on a cowboy hat to make a living."¹⁹⁴ The efficacy of "constructing performance identities" is an essential tenet of Shank's scene analysis and the "defining characteristic of *scenes* in general as

¹⁹¹ Shank interviewed and corresponded with a number of important figures: Tary Owens, a musician who initially appeared on the scene during the Threadgill's years and moved on to a successful career as a folklorist and indigenous music collector in the vein of John and Allen Lomax; Roger Abrahams, UT English Professor, folksinger and scholar; Bill Malone, country music musician, scholar, and author of *Country Music U.S.A.*; and Ed Guinn, musician, co-founder of the rock group, Conqueroo, and an early African American on the scene who was the first black man to gain entrance into the Longhorn Band. These are valuable sources that expand Reid's original account.

¹⁹² Shank's account is a marked improvement in expanding the creation myth, but Jason Mellard's dissertation, *Cosmic Cowboys, Armadillos, and Outlaws: The Cultural Politics of Texan Identity in the 1970s*, undoubtedly provides the best history and significance of the Armadillo in the evolution of Austin music.

¹⁹³ Shank, p. x.

¹⁹⁴ The phrase, "Constructing the Musicalized Performance of Texan Identity," is the name for Chapter Two of Shank's *Dissonant Identities*. The quote by Tommy Taylor comes from my discussion with Taylor in April 2001. We were discussing the late-1960s era in Austin when many of the so-called "Cosmic Cowboys" were engaged in playing in regional rock bands. Taylor maintains that many such players like Todd Potter, Leonard Arnold, Layton DePenning, John Inmon and Gary P. Nunn were all rockers at heart and that Gary P. Nunn had grabbed a cowboy hat during the progressive country years to appeal to the popular market of the day. Taylor's point underscores the sartorial side of constructed cowboy identity.

well as their most important cultural function."¹⁹⁵ As suggested in Chapter 1, even though scenes can facilitate temporal identity mills, the larger significance of music scenes often rests in their ability to affect aesthetic innovations and musical trends and their ability to generate enduring cultural products that play pragmatic roles in larger cultural settings. The immediate issue regarding Shank's postmodern ethnographic lens focused on the 1970s however, is rooted in his second argument regarding the "major transformation in the organization of music-making in Austin [during the 1980s]." What was this major transformation and what did it change? To address this dual question and to effectively compare the two decades, it's necessary to sketch Shank's assessment of music-making in Austin during the 1980s. In framing his assessment, the author divides the decade into two parts—the early years when the punk scene was popular followed by the period when the New Sincerity bands dominated the stage in his analysis. There is little doubt that the punk scene in Austin that matured in the early-1980s stands in sharp contrast to "the organization of music-making in Austin" during the previous decade. But was the punk scene a trans-Austin phenomenon? Was it a ubiquitous signifier of the creative process of making music in the Capitol City? Was it the main "rock" game in town? In considering this question, it's helpful to explore the "headquarters of Austin Punk." Contemporary sources agree that the impetus for this shift in Austin music-making revolves around the activities of a single nightclub, Raul's, in the late 1970s.

In late 1977 three aspiring young female rock musicians teamed up with Jesse Sublett, a talented Austin player with a strong local pedigree, to form their hard-edged punk band, the Violators.¹⁹⁶ At that time, the progressive country scene still resonated in performance venues around town and the new group was having a hard time finding an entrance-level gig. In their search, they approached a Tejano bar on "The Drag" on the northwestern border of the UT campus. Raul's routinely reserved one night a week for non-Latin formats and the owners decided to give the young group an opportunity. The Violators along with the Skunks, Sublett's other band, played Raul's in February 1978 to

¹⁹⁵ Shank, p. x. The italics in this sentence are the author's.

¹⁹⁶ Jesse Sublett is a talented musician and writer who was instrumental in kick-starting the punk scene in Austin. At the time he was working as a quasi-mentor for the younger "Violator" musicians, he started another punk group, the Skunks, that would become a significant force during the punk years. The Skunks and the Violators were the first groups to perform at Raul's.

a large, enthusiastic audience, beer sales were strong, the club owners were impressed, and a new sub-scene was born. It was later that year on September 19 that the Raul's scene captured the attention of a larger audience. When a new punk band, the Huns, played the club, a defining moment in Austin punk history unfolded: A uniformed police officer arrived responding to a noise complaint (allegedly made by two undercover officers at the club), a riot erupted given a strong degree of encouragement from the stage, and a member of the audience snapped an image of the bare-chested lead singer kissing the police officer as he was being arrested . . . It was a timeless moment in punk theater, it was reported in local and national sources, Raul's clientele grew appreciably, and the one-time Tejano joint became *the* punk-rock venue in town as the incident echoed through the performance halls of punkdom across the country.

Shank argues that "punk rock opened a new gash on the smooth surface of the dominant power bloc of Texas" a fresh wound that essentially set aside the "cross-generational hegemony that had been hailed as the great achievement of the progressive country scene in Austin during the early and middle seventies."¹⁹⁷ In other words, the punk rock message wasn't concerned with making a stand against the "establishment," the message that unified defiance during the countercultural years and (according to Shank) informed the lyrical themes valued by the cosmic cowboys. The punks weren't interested in generations or genres "getting along." They wanted their piece of the socio-economic pie and weren't interested in standing in line. Or, as Shank reports, the punk scene, as exemplified by the Huns, "brought to the surface the underlying tensions in the Austin music scene—between international music styles and local traditions, between that component of the local population interested in alternative cultures and alternative politics, and the group more interested in stability and order in maintaining a profitable way of life."¹⁹⁸ Although the defining incident at Raul's shook up the punk element of the Austin scene and garnered national attention, the Austin reign of the punks would be brief. Soon, a new rock 'n' roll derivative coalesced around the "New Sincerity" phenomenon in 1985.

¹⁹⁷ Shank, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

In considering the rise of these bands, the same questions above about the punk scene are helpful in gauging this new scene's position in "the organization of music-making in Austin." Specifically, was the scene a trans-Austin phenomenon? Was it a ubiquitous signifier of the creative process of making music in the Capital City? Was it the main rock 'n' roll game in town? As with the punk scene, I would say no and submit that the New Sincerity movement and the punk scene it eclipsed were two of several notable music sub-scenes that operated successfully in Austin during the 1980s. There were several highly prolific scenes at play in Austin during this period. Christopher Cross for example, an Austin-based entertainer managed by Tim Neece, a fifteen-year veteran of the Austin music business community, swept the Grammy Awards in 1981 with five first-place showings and was awarded a Golden Globe Award and an Oscar that same year. Cross's success was the culmination of an extended struggle of a pop-oriented rock band making their way during the progressive-country years, playing many of the same venues frequented by the Cosmic Cowboys, while Cross was continually writing and refining his song catalogue to facilitate what manager Neece calls "the ten-year overnight success."¹⁹⁹ It's worth noting that Cross, who never "put on a cowboy hat to make a living," was an accomplished songwriter in the vein of the prominent songsmiths of the 1970s and his back-up band, much like the musicians who accompanied the progressive country acts, worked diligently to bring Cross's exceptional compositions to commercial fruition.²⁰⁰ To be sure, the rhythm section of Cross's band, Andy Salmon on bass and Tommy Taylor on drums (mentioned above), continue as prominent operatives in the Austin music scene during the second decade of the 21st century. The landmark accomplishments of Christopher Cross, as well as the accomplishments of other 1970s' era Austin recording artists that are addressed throughout this study, seem to contradict Shank's claim that, "During the mid-1980s, the production of popular music in Austin became more closely linked with the requirements and values of the national recording

¹⁹⁹ Neece and I have been long-time associates and we've had many discussions about Christopher Cross during the progressive-country years and his quip, "the overnight ten-year success," has surfaced in these exchanges.

²⁰⁰ Future hits that Cross and the band were shaping during this period include "Ride Like the Wind" (1980, #2 on the U.S. Pop Charts), "Sailing" (1980, #1 on the U.S. Pop Charts), "Never Be the Same" (1980, #15 on the U.S. Pop Charts), and "Say You'll Be Mine" (1980, #20 on the U.S. Pop Charts). In 1981 Cross joined Burt Bacharach to pen "Arthur's Theme (Best That You Can Do)" (1981, #1 on the U.S. Pop Charts).

industries."²⁰¹ Evidently Cross, Nelson, Walker, Murphey, Stevenson, Fromholz, Clark, Ramsey and others of the period had some workable knowledge of the "requirements and values of the national recording industries." By the time the New Sincerity bands had registered a plausible blip on the national media radar, the Austin blues scene was in full swing with the Fabulous Thunderbirds landing several national hits,²⁰² Stevie Ray Vaughan had become an internationally acknowledged blues guitar stylist of exceptional ability, and local acts like Angela Streheli, Lou Ann Barton, and the venerable W.C. Clark, mentor to various young blues players, developed dedicated regional followings. Austin native Eric Johnson was well on his way in establishing his global reputation as one of the most innovative practitioners of the electric guitar in the history of the instrument.²⁰³ Countless copy-rock bands were busy honing their skills and working on original material while making a living in Austin's fraternity and sorority houses; innovative cross-genre acts like Beto and the Fairlanes blended the sounds of Latin America and the Caribbean Islands into a powerful and popular hybrid; Austin jazz players expanded their niche featuring stunning soloists like trombonist Jon Blondell and saxophone master Tomás Ramirez; and Central Texas Tejano musicians were pushing the boundaries of established formats like Orchestra, Mariachi, and Conjunto in an innovative fusion depicted by acts like Little Joe y la Familia, Ruben Ramos, Esteban "Steve" Jordan, and Flaco Jimenez. In sum, punk and the New Sincerity bands were fellow travelers in a vibrant Austin scene that encompassed many sub-scenes and creative

²⁰¹ Shank, p. x. It's difficult for this author to imagine a closer link to "the requirements and values of the national recording industries" than Cross's five Grammys, a Golden Globe and an Oscar. Additionally, artists like Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker, both selling millions of recordings during the 1970s, were *more* than in-sync with national recording industries; they were in fact redefining the industry's role in the careers of dedicated singer-songwriters. A cursory review of Willie Nelson's discography during the 1970s reveals over 25-million studio albums sold. This doesn't even include singles or live albums.

²⁰² In the 1980s the Thunderbirds had the following national hits: "Tuff Enuff" (1986); "Wrap It Up" (1986); "How Do You Spell Love" (1987); and "Powerful Stuff" (1989).

²⁰³ Eric Johnson's impact on the world of modern electric guitar performance is unprecedented. He is regarded as one of the greatest living technicians of the instrument. *Guitar Player Magazine* has called Johnson "one of the most respected guitarists on the planet" His innate skills and technical proficiency have been praised by Eric Clapton, Carlos Santana, Billy Gibbons, Johnny Winter, B.B. King, Joe Satriani, Larry Carlton, and Stevie Ray Vaughan. His 1990 album release, *Ah Via Musicom* that featured the single "Cliffs of Dover," earned Johnson a Grammy Award in 1991 for Best Rock Instrumental Performance.

movements. Nonetheless, the New Sincerity bands left a footprint in the course of Austin music history and it's important to consider Shank's assessment of this new style and its relevance to Austin music history. I now turn to Shank's account of the New Sincerity scene and the analytical methods he applies to that account.

Shank invests a great deal in the idea of sincerity, an idea he describes in two specific contexts. The first notion of sincerity is rooted in the writing and performance of country music. In defining this aspect of the word, he references one of the great progenitors of the genre, Hank Williams, by way of the country music scholar, Bill Malone:

Williams sang with the quality that has characterized every great hillbilly singer: utter sincerity. He "lived" the songs he sang — he could communicate his feelings to the listener to make each person feel as if the song were being sung directly to him or her. On one occasion when asked to explain the success of country music, Williams replied: "It can be explained in just one word: sincerity. When a hillbilly sings a crazy song, he feels crazy. When he sings, 'I Laid My Mother Away,' he sees her a-laying right there in the coffin. He sings more sincere than most entertainers because the hillbilly was raised rougher than most entertainers. You got to know a lot about hard work. You got to have smelt a lot of mule manure before you can sing like a hillbilly. The people who has been raised something like the way the hillbilly has knows what he is singing about and appreciates it."²⁰⁴

This statement outlines the seminal essence of sincerity as Shank incorporates the term. This is the sincerity that Shank attaches to the convincing, connecting style of Willie Nelson in concert, or as the author describes, "Nelson's ability to perform 'sincerity' for every group in his audience."²⁰⁵ Shank then introduces an enhanced interpretation of sincerity, specifically, "postmodern sincerity" as it applies to the creation and performance of progressive country music in the 1970s as well as the New Sincerity music of the following decade:

I argue that the cultural function to which local musical performance is put (that is, the construction of identity and community) results in a musical

²⁰⁴ Malone, Bill. *Country Music U.S.A.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991). Malone notes that he's taken the quotes from Hank Williams from the following source: Quoted in Rufus Jarman, "Country Music Goes t Town," *Nation's Business* 41 (February 1953): 51.

²⁰⁵ Shank, p. 59.

aesthetic organized around a postmodern concept of sincerity. Sincerity becomes a value that can only be signified through an evident resistance of the disciplinary constraints of the dominant culture.²⁰⁶

The term "sincerity" used to describe the group of alternative rock bands from roughly 1985 to 1990, is set in opposition to hegemonic social structures unlike the "sincerity" of Hank Williams, which didn't suggest such opposition.

The term "New Sincerity" had a curious genesis. It was the product of a casual conversation between Jesse Sublett, previously identified as a prominent figure in the punk scene, and local music critic Margaret Moser. Although the specific language of the exchange differs depending on the source, Sublett coined the phrase "New Sincerity" in critiquing the developing style in the aftermath of the punk scene. Moser used the term in print and it became the common catch phrase for the new bands. Contemporary usage suggested the idea that the songs and the performances were a product of true emotion, genuine feelings with a link to authenticity and humanness in representing the subject at hand. Shank described New Sincerity as a reaction against the Austin punk genre and its aggressive performance format. Punk, in turn, was a reaction against the progressive country styles.²⁰⁷ Or, as Shank points out, "Punk in Austin directly attacked this specifically nostalgic form of sincerity as groups like the Huns and the Reversible Cords layered their performances with an ironic negation designed to disrupt and dismantle local traditions of musical communication."²⁰⁸ The New Sincerity bands and the progressive country artists therefore, share a common link of "performing sincerity." Austin punk progenitor, Jesse Sublett, however, questioned the "sincerity" of the New Sincerity bands. According to Shank,

In [Sublett's] eyes, [the acts] were flaunting their claim to an absence of artifice, championing "content" over "style" by their manner of not changing out their daily clothing to perform . . . by their sloppy,

²⁰⁶ Shank, pp. xiii-xiv.

²⁰⁷ I believe that most musicologists would consider that these two styles, punk and new sincerity, are more than simply a reaction against previous styles: Each had their singular defining musical characteristics and were influenced by larger, international trends in music-making. But I agree with Shank's assessment that both of these styles were set in a sociological and performance setting in opposition to "the last 'big thing.'"

²⁰⁸ Shank, p. 147.

unprofessional performances, and by their attempts to deconstruct the distinction between the musicians onstage and the fans in the audience.²⁰⁹

Sublett questioned the purity of this so-called "sincerity" because these bands were not free from "outside influence or adulteration" and because "no popular music is free from artifice."²¹⁰ Sublett—at least according to Shank—felt that the groups who echoed the "sincere" essence of the seventies and by extension, the sincerity-based styles of classic country performers—Shank's "nostalgic form of sincerity"—were clearly engaged in commercial artifices and that signified a "purity" sellout. Frankly, I find both Shank and Sublett's positions insightful: Punk, as it was practiced in Austin, was an explosive exposé of pop-rock theater where music and youthful attitudes served as stage props and like-minded audience members rounded out a cast of "performance purists." New Sincerity involved an ascending generation of musicians (rather than shock-rock proto-theatians) who embraced their brand of "heart-felt" musical expression as an avenue for professional success in the music industry. The True Believers that featured Alejandro Escovedo, his younger brother Javier, and fellow guitarist John Dee Graham, exemplified the New Sincerity movement. Escovedo and company wrote and presented emotionally based compositions, they adopted unadulterated music styles void of the smoke & mirror approach that typified other rock styles, they interacted with their audience, and *genuinely* "worked" the scene while maintaining a keen eye on their potential professional prospects. By and large, this is the nature of the music business—the ongoing challenge to find a graceful balance between art and artifice. This search for the essence of sincerity is one of many examples that illustrate styles of cultural analyses that over-emphasize the pedantic at the expense of more significant and determining aesthetic and musical considerations. My experience in the music industry suggests that everyone strives for his or her own brand of sincerity. Sincerity might manifest in Hank William's hillbilly singing about his momma "a-laying right there in the coffin" or might shine through in the rock-theater melee as the Hun's lead singer kissed the cop while being handcuffed at Raul's. At bottom, sincerity is a process—there must be a sincere-*or* and a sincere-*ee*—and that process or exchange must evoke an emotional response in or

²⁰⁹ Shank, pp. 148-149.

²¹⁰ Shank, p. 147.

between the individuals. Sincerity therefore doesn't blossom in a vacuum and ultimately, sincerity and its practical results rest in the heart of the individual.

The purpose of sorting through definitions and examining terms and context, is an attempt to better understand the efficacy and utility of Shank's postmodern ethnographic techniques. Although *Dissonant Identities* focused on the relationship of scene and identity, it might have been helpful to focus more on musical structure and how musical products operate in a social dynamic rather than laboring on the inner-cranial causality of a bunch of young adults playing very hard at being young adults.²¹¹ Even so, I believe that there were more parallels between the events and environment of the New Sincerity scene and the progressive country scene than Shank's analysis illustrates. Jason Mellard eloquently makes this point in dissertation:

Barry Shank was a college student in Austin in the 1980s, and his *Dissonant Identities* aligns itself with that decade's musical subcultures. He skillfully narrates the progressive country story I focus upon but treats it as an account of what Shank's generation of musicians rebelled against. I argue, in contrast, that the Armadillo World Headquarters and Willie Nelson made Shank's privileged subjects—the "New Sincerity" scene, the True Believers, Raul's, the Reivers—possible. If Shank were to turn the same sharp interdisciplinary tools he reserves for punk on progressive country, he would recognize how the early 1970s musical performances enabled and foreshadowed the future Austin scenes. The Armadillo World Headquarters, too, was driven by the do-it-yourself ethos the punks held so dear, and, indeed, it was a DIY project with grander ambitions and a more secure legacy than the compelling but somewhat obscure post-punk movement of New Sincerity.²¹²

In keeping with Mellard's commentary, not only was the Armadillo an exceptional do-it-yourself-ad hoc cultural experiment "with grander ambitions and a more secure legacy," the entire early-seventies scene was similarly structured, and, I would argue, the ultimate

²¹¹ In the late 1970s Louis Black, who went on to co-found the *Austin Chronicle* with fellow graduate film studies student, Nick Barbaro, was primarily listening to progressive country music when he gradually edged into an appreciation of punk music through the tutelage of several new music aficionados at Inner Sanctum, Austin's hip retail record store. In an interview with Shank on September 17, 1990, Black said, "I suddenly had this revelation, you know, you go through these revelations, when you realize that music didn't have to be that mature." (Shank, p. 97.) This observation strikes me as a confirmation of the idea punk music was, at least to some degree, "young adults playing very hard at being young adults."

²¹² Mellard. pp. 27-28.

do-it-yourself adventure, then and now, was the composition of enduring, popular songs. Because Shank's focus does not accommodate songs and by extension other durable cultural products, his postmodern ethnographic approach has limited utility in highlighting many of the vital causal components of the progressive country era. By overlooking, omitting, and sometimes distorting various building blocks of the earlier scene, subsequent scene observers are left with an incomplete history of the period and its influence on the evolution of Austin music beyond the 1970s. This implies another potential inquiry: Inasmuch as Shank drew liberally from the creation myth in developing his 1970s storyline, could this myth be a contributing factor to the shortcomings in the treatment of the progressive-country years as presented in *Dissonant Identities*? Also worth considering, has the creation myth become so ingrained in the history of Austin's early scene that subsequent analyses have been compromised? In the remaining pages of this chapter, I will point out various claims made by Shank and I will offer counterclaims and explain their significance to the period under study and to the study of music scenes in general.

Identifying Dissonant Claims and Offering Counterclaims

In his ethnography "about music-making in Austin," Shank reiterates many of the historical perspectives and themes originally presented in Reid's 1974 *The Improbable Rise*.²¹³ As I've tried to argue thus far, the creation myth is fine as far as it goes, but there were many other contributing factors regarding the debut and durability of Austin's musical creativity and contribution to national and international popular music discourse. Shank's well-trained ethnographic eye introduced new people, players and places, and the history of record is well served through these efforts. But beyond these additions and beyond referencing Reid's seminal arguments about the sacred triumvirate of venues and Willie Nelson's catalytic role in the scene's genesis, Shank makes claims about the progressive country scene that, as I mentioned in the opening pages of this chapter, are "notably removed" from my "observations as a participant observer" during the evolution of the Austin scene. Further, I believe that several of Shank's tenets regarding the mechanics and the motivations behind music-making in Austin during the 1980s don't

²¹³ Shank, p. xii.

transfer well when applied to the progressive country years. I complete this chapter by highlighting specific "dissonant" claims made by Shank and offer counterclaims that are more harmonious with my recollections and research of the period under review. In addition to these counterclaims, I offer a brief analysis of several of the tenets that provide the theoretical structure of Shank's postmodern ethnography.

My initial submission in this effort addresses Shank's decision to forego a detailed appraisal of the roles played by the so-called "stars" in the evolution of the Austin scene. In describing the parameters of his ethnography, Shank claims that:

In the end, however, my act of ethnography is a layered narrative that I have constructed about music-making in Austin. Therefore, this book cannot contain *the final story* of the Austin music scene. Rather, it attempts to describe, from the ground floor, the important cultural functions of this scene during a specific moment of transformation along with the historical background of that transformation. I have not written extensively about Austin's major recent recording "stars." The late Stevie Ray Vaughan, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Joe Ely and even Marcia Ball appear only in retrospect and mostly in passing. Without a doubt, the story I have told would be quite different if I were to have focused on the commercial successes that have been produced through this transformation. Instead, the contribution of these "stars" to the story told in this book comes from the time in their careers when they too were struggling quasi-professional performers making their most impassioned music in the city's nightclubs. This is where I have focused my interest: on musicians who have not reached stardom but who continue to struggle through performance, and on the fans who identify with that constitutive struggle.²¹⁴ (Italics are the author's)

Before commenting on specific claims in this statement, it is necessary to define the significance imbedded in the author's use of the term, "transformation." In addressing this "transformation" between the seventies and the eighties, Shank argues "that a major transformation [took] place in the organization of music-making in Austin."²¹⁵ This "major transformation" involved two groups of Austin-based musicians. The first group was the progressive country constituency—the "cosmic cowboys" of the seventies—and the second group was the "punk" and "New Sincerity" constituency of the eighties. Although Shank argues that both groups were driven by their personal and professional

²¹⁴ Shank, pp. xii-xiii.

²¹⁵ Shank, p. x.

quests to establish new, "musicalized identities" by performing in Austin's live-music venues, they approached the challenge in distinctly different ways. The earlier group engaged in what Shank calls an "antimodern critique" that involved rejecting the social mores of the day—the "nine-to-five" format and the dedicated work ethic that signified this path—thus allowing this group to reify their dreams of fame and fortune in the music business by "not having to work."²¹⁶ The second group however, engaged in the "postmodern goal of making a living in the music business."²¹⁷ According to Shank, this group reasoned that to reify their dreams of fame and fortune they needed to play by the rules common to the contemporary hierarchy of music-business executives and the prevailing economic mores that characterized this period. I find this line of reasoning misguided and will substantiate this opinion in the pages that follow, but the issue at hand is to define Shank's notion of the "major transformation." Shank describes the transformation as the shift from the antimodern ethos of the seventies to the postmodern ethos of the eighties. To insure that my interpretation is true to Shank's intent, I offer the "transition analysis" in the author's original words:

When the goal of musicalized experience is transformed from the antimodern critique of not having to work, to the postmodern goal of making a living in the music business, the interpretive structures that shape identity formation have been dramatically changed.²¹⁸

Evidently the "transformation" that the author describes reconfigured the "interpretive structures" through which the musicians created their performance identities. In other words, the transformation reconfigured the musical environment or more succinctly, it transformed the *scene*. Shank's transformation argument therefore represents the outcome of weighing the earlier seventies scene against the subsequent eighties scene and in that effort, both scenes must be measured with the same yardstick. Overlooking the role the recording stars played compromises the yardstick and for reasons listed below, it yields a flawed comparison.

I begin with Shank's comment above where he mentions that he has "not written extensively about Austin's major recent recording 'stars.'" He goes on to say that "Stevie

²¹⁶ Shank, p. 251.

²¹⁷ Shank, p. 251.

²¹⁸ Shank, p. 251.

Ray Vaughan, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Joe Ely and even Marcia Ball appear only in retrospect and mostly in passing." This list of recording artists suggests that he's concentrating on stars of the 1980s. Stevie Ray Vaughan and the Fabulous Thunderbirds were definitely breakout stars of the eighties and although Joe Ely and Marcia Ball had strong breakout roots in the seventies, their successes continued to expand through eighties. Ely had three major-label releases on MCA Records during the seventies with seven releases on major and secondary labels during the eighties.²¹⁹ Ball released a local album, *Freda and the Firedogs*, in 1972; she signed with Capitol Records and released her album *Circuit Queen* in 1978; and in 1984 she signed with Rounder Records and released three albums during that decade.²²⁰ Consequently, when Shank refers to "Austin's recent recording 'stars'," I'm assuming that he is referring to the recording stars of the 1980s even though Ely and Ball have strong associations with the seventies. Still, I fail to see the connection between these four acts—Stevie Ray Vaughan and the Fabulous Thunderbirds (the crown jewels of Austin's burgeoning blues scene), and Joe Ely and Marcia Ball—and the late-seventies emerging punk bands at Raul's and the New Sincerity bands of the middle 1980s. Each of the four acts mentioned were associated with distinct sub-scenes and there was limited interplay between their respective camps. Further, all of the "recent recording stars" that Shank itemizes were participants in a larger group of significant eighties-era "Austin recording stars," a group and a body of work that Shank rarely acknowledges—Christopher Cross, the hits of Willie Nelson, the continuum of successful Jerry Jeff Walker releases, the popular albums and singles of Michael Martin Murphey, the ever-growing cult following of Townes Van Zandt, and the ubiquity of Guy Clark titles recorded by major acts in the commercial marketplace are several of many examples. At bottom, the studio efforts of the punk and New Sincerity bands yielded no appreciable breakouts on the national charts. The only personality with enduring star potential was Alejandro Escovedo of the True Believers, who has gone on

²¹⁹ Ely's discography is as follows: *Joe Ely* (1977), *Honky Tonk Masquerade* (1978), *Down on the Drag* (1979), *Live Shots* (1980), *Musta Notta Gotta Lotta* (1981), *Hi-Res* (1984) all on MCA Records, followed by *Lord of the Highway* (1987) and *Dig All Night* (1988) on Hightone Records, and to round out the 1980s, *Milkshakes and Malts* (1988) and *What Ever happened to Maria* (1988) on Sunstorm Records.

²²⁰ The three Rounder releases during the 1980s were *Soulful Dress* (1984), *Hot Tamale Baby* (1985), and *Gatorhythms* (1989).

to achieved a degree of national notoriety, but such notoriety was an afterthought of the New Sincerity scene and at the time of Shank's *Dissonant Identities*, Escovedo was waiting in the wings. The significance of this commentary on Shank's "moment of transformation" between the seventies and the eighties is as follows: Shank's choice not to write "extensively about Austin's major recent recording stars" of the 1980s has had a limited effect on his analysis of Austin's eighties scene because the two blues acts along with Ely and Ball were only vaguely associated if at all with the constituents of Shank's ethnography and there were no "recent recording stars" that emanated exclusively from the punk and New Sincerity scenes.

The same cannot be said about the scene of the seventies. An accurate assessment of that scene demands the inclusion of the popular recording stars of the period. There were simply too many successful seventies-era recording projects that resonated regionally, nationally, and internationally to be ignored. Further, the successful recording environment had a systemic effect on the overall Austin scene. Each successful "star-oriented" project represented an extensive substructure of musicians, studios, engineers, managers, agents, support crews, venues, record company efforts and audiences that factored into the larger scene dynamic.

This brings me to my next point regarding Shank's assessment of the "major transformation [that took] place in the organization of music-making in Austin." As I argue in Chapter 1, music scenes are cultural engines. They are productive power sources featuring a collection of interrelated facets that work in synchronistic harmony to insure the scene's vitality and productivity. Overlooking or downplaying a key component compromises an objective analysis of the composite scene. All of the scene's functioning components must be considered in the overall calculus. Shank's ethnographic calculus in weighing the antimodern ethos of seventies scene against the postmodern ethos of the eighties scene is therefore a suspect comparison.

When Shank rolls the "stars" out of his eighties scene equation—"stars" that at best have only tenuous connections to the punk and New Sincerity movements—he does not compromise the "organic integrity" of the eighties scene under study. When he applies this same calculus to the seventies scene by rolling out the "stars," it drastically compromises the "organic integrity" of the entire scene. It's not a fair comparison. I

therefore question the author's claim that, "Without a doubt, the story I have told would be quite different if I were to have focused on the commercial successes that have been produced through this transformation."²²¹ In my reading of the history of the period and as I argue above, there were no appreciable "commercial successes" attributable to Shank's major transformation, and the story of the punk and New Sincerity scenes holds up quite well even with the exclusion of Stevie Ray Vaughan, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Joe Ely and Marcia Ball.

Shank's decision to bypass the "stars" of the period to focus on the "musicians who have not reached stardom but who continue to struggle through performance, and on the fans who identify with that constitutive struggle" is a worthy and necessary effort.²²² Popular scene studies commonly overlook the contributions of the musicians in the creative trenches as well as the extended collection of support personnel and infrastructure groups that nurture the efforts of that select coterie of publicly recognized personalities; in other words, the "stars." Behind any significant splash in the entertainment industry there is a substructure of support and causality, and behind any successful scene there is a history of trench warfare that is all too often overlooked in favor of the concomitant glitz and glitter associated with an ascending public personality.²²³ I therefore applaud Shank's methodology of overlooking the common avenue of "star stories" to focus on the less popular yet often equally talented acts that often propel local scenes. Nonetheless, Shank does not treat both scenes with equal objectivity.

Regarding Shank's comparative analysis between the seventies and the eighties, it's as if he had a postmodern theory in need of an example so he wrapped the Austin music scene around the theory which required some stretching, shaping and the occasional strip of rock 'n' roll duct tape to insure durable seams. The theory fared well in his analysis of the eighties, but the wrapping material—at least that section that signified the scene of the seventies—did not fare as well and was significantly distorted

²²¹ Shank, pp. xii-xiii.

²²² Shank, pp. xii-xiii.

²²³ Although Shank does include the musicians of the eighties who "continue to struggle through performance," he does not attempt to analyze the "support personnel and infrastructure groups" that I believe are essential players in any scene study. His inclusion of the striving musicians in the creative trenches is however a refreshing addition to the usual "star oriented" scene study.

through the effort. This position informs many of the forthcoming examples regarding Shank's claims about the essence of the seventies scene.

The Requirements and Values of the National Recording Industry

Shank maintains that with the major transformation that took place during the mid-1980s, Austin became "more closely linked with the requirements and values of the national recording industries."²²⁴ As mentioned, I find this line of reasoning misguided. One reason rests with the limited scope Shank's "sample study." The author is evidently associating this transformation to national requirements to the New Sincerity bands of the middle eighties. Although I've mentioned this numerous times, this group of talented young musicians was one of many Austin sub-scenes that populated the 1980s Austin scene, and despite Shank's enthusiasm for this short-lived genre, it was hardly the only game in town. But more significantly, Shank's claim ignores the substantial contributions of the so-called progressive country acts that, if considered objectively and judged by industry standards like album sales, major media appearances, career legacies, and international popularity, most certainly had a working knowledge of the requirements and values of the national recording industries. In fact, several of these acts like Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker, through innovative and unorthodox recording formats that met with considerable resistance from the record companies, coupled with their artistic tenacity, changed the way hit records were made. Nonetheless, Shank maintains that the Austin scene didn't embrace national standards until the antimodern-postmodern transformation of the middle eighties. In the following narrative, the author argues that the mainstream music industry questioned the viability of the Austin scene at the peak of the progressive country era:

But by the spring of 1974, representatives of the national recording industry were casting doubts on this vision of a musically created anticommercial utopia. Jerry Wexler was a vice president for Atlantic Records; he was responsible for Willie Nelson's signing with the label and produced Nelson's first crossover rock success, *Shotgun Willie*. *Rolling Stone* quoted Wexler's puzzlement regarding the music scene in Austin. "I keep hearing about this great music scene in Austin but whenever I ask who I should sign, nobody seems to know. Is it a mirage down there?"

²²⁴ Shank, p. x.

The recording industry could not understand a music scene that was not organized around the production of nationally oriented, commercial viable recordings. Therefore, the writer of the article concluded, "the jury's still out on Austin music. It has not made any impact on the charts and those charts will determine Austin's national impact."²²⁵

Shank's *Rolling Stone* source was an article written by music critic Chet Flippo in 1974 entitled, "Scene or Mirage? Austin: The Hucksters Are Coming."²²⁶ Flippo, a highly respected music critic presented this article as a snapshot on the timeline of Austin music history, and indeed, in 1974 the "jury [was] still out on Austin music." Throughout the Austin scene during that period, there was a lively discourse regarding the city's future: Would Austin become the fourth wheel in the Los Angeles, Nashville and New York industry turbine; would the major labels establish offices in town; was Austin bound for glory as the new international entertainment industry hot spot? Two camps went back and forth on the issue. One group argued that Austin was rooted in anticommercial ethos which, according to artist and scene impresario Jim Franklin, "is why most of the people who moved here did so." Franklin went on to say, "Most of the musicians are content to play the same clubs and smoke their dope and drink their beer."²²⁷ The other group argued that the growing musical momentum inherent in the Austin and the quality of the entertainers all but guaranteed that the "big money men" and the established corporate hierarchies would soon arrive and take the town to the next level. Although there was merit to both arguments, I would point out these respective shortcomings: The anticommercial group that invested in the laid back and lazy nature of the typical Austin musician underestimated the professional drive and dedication of the key protagonists on the stages of Austin. Nelson, Walker, Stevenson, Murphey, Fromholz, Wier, Ball, and others were very serious about their careers; each one operated a small business enterprise with band payrolls to meet, recording deadlines to honor, road crews to maintain and brands to build. The support musicians involved in this venture were similarly serious about developing their careers as professional players. My experience as a participant observer suggests that a great deal of the reportage that

²²⁵ Shank, pp. 64-65.

²²⁶ Flippo, Chet. "Scene or Mirage? Austin: The Hucksters Are Coming." *Rolling Stone* magazine, 1974, issue #154.

²²⁷ From the Flippo article "Scene or Mirage?"

romanticized the "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll" aspects of the scene was often popular window dressing that set the scene in the larger countercultural environment that was popular during the 1970s. The proto-industry group that forecast Austin's imminent success as an entertainment industry nexus miscalculated the nature of the established record companies and their positions in the vast corporate economy of scale that generally determined their strategic business plans. The majority of major labels were owned by massive corporate enterprises. Epic and Columbia were owned by CBS, Warner Brothers Records was a subset of the larger entertainment corporation with vested interests in diversified fields not the least of which was the motion picture industry that generated the bulk of their corporate earnings, and many of other recognizable labels were affiliated with larger corporate entities. Even during the middle seventies, a search of the ownership schematics of major record labels would yield names like General Electric, NBC-Universal, Paramount Pictures and similar behemoths. Further, the days of the viable independent record labels like Atlantic, Reprise, Capricorn and others were numbered as the seeds of globalization began to sprout in the last quarter of the 20th century.²²⁸ Consequently, those Austinites who were propounding a newfound focus on their fair city were deaf to the strategic agenda that echoed in corporate boardrooms across the country. But by the time Shank published *Dissonant Identities* in 1994, that undetermined verdict that Flippo had suggested in his 1974 article had been delivered and filed in the court records. This observation should have been noted in Shank's study. Austin never became the fourth wheel in the Los Angeles, Nashville and New York industry turbine, the "big money" never made it to town at least through the corporate conduits associated with the entertainment business, but Austin has thrived as an Ur-source of musical innovation and has established countless productive relationships with the major league players on the left and right coasts and in Nashville.

The quote from Atlantic Records Vice President Jerry Wexler that Shank chose to highlight in his comment above does not accurately reflect the relationship that this legendary record producer enjoyed with Austin and its musicians. I'm confident that Flippo accurately reproduced the comment from Wexler, but Flippo's article does not

²²⁸ The massive trends of corporatism essentially engulfed many small and independent concerns with a select cabal of multinationals took the reins of the entertainment industry. The corporate hegemony however was seriously challenged by the advent of the Internet in the late 1980s.

specify when Wexler made the comment or offer any contextual information about the quote. This is an important consideration. If Wexler made the "who should I sign?" comment in 1971 or 1972 for example, then the history of Wexler's relationship with Austin musicians that is supported by his own commentary on that relationship makes chronological sense. If however, he made the comment in 1974 when Flippo wrote the article, then the continuity of the timeline regarding Wexler's extended relationship with the Austin scene becomes somewhat unclear. Let me explain:

Doug Sahm died on November 18th, 1999. Jerry Wexler and Sahm had a very close relationship dating back to their initial meeting in the early 1970s when Wexler bought his recording contract from Mercury Records in 1973. According to Sahm, "Out of the blue, Jerry Wexler, the funky Jewish king of black music (the man behind Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Chuck Willis, the Drifters and many others) called me one day and said, 'T-Bone, you're playing on my team now.'"²²⁹ Sahm and Wexler teamed up on two recording projects, *Doug Sahm and Band* (1973), a unique set of recording sessions in New York that featured a collection of exemplary musicians that reflected the extended musical influences that Sahm had experienced during his career, and *Texas Tornado*, also released in 1973 on Atlantic Records.²³⁰ Approximately one year after Sahm's death, Raul Hernandez, the lead music critic for the *Austin Chronicle*, traveled to Long Island to interview Wexler for his article, "Man and a Half: Jerry Wexler, 'The Funky Jewish King of Black Music.'"²³¹ In that article, Hernandez documented Wexler's recollections on his relationships with various Austin musicians. What follows are statements that Wexler made to Hernandez during the interview about specific Austin artists and what those particular artists had to say about Wexler's comments:

²²⁹ From the album liner notes, *Doug Sahm & Friends*, Atlantic Records, 1973.

²³⁰ The 1973 New York Atlantic sessions included an array of powerful players. According to Sahm, again from the liner notes of *Doug Sahm and Band*, "In the process [of the 1973 sessions], Wexler changed my life. He made it possible for me to assemble one of the most amazing all-star groups of musicians I could ever dream of; he was kind enough to make us feel at home in this big New York City of his; and he was strong enough to push us whenever the music didn't meet his usual standards of excellence." Those musicians included George Rains, Jack Barber, Augie Meyers, Bob Dylan, Mac Rebennack ("Dr. John"), David Bromberg, David "Fathead" Newman, Wayne Jackson, Willie Bridges, Rocky Morales, Flaco Jimenez, Ken Kosek, Charlie Owens, Martin Fierro, and others.

²³¹ Hernandez, Raul. "Man and a Half: Jerry Wexler, 'The Funky Jewish King of Black Music.'" *Austin Chronicle*, December 1, 2000.

Wexler on Ray Benson

"Western swing? Nobody knows it. I mean, God bless Ray Benson, because he's the man. I had a fabulous collection of Western swing, which I turned over to Ray Benson of Asleep at the Wheel a year or two ago. Ray and I are very good friends. When he came out with this recent record and video, for which he won a couple of Grammys, *Ride With Bob*, I sent him a note telling him how knocked out I was. He said, 'Those few words from you mean more to me than a rave review in *Rolling Stone*.'"

Ray Benson on Wexler

"Yeah, he was being disturbed by dust mites and couldn't have all that cardboard around. I'd say it was about two yards of LPs. The interesting thing about the whole thing was, on the albums, every so often next to a title there's 'W.N.' I asked him what it was and he said, 'Well, I was choosing songs for Willie Nelson to do a Bob Wills tribute album in 1974.'"

Wexler on Marcia Ball

"It was Marcia's fault that Freda & the Firedog's stuff [produced by Wexler in Tyler, Texas, 1972], never came out, because at a certain time in rock history, pop history, people that were not in the main centers of the business had been instructed by other people, who presented themselves as knowledgeable to, 'Be real careful, because those sharpies from New York are going to fuck you, they're going to suck your life's blood.' There was paranoia running throughout the country. So Marcia, or whoever was advising her, they got to where they never would sign the contract. Never signed the contract ... "

Marcia Ball on Wexler

"The contract wasn't great, and we couldn't find a lawyer who could give us any more advice than, 'Sign it -- it's Jerry Wexler.' They may've been right, though; the label was doing that Austin-Atlantic country thing, and Jerry was sticking his neck out, basically. He had Doug, and Tony Joe White, and Willie all involved, but he was still sticking his neck out. He wasn't in the best position with Atlantic at the time. It was probably my fault that we drug our feet long enough that he just said, 'Well, I can't work under these circumstances.'"

Wexler on Ray Wylie Hubbard

"We agreed that I'd sign him to Atlantic [c. 1976]. I was not in a position to produce him at that time, but we agreed that he'd go to Muscle Shoals to cut the album. So, he went to Muscle Shoals -- arrived on a Friday, left on a Saturday, and was out of there. That was the last I ever heard of him."

Ray Wylie Hubbard on Wexler

"I called up Mr. Wexler at his house that night and said, 'Mr. Wexler, I feel uncomfortable down here at this studio,' and I think the way I remember it, I think he was having dinner with Bette Midler. He says, 'Well, I'm having dinner with Bette Midler right now.' I said, 'Well, Mr. Wexler if I could just have a minute, I do not think Bob Johnson [sic. should be Johnston] is

the fellow to produce my record, and I just feel awful. I don't know what to do. I know I can make a great record.' The way I remember it, he said, 'Well, maybe you're not ready to record,' and I said, 'You're probably right. I really am not ready to record right now. I honestly believe that may be part of it.' So we flew out the next day."

Wexler on Lou Ann Barton

"In the end, I wasn't too happy with the mix [on *Old Enough*, 1982], but otherwise it was pretty good."

Lou Ann Barton on Wexler

"It wasn't lowdown enough."

Wexler on the Fabulous Thunderbirds

"Carlos wanted them [for Santana's *Havana Moon*, 1983]. I hadn't known the Thunderbirds before, but we got real tight, especially Kim Wilson and I. We went out for supper one night, and got a load on. Kim says, 'I don't know where you think you're going, but you're coming on the road with us. Play tambourine, do something, but you're coming out with us.'"

Kim Wilson on Wexler

"Oh yeah [laughing], I wish I could take him out on the road right now! That was a really nice experience, that session. My only regret about Jerry Wexler is that I haven't had enough experiences with him. You gotta put a guy like Wexler up with people like Muddy Waters and B.B. King. He's one of those people. Just a fine individual, who's helped out a lot of people in this world."

Wexler on Stevie Ray Vaughan

"Seeing him that one time at the Continental Club [1982] was almost an out-of-body experience, I couldn't believe it. I called Claude Nobs at [the] Montreux [Jazz Festival] the next morning. I said, 'You gotta book this musician I'm telling you about. There's no time, I have no tapes, no videos, no nothing -- just book him.' And he did, on my say-so. And that's where he met Jackson Browne and David Bowie. David Bowie took him out on the road, and Jackson Browne was so taken with him that he gave him free studio time to cut his first album, which John Hammond took over and released on Columbia."

Wexler On Clifford Antone

"Doug also introduced me to Clifford, and that was a gift getting to meet Clifford Antone and becoming friends with him. There's a man that I really value and respect, because of his unbelievable dedication to the righteous music. There's only one Clifford Antone. All by himself. He had his club, he had his label, he looked after his singers. I talked to Clifford just before he went away."²³²

These quotes from Wexler and the responses from the Austin musicians reveal a long and productive relationship with a variety of Austin notables. The comments reference a

²³² Wexler's comment regarding Antone "going away" refers to his voluntary surrender in late 2000 to serve a federal prison term.

time-period of 28 years from 1972 when he came to Texas to produce Marcia Ball's early album through 2001. This brings me back to my comments on Flippo's 1974 article quoted by Shank. After considering the comments above, the timing and context of Wexler's comment pales when weighed against the evidence of his long-standing relationship and fondness for Austin and its musicians. Despite Wexler's quote in Flippo's article, the legendary producer obviously found a number of a number of people "to sign" in Austin.

Shank claims that "representatives of the national recording industry were casting doubts on this vision of a musically anticommercial utopia" but other than citing Wexler's quote, the author offers no evidence as to who those "national recording" operatives might be. Just in the small slice of Austin music history from 1974 to 1976, there were several national recording industry developments worth noting. Willie Nelson released *Phases and Stages* in 1974 on Atlantic Records (thanks to Jerry Wexler) that reached #34 on Billboard's Country Album charts and then released *Red Headed Stranger* in 1975 on Columbia Records that sold over two-million units and peaked at #1 on the Billboard's Country Album charts. B.W. Stevenson moved from RCA to Warner Brothers Records in 1975; Rusty Wier signed with ABC Records in 1975; Michael Martin Murphey had a #3 national hit on the Billboard Charts in 1975 with "Wildfire" followed by a top twenty hit, "Carolina in the Pines," that same year; and Fromholz signed with Capitol Records in 1976. With these facts readily available when Shank published *Dissonant Identities* in 1994, I'm perplexed by his claim that "national recording industry were casting doubts on this vision of a musically anticommercial utopia." Ultimately, for Shank to imply that Austin during the 1970s was out of step with the "requirements and values" of the mainstream music industry is not supportable.

The Shift from Live Performance in the 1970s to Recording in the 1980s

In another claim dealing with the major transformation from the seventies to the eighties, Shank claims that the focus during the seventies was rooted in live performance rather than the process of studio recording, but in fact the New Sincerity scene focused on the recording process:

Music-making in Austin [during the middle eighties] now focuses on recording rather than live performance. Live performance is now treated as one aspect of a complex industry oriented to the production and circulation of the pursuit of wealth.²³³

This assertion is problematic on several levels. During the seventies, live performance was most certainly treated as *one* of *many* elements in the career path of an aspiring artist. But the popular acts of the seventies revered the recording process as the grand challenge of their professional careers. Active players were acutely aware that an evening in a nightclub or on a concert stage was a fleeting moment in a larger professional timeline and that the recording process was an indelible statement by which the artist would be judged for decades to come. Stated simply, making records was a very big deal during the 1970s. Consider for example the sheer number of album releases during the seventies. The overall studio output of the progressive country years completely dwarfed that of the eighties. A survey of the high-profile New Sincerity bands in Austin during the 1980s indicates that they released 19 studio albums on viable state-of-the-art record labels:

Reivers (Zeitgeist)	4: <i>Translate Slowly</i> (1985); <i>Saturday</i> (1987); <i>End of the Day</i> (1989); <i>Pop Beloved</i> (1991)
Rank and File	3: <i>Sundown</i> (1982); <i>Long Gone Dead</i> (1984); <i>Rank and File</i> (1987)
The True Believers	1: <i>True Believers</i> (1986)
Glass Eye	4: <i>Huge</i> (1986); <i>Bent by Nature</i> (1988); <i>Time For A Change</i> (1989); <i>Hello Young Lovers</i> (1989)
Dharma Bums	3: <i>Haywire</i> (1988); <i>Bliss</i> (1990); <i>Welcome</i> (1991)
Doctor's Mob	2: <i>Headache Machine</i> (1985); <i>Sophomore Slump</i> (1987)
Wild Seeds	2: <i>Brave, Clean & Reverent</i> (1986); <i>Mud, Lies & Shame</i> (1988)

TOTAL - **19** Releases

Looking back to the seventies and considering the acts associated with the progressive country moniker that were actively recording, reveals over **80** album releases on major labels. What follows is an encapsulated list of these artists and the number of their releases during the 1970s.

²³³ Shank, p. 251.

Jerry Jeff Walker	10
The Lost Gonzo Band	3
Steven Fromholz	3
Michael Murphey	8
Rusty Wier	5
Guy Clark	4
Townes Van Zandt	4
Denim (Traveler)	2
Joe Ely	4
Butch Hancock	3
The Flatlanders	1
Balcones Fault	1
Marcia Ball	2
Ray Wylie Hubbard	2
Doug Sahm	5
Willie Nelson	17
TOTAL:	81

The New Sincerity "focus" on recording not only lagged far behind the output of the progressive country period, their recordings attained no appreciable commercial success, none of the songs were covered by other major recording artists, there were no hit singles, no gold or platinum albums, and the scene had run its course by approximately 1990. All the albums of the period are long out of print and few, if any, have been resurrected in remastered digital CD formats. The catalogue of the 1970s was infinitely more successful by music industry indicators. The volume of album sales for the seventies are measured in the tens-of-millions while the album sales of the New Sincerity acts are measured in the thousands.²³⁴

Regarding Shank's "major transformation" that focused on recording during the 1980s coupled with "the requirements and the values of the national recording industries," and, by extension, a focus on television and major media coverage, there was

²³⁴ My comparison between the two decades is hardly scientific and may not pass muster with trained statisticians. One could reasonably argue that I'm incorporating ten years of album output and comparing it to five years of New Sincerity output, and I'm sure there are countless other statistical deficiencies in my comparison. Nonetheless, I believe that most reasonable scene observers would acquiesce to the fact that the volume of albums produced during the 1970s proportionally exceeds the per capita volume of albums produced during the 1980s. Further, the cultural significance of the recorded product emanating from the 1970s far exceeds that of the product of a small group of Austin-based bands that have largely faded into a zone of music industry obscurity.

a moment of great hope and anticipation in Austin's New Sincerity scene.²³⁵ Apparently, there had been a great deal of hometown "scene capital" invested in a MTV special, *The Cutting Edge*, filmed at Austin's Liberty Lunch and other settings around town in 1985 that featured Zeitgeist (the Reivers), Glass Eye, Doctors Mob, the True Believers, Poison 13, Joe "King" Carrasco, Dino Lee and others. Many local observers felt that presenting Austin's vibrant new scene to a national television audience would trigger the critical mass necessary to take the sounds of New Sincerity to radio stations, listeners, and record-buying consumers across the country. But, according to music critic, Kristin Gorski, "Despite extensive critical attention (including national coverage in *Rolling Stone* and a 1985 episode of the MTV program *The Cutting Edge*), none of the 'New Sincerity' bands met with much commercial success, and the 'scene' ended within a few years."²³⁶

Interestingly, *The Cutting Edge* broadcast did bear some hometown musical fruit. One of the young groups selected for *The Cutting Edge* filming was Timbuk 3, a young act from Madison, Wisconsin, who had recently migrated to Austin. Timbuk 3 was a husband and wife team, Pat and Barbara K. MacDonald, whose third member was a jam box that played pre-recorded rhythm tracks, thus rounding out the performance triumvirate. This unique ensemble walked away from the MTV broadcast with all the marbles; they were signed by the I.R.S. label on the merit of an extremely witty and well-crafted song, "The Future's So Bright, I've Gotta' Wear Shades." The single topped out at #19 on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart in 1986 and has been touted as one of the best "one-hit-wonders" of the 1980s. The success of Timbuk 3 is a telling turn of events . . . When the MTV crew came to Austin bringing "the requirements and values of the national recording industry" they essentially passed on the New Sincerity offerings and came away with a clever song that chanted the good fortune of a college student who was on his or her way to realizing the American middle-class dream:

I study nuclear science
I love my classes
I got a crazy teacher, he wears dark glasses
Things are going great, and they're only getting better

²³⁵ Shank, p. 10.

²³⁶ Gorski, Kristin: "Almost Famous: The Austin Texas Soundtrack Circa 1985," *Annabelle Magazine*, No. 12 (2006).

I'm doing all right, getting good grades
The future's so bright, I gotta' wear shades,
I gotta' wear shades.²³⁷

The big success story of *The Cutting Edge* filming in Austin, came down to a single, solid song; that basic building block that I argue was the essential driving force of the 1970s scene and one of the most significant cultural products in the music business since the advent of the protective copyright statutes of the 19th century. The strength and popularity of this composition is vested not only in its compelling top-twenty chart position in 1986, but in its use in other high-end popular media formats like movie and television appearances over the years and various compilation recordings. Such is the nature of good songs . . . they make lasting imprints on other popular media formats beyond the national charts, and, as emotional signifiers, they find their way into the lives of listeners far removed for the original scene of their creation.

In retrospect, many scene participants hoped that the big breakout for the New Sincerity scene might be the 1985 television taping of *The Cutting Edge*. The practical results of this visit from these "cutting-edge" music-industry professionals yielded a great break for Timbuk 3, a unique pop-rock combo who had recently migrated to Austin and had no appreciable affiliation with the New Sincerity bands. Prior to their "MTV break," Pat and Barbara K. MacDonald had been local street buskers with a battery-powered band. Still, on the power of their well-crafted song they landed a significant record deal, a major hit, a Grammy Award for Best New Artist in 1987, and a series of seven subsequent albums. When the smoke cleared after the MTV production teams headed back to their respective corporate bases of operations in 1985, the New Sincerity scene was left with a single episode in a contemporary cable television broadcast. The cosmic cowboys and progressive-country-era players however were left with the television program they had initially inspired and starred in, *Austin City Limits*, filmed in Austin by Austinites, that was in production for their tenth successful season. Shank's claim regarding the "major transformation" from a live-performance focus during the seventies

²³⁷ From the song, "The Future's So Bright, I Gotta' Wear Shades" by Pat MacDonald. Copyright 1986 Mamdaddaddi Music/I.R.S. Music, administrated by Atlantic Music. BMI. From the 1986 I.R.S. recording *Greetings from Timbuk 3*. The segment represented above is the first verse and what amounts to the chorus, by repeating at the end of each verse, "The future's so bright, I gotta' wear shades."

to a studio-recording focus during the eighties is another baffling claim that is short on substance regarding music-making in Austin during the seventies and eighties.

You Can't Make it Here

According to Shank, "No locally nurtured talent built a successful recording career while retaining a home base in Austin's music scene."²³⁸ After reading and considering this comment, I studied Shank's pre- and post-narratives that framed this claim to insure that I wasn't missing a valid contextual reference. I wondered if there might be some mitigating testimony linked to this bold position or an argument that indicated the author was focusing on a particular genre, style or a particular time-period, but I found no relevant qualifiers. Shank's statement is not only patently wrong, it denigrates Austin's singular climate of creativity. I argue throughout this dissertation that Austin's aesthetic milieu of the early seventies perpetuated an exceptional nucleus of artistic innovation that encompassed new musical styles, pioneer recording studios, a renaissance in the graphic arts, broadcast formats like KOKE FM and *Austin City Limits*, art-oriented entrepreneurial ventures like the Armadillo, and music-business support organizations. Austin was a nurturing nexus that accommodated the dreams and the careers of hometown musicians as well as Austin transplants who have gone on to create successful and enduring recording careers with Austin as their home base.

Rusty Wier is probably the most apparent example. Rusty spent his entire life making music in Austin, he affiliated with the Austin-based management company Moon Hill in the early 1970s and secured his initial recording contract with ABC Records in 1974 and his subsequent career was entirely Austin-based. The internationally renowned guitarist Eric Johnson, an Austin native has based his entire nine-album recording career in Austin.²³⁹ Willie Nelson transformed his career when he left Nashville for Austin's fertile aesthetic climate in 1972. The phenomenon of "resuscitation & reinvention" also applies to the careers of the peripatetic songster Jerry Jeff Walker who landed in Austin

²³⁸ Shank, p. 16.

²³⁹ Eric Johnson's discography is as follows: *Seven Worlds* (Ark 21, 1978); *Tones* (Reprise, 1986); *Ah Via Musicom* (Capitol Records, 1990); *Venus Isle* (Capitol Records, 1996); *Souvenir* (Vortexan Records, 2002); *Bloom* (Favored Nations, 2005); *Live from Austin, Tx.* (New West Records, 2005); *Live from Austin, Tx.* (Vortexan Records, 2010); *Up Close* (Vortexan-EMI, 2010).

in 1972 and never left, and Christopher Cross who relocated to Austin from San Antonio during the seventies and worked the local and regional market until his unprecedented success on Warner Brothers Records in 1980. All of Fromholz's major recordings after the release of *Frummox: From Here to There* in 1969 were Austin-based. Shortly after Murphey recorded his first album in 1972 he moved from California to settle in Austin and continue his recording career. The rock band Denim came to Austin from Houston in 1974, signed with Epic Records in 1976, released their first album in 1977, and since that time have released four more albums and still reside in Austin.²⁴⁰ Doug Sahm spent a great deal of that period in Austin living on the dirt road that led to Soap Creek Saloon (?) and he had an exceptional list of albums released during his long Austin tenure. B.W. Stevenson's first two albums on RCA were done when he lived in Dallas (and even then he was represented by Austin-based Moon Hill Management who facilitated these early albums), but by 1973 he was a full-time Austin resident and went on to record eight subsequent albums on RCA, Warner Brothers, MCA, and Amazing Records.²⁴¹ Although there are other examples of artists who developed successful "Austin-based" recording careers, one final example is worth mentioning. In 1969 Willis Alan Ramsey graduated from Highland Park High School in Dallas and moved to Austin. After a Leon Russell concert in 1972 Ramsey sought out the Oklahoma rock star at his Austin hotel room and insisted on playing Russell some of his songs. The result was a recording contract with Shelter Records and one of the most successful cult albums in late-twentieth-century recording history. Various songs from this 1972 Shelter release, *Willis Alan Ramsey*, have since been recorded by the pop-rock acts America and Captain & Tennille, by fellow songwriters Jerry Jeff Walker, Shawn Colvin, Jimmy Buffett, Lyle Lovett, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, as well as Widespread Panic and Waylon Jennings. Willis Ramsey's success was the product of a recording contract signed, sealed and delivered in Austin.

²⁴⁰ Denim's discography is as follows: *Denim* (Epic, 1977); *Traveler* (recorded as "Traveler" in a short-lived name change, ABC Records, 1978); *Indian Paint Brush* (Grump Records, 1995); *Evolution* (Grump Records, 1999); *Cool Blue Flame* (Grump Records, 2009).

²⁴¹ B.W. Stevenson's discography is as follows: *B.W. Stevenson* (RCA, 1972); *Lead Free* (RCA, 1972); *My Maria* (RCA, 1973); *Calabasas* (RCA, 1973); *We Be Sailin'* (Warner Brothers, 1975); *The Best of B.W. Stevenson* (RCA, 1977); *Lost Feeling* (Warner Brothers, 1977); *Lifeline* (MCA-Songbird, 1980); *Down the Road* (Amazing Records, 1999); plus a series of four composite albums from 2000 through 2005.

The acts listed above were all reasonably high-profile public figures in the Austin market and to varying degrees, in the national market. Their recordings enjoyed respectable airplay, they routinely appeared on television and many were featured on *Austin City Limits*, and by the time Shank published *Dissonant Identities* 1994, several of these artists were legitimate international recording personalities. Significantly, all of these acts were all strongly identified with Austin, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. I am therefore perplexed by Shank's statement, "No locally nurtured talent built a successful recording career while retaining a home base in Austin's music scene."²⁴² The statement is not only unsupportable, it paints an inaccurate picture of the prolific aesthetic environment that characterized the city during that period.

Cowboy Boots & a Stetson - The Essentials for Success in Austin

Shank's second chapter, "Constructing a Musicalized Performance of Texan Identity," argues that the Austin music scene was powered by the history of the romantic cowboy. As he eloquently states, "the Austin music scene was built on this foundation of a commercialized cultural tradition of popular music, centered in the liminal arenas of honky-tonks, and performed with an assumed air of Anglo-Saxon masculine moral authority inherited from the mythical presocial origins of the state of Texas through the discourse of cowboy lore."²⁴³ "Things cowboy" certainly played a significant role in the Austin music mix, scholarly and journalistic treatments of the connection abound, and it seems that a historical trip down the John and Alan Lomax - J. Frank Dobie - Walter Prescott Webb "Cowboy Ballad & Folklore Trail" is prerequisite to the study of 20th-century Texan music. The myth of the American Cowboy must rank in the top-ten list of international cultural tropes. The romantic cowboy is a vast, important, and well-researched topic that has influenced enterprises from the motion picture industry to prominent United States presidencies and even the Polish Solidarity movement in the 1980s!²⁴⁴ Having ventured down Austin's cowboy musical trail during the 1970s, I

²⁴² Shank, p. 16.

²⁴³ Shank, p. 37.

²⁴⁴ In 1999, Kevin Mulroy edited a book of Polish poster art that incorporated images of the American cowboy: Mulroy, Kevin. *Western Amerykanski: Polish Poster Art and the Western*.

believe that the influence of the cowboy myth is overrated *when applied* to the protagonists of the story regarding the ascendance of the Texan singer-songwriters. "Constructing a musicalized performance of Texan identity," or shaping a public performance persona from native Texan cowboy clay *was not* what motivated Nelson, Walker, Murphey, Fromholz and others. These gentlemen, then *and* now, are dedicated to the craft of songwriting and to creating a popular, enduring, and meaningful body of work. Their creative lives revolved around the song, songs that they had written, songs of their contemporaries, and songs from the extensive American songbook that they would, from time to time, interpret, record and "make their own."

I'm reminded of a famous quote from Abraham Lincoln. In 1862, shortly before signing the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln wrote a letter to the *New York Tribune* in response to an editorial by Horace Greeley's in which he urged complete abolition. The President's response contained the following passage: "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that." Similarly, if Nelson, Walker, Murphey and Fromholz could write songs and follow their individual aspirations in the music industry by presenting the music they treasured by putting on a cowboy hat, they would do it, if they could generate the same result by avoiding this fashion accoutrement, they would do that, if they could facilitate their mission by wearing a hat that characterized the particular song they were presenting at the time, they would do that, or, more probably, they would ignore the entire hat question entirely. These musicians were professional songwriters drawing on a range of topics as vast as the American frontier. The efficacy of songwriting as a dominant creative center for a select group of musicians is a topic overlooked by many critics and scene observers. In the case of the Austin-based artists under study, songwriting was *the* prime motivator, and although the notion of identity and image are certainly components in a survey of their broader career plans, such components more commonly fall under the rubric of branding and marketing rather than aesthetic motivation.

(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999). On page 68 is a Polish Solidarity poster that features an image of Gary Cooper in the 1952 film *High Noon*.

The very essence of songwriting belies the act of conforming to a specified personal-professional motivational identity that Shank presents in his discourse on "constructing" a "musicalized Texan identity." The essence of songwriting—at least the style of songwriting I'm associating with the protagonists in this story—is a combination of personal experience and an exploration of the writer's imagination. Songwriting probes that obscure territory of dreams, desires, theories, associations, romance, and fantasies. This technique has the songwriter wearing many different hats and embracing many different identities; a style that might be called, "mind's-eye imagineering." This particular brand of creativity is different from the song mills in Nashville, Los Angeles or New York where writing is often formula-, subject- or project-based. In no way is this opinion intended to prioritize one style over the other or even imply that there are clear-cut categories of the craft. The work of industry giants like Nashville's Harlan Howard, Los Angeles-based Paul Williams, or New York's Burt Bacharach stand as stunning contributors to the art of songwriting and they undoubtedly embrace their own brand of mind's-eye imagineering. In light of their high-profile success, however, they are often called upon to create project-oriented compositions from motion picture scores to corporate advertisements. To be sure, many of the seventies' era Austin-based songwriters have worked in structured or commercially oriented settings and many have produced their fair share of jingles and musical commercials. But the protagonists I'm referencing—Nelson, Murphey, Walker, Murphey, Stevenson, Wier, Bridger, Fromholz, Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, Willis Alan Ramsey and others—are independent contractors who inhabit that unstructured inner world of imagination and actively engage in the process of mind's-eye imagineering on a day-to-day basis. In their songwriting—the creative side of their career equation—they are unencumbered with concepts like "constructing musicalized identities of Texan identity" or analyzing the philosophical aspects of their efforts. They segregate the concepts of image, public persona, stage props, and performance constructions to the business side of their career equations with each artist approaching that challenge with varying degrees of commitment. In essence, they're free-form creative drifters.

Another example of Shank's theoretical investment in attaching the "musicalized performance of Texan identity to the Austin scene surfaces in the author's statement

regarding the modus operandi of the Armadillo talent buyers: "As the managers of the Armadillo continued their search for musicians who could perform this rearticulation of the traditional Texan identity for a younger audience, they began hearing about a country singer who had recently left Nashville and who was rumored to enjoy smoking marijuana."²⁴⁵ Having worked with Eddie Wilson, Mike Tolleason and their mid-seventies talent buyer, Bobby Hedderman, as a musician, a booking agent, and an artist manager, I reject the claim that the Armadillo staff focused their talent searches on the next big ersatz cowboy performer. Just like countless other nightclub owners and concert promoters, professional venue operators searched for cost-effective acts that could pack the house and maximize ticket, beer, food, and merchandise sales. This was a delicate challenge that left little room to invest in "Texan identities" as a dependable payday for a going business concern. If the act drew well, they were booked. Exorbitant talent costs, acts that don't pay for themselves through ticket sales, are a path to financial insolvency for live-music venues. As importantly (and as mentioned in Chapter 2), "an analysis of the acts that comprised the 'Decade of the 'Dillo' reveals that only 15% of those acts could be classified as 'progressive country.'"²⁴⁶ In truth, the entire Cosmic Cowboy movement was hardly first and foremost in the Armadillo booking game plan. This legendary venue was not, as Shank claims, the "cathedral of the cosmic cowboy."²⁴⁷ More accurately, in the early days it was often referred to as "the House that Freddie built" after the popular blues artist Freddie King, who was an Armadillo regular who would completely pack the venue until his demise in 1976. The Armadillo wisely depended on a disparate talent line up that included acts like Frank Zappa, Commander Cody, the Velvet Underground, Ravi Shankar, Leon Russell, ZZ Top, Cheech & Chong, John McLaughlin and the Mahavishnu Orchestra and countless other high-profile acts that were far removed from the progressive country genre.

I believe, for reasons threaded throughout this dissertation, that the link between the historical cowboy and the "cosmic cowboy" has been tremendously overemphasized. Shank provides an excellent treatment of the Lomax-Dobie-Webb background

²⁴⁵ Shank, p. 64.

²⁴⁶ See footnote 62 in Chapter 2, regarding the progressive country acts during the decade of the 'Dillo.

²⁴⁷ Shank, p. 78.

arguments, and particularly good job with his segment on the singing cowboy and its relevance to the popular music of the late 20th century. Still, this whole notion that the Armadillo was the "cosmic-cowboy cathedral," has played so strongly in the history of the Austin scene that, much like the creation myth itself, it has been cycled and recycled into a "revealed truth" status. Yes, the cowboy history and all its popular identifiers definitely applies, and yes, it's a fantastically strong metaphor for "identity" studies (as convincingly evidenced by Mellard's exceptional dissertation), but when this grand cowboy trope is applied to the music and entertainment business it flows into an identity stream that is already highly diluted with image, innuendo, smoke, mirrors, and carnivalesque grandstanding that is inherent in the music industry. A great deal of the adaptation of the cowboy image into the Austin scene was sartorial and on many levels, served as stage props and branding tools. Scenes, after all, have their costumes! The progressive country "look" embodied a cross between the real cowboy attire as exemplified by rodeo stars and the hippiefied versions of Porter Wagoner's "Nudies of Hollywood" sequined suits with well-shaped Stetsons and flashy boots. The eighties scene in Austin—punk and New Sincerity—was replete tattoos, piercings, black leather jackets, and old-school combat boots, and the blues scene of the same period reintroduced Brylcreem ("a little dab'll do ya"), pompadours, and DiVinci bowling shirts in a post-James Dean-Marlon Brando public persona.

The abundant focus on "cowboyness" obscures the individual creative efforts of the songwriters. Were these songwriters embracing the cowboy image in their work? Certainly, *but only on a song-by-song basis!* To refer back to the basic definition of "sincerity" offered by Hank Williams as it applies to country music (and I would argue, to other songwriting genres from the blues to urban rap songs): "When a hillbilly sings a crazy song, he feels crazy. When he sings, 'I Laid My Mother Away,' he sees her a-laying right there in the coffin."²⁴⁸ Consequently, when Willie Nelson sings, "Mommas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys," he assumes the temporal role of the cowboy, and when Michael Martin Murphey sings "Geronimo's Cadillac," he assumes the identity of a proud Indian leader as a casualty of Manifest Destiny, when Walker sings "Mr. Bojangles," he revisits the old First Precinct jail on Rampart Street in New

²⁴⁸ Malone (1991), p. 242.

Orleans, and when Fromholz sings "Birds and Wolverines," a song about the ecological balance in the Florida Everglades, he assumes the role of an environmentalist.²⁴⁹

Songwriters appropriate different identities as part of their job definition. Wearing a variety of hats to try to pack the songwriter's frontier-sized collection of ideas and identities into a single ten-gallon Stetson is a disservice to their creativity and their craft.

The Austin Interchangeable Band

In sections throughout *Dissonant Identities*, Shank analyzes the professionalism, the performance qualities, and the motivations of the extended group of support musicians who backed up Austin's high-profile entertainers of the 1970s. The author recognizes that the support players were a vital part of the progressive country initiative because of their role in interpreting and embellishing the compositions that the singer-songwriters brought to the creative table. In essence, the sidemen were an important part of the mix on the concert stage and in the studio. Shank refers to this group of sidemen as the "Austin Interchangeable Band," a term he borrowed from musician and scholar Hugh Sparks who incorporated the phrase into his 1984 dissertation, *Stylistic Development and Compositional Processes of Selected Solo Singer/Songwriters in Austin, Texas*.²⁵⁰ In my recollection, the phrase originated when Steven Fromholz described this loose group of friends and musicians as the "Austin Interchangeable Band" in the early 1970s. Jerry Jeff Walker confirms this recollection in his autobiography *Gypsy Songman* when he says, "Steve Fromholz named this bunch of young colts 'The Austin Interchangeable Dance Band.'"²⁵¹ Shank makes certain claims about these musicians and by extension, the fabric and utility of the seventies scene, that warrant a brief review.

²⁴⁹ "Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys" is a country music song first recorded by Ed Bruce, written by Bruce and his wife, Patsy. His version of the song appears on his 1976 self-titled album for United Artists Records. In late 1975–early 1976, Bruce's rendition of the song went to #15 on the Hot Country Singles charts.

²⁵⁰ Sparks, Hugh Cullen. *Stylistic Development and Compositional Processes of Selected Solo Singer/Songwriters in Austin, Texas*. Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The University of Texas at Austin, May 1984.

²⁵¹ Walker, Jerry Jeff. *Gypsy Songman*. Emeryville: Woodford Press, 1999, p. 112.

Shank presents the Interchangeable Band as a formal group. It was not. The "group" was simply (to reference the jargon of the period) a cosmic coterie of fellow pickers. The Austin Interchangeable band never performed as designated musical entity or functioned as a commercial enterprise. The Austin Interchangeable Band was a figure of speech that signified group of capable support musicians with various degrees of skills to supplement a live-performance or recording requirement. Nonetheless, Shank makes the following statement about this "non-band":

During the seventies, members of the Austin Interchangeable Band could pride themselves on their ability to perform any song in any style with no rehearsal. This ability both increased their own local market value—enabling them to work with no notice for a variety of bandleaders—and signified their dismissal of the importance of the labor market to musical performance. Their audiences could listen to them backing up Michael Murphey, Tanya Tucker, or Jerry Jeff Walker and interpret in their loose, mocking performances the rejection of the commercial role they were filling. Although they were musicians for hire with skills developed through catering to mainstream tastes in the more commercially oriented clubs in town, the Austin Interchangeable Band transformed the anticommercial ideology of Austin's folksingers into a performance style that emphasized intoxicated looseness, spontaneity, and a tongue-in-cheek attitude toward their own professional status. In the studio, this performance style and the attitude it represented were typically lost in any efforts to produce coherent and disciplined recorded music. Only on rare occasions, such as Walker's *Viva Terlingua* [sic], could the contradictory meanings of this version of Austin's musical aesthetic be recorded.²⁵²

Although I can only speak authoritatively about my personal experience as an active subject in Shank's assessment of this 1970's performance and recording milieu, I believe that the following comments reflect the positions of many of my contemporaries. The author's observation about performing "intoxicated," playing "any song without rehearsal," thus increasing our "local market value" and working with a "variety of bandleaders" are plausible dots on a complicated scene matrix. These comments ring true to various degrees in various situations. Playing with Walker certainly involved some high times (although some band members drank very little, contrary to Shank's comments and many public perceptions) and our rehearsals were more like pickin'

²⁵² Shank, p. 244.

sessions where we kicked around ideas and "feels" for songs. Working with Murphey was a *completely* different story. The ambiance in his camp was, by and large, diametrically opposed to that of Walker's camp. An unwritten "sideman support standard" developed during the period whereby the band members naturally reflected the public persona and values of the bandleader. As Shank suggests, we were "musicians for hire," many of whom learned their chops "catering to mainstream tastes" in commercial venues, but to claim that we "transformed" the preexisting styles and professional natures of our veteran employers to a "performance style that emphasized intoxicated looseness, spontaneity, and a tongue-in-cheek attitude toward [the folksinger's] own professional status" is simply nonsense. We were "hired hands," the "folksingers" were the trail bosses, and, as Shank accurately points out, we were "interchangeable." This type of "Wild-West-party-at-all-costs" reportage might make for entertaining copy, but it does not reflect the common activities in Austin or the rigors of extended cross-country promotional tours.

The mention of national touring suggests an important aspect of the extended Austin scene. The chroniclers cited in this study, from the early accounts of Bill Malone through Reid's *Improbable Rise* to Shank's *Dissonant Identities* all focus on Austin music performed *in* Austin. Understandably, these writers weren't following the popular acts of the period around the country and they depended on secondary journalistic sources for "road reports" if they were interested in blending such meta-Austin information into their narratives. Yet the road is where these professional bands spent a great deal of their time and the road is where successful careers were created. During the early seventies, a typical Walker or Murphey promotional tour might include a two-month road adventure that would include six to eight multi-night engagements in key national markets and various one-nighters along the way—two nights at Mother Blues in Dallas, two nights at Liberty Hall in Houston, a concert opening slot in San Antonio, a three night run of West Texas colleges, three nights at Ebbets Field in Denver with a stopover at Tulagi's in Boulder, several nights at a listening room in Atlanta, a weekend at the Main Point in Bryn Mawr outside of Philadelphia, two shows in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington D.C., three nights at Paul's Mall in Boston, a folk festival in Hartford Connecticut, culminating with a four night engagement at Kenny's Castaways in Uptown

Manhattan. After several weeks off in Austin, the cycle would begin anew with a focus on the West Coast with similar gigs in Phoenix, the Troubadour or the Whiskey A-Go-Go in Hollywood, the Little Bear in Huntington Beach, up to the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco and a long weekend in Seattle. These tours involved much more than playing the various venues. There were in-store record store appearances, radio interviews and live tapings, television appearances, press interviews, afternoon shows or private parties arranged by the record company, and the occasional studio session on the road to capture several new songs that had been bantered around during the tour. It was not uncommon therefore for "home-coming," hometown shows to be more like welcome home parties with friends sitting in and a festive atmosphere with a special interplay between band, audience and old friends.

Even more perplexing is Shank's comment, "In the studio, this performance style and the attitude it represented were typically lost in any efforts to produce coherent and disciplined recorded music."²⁵³ The author then goes on to offer this supporting statement: "Only on rare occasions, such as Walker's *Viva Terlingua* [sic], could the contradictory meanings of this version of Austin's musical aesthetic be recorded."²⁵⁴ Ironically, Shank's reference to *¡Viva Terlingua!* is correct, but not for the reasons he offers. This "rare occasion" that engaged the "contradictory meanings" of Austin's fast, loose and occasionally alcohol-related "musical aesthetic" that characterized the recording ethos of *¡Viva Terlingua!* was a conscious construction on Walker's part. It was the Texas Hill Country extension of the recording format that Walker incorporated for the previous recording of the *Jerry Jeff Walker* album that took place in an ad hoc studio in Austin. As the lead guitar player for both projects, I can assure you that Jerry Jeff planned it that way. The important consideration however is that *¡Viva Terlingua!* (1973) as well as *Jerry Jeff Walker* (1972) were *the only* recording projects of the era that were so designed. *All* of the other albums recorded during the period that included Austin musicians—the so-called Interchangeable Band and related players—were meticulously rehearsed, extensively planned, and professionally recorded projects. This includes an extensive inventory of previously cited albums from Willie Nelson, Michael

²⁵³ Shank, p. 244.

²⁵⁴ Shank, p. 224.

Martin Murphey, B.W. Stevenson, Willis Alan Ramsey, Rusty Wier, Steven Fromholz and other recording acts of the era.

The contemporary contingent of Austin musicians, the group that Walker affectionately and accurately referred to as the "young colts," approached the recording experience in a professional and conscientious fashion. We realized that we were high on hot-licks and determination and short on studio experience and we approached the recording challenge with a balanced degree of trepidation and youthful enthusiasm. We realized that we were in competition with some of the finest studio musicians in the country. There were ample veteran pickers in Nashville, New York, and Los Angeles where many of the period's sessions took place, and the decisions regarding session players for a project fell not only with the artist under contract, but with the artist's producer and the record company that was writing the checks for the production expenses. For the first time in our nascent careers, we were on the originating side of the vinyl recordings that we had spent so much time trying to emulate and master as performers in regional rock bands. We were now on the inside of those grooves with the opportunity and responsibility to make lasting and indelible statements through the medium of these exceptional hand-crafted songs. We had suddenly graduated from those long hours of practicing our instruments and sitting in front of the turntable in our home stereo systems picking up the stylus arm, moving it back a few grooves, and trying to get the inflection and delivery just right on a particular instrumental performance. We were now charged with creating those performances. With the support of our fellow players, the encouragement of our songwriting employers and the patience of veteran record producers, we succeeded.

One has only to objectively review these various products to ascertain that they were state-of-the-art recordings in terms of musicianship and recording techniques and are distinctly different from Walker's recordings, which of course is exactly what Jerry Jeff had in mind. Further, one only has to reference the national charts to determine that these products, including the two Walker albums, satisfied the commercial "requirements and values" of the professional recording companies, the tastes of the record-buying public, and the sensibilities of the contemporary music critics. Shank's attempt to cast the recording techniques of the seventies as "not ready for prime time" then weigh them

against the New Sincerity bands who allegedly embraced the "requirements and values of the national recording industries" does not conform to the reality that unfolded on the streets, stages, and studios of Austin during the progressive country years.

The Collapse of the Cosmic Cowboys

What Shank calls "The Collapse of the Progressive Country Alliance" — the title of the fourth chapter in *Dissonant Identities* — was not a collapse. It was the public retirement of a cache of media constructions that the prominent musicians of the era had consistently shunned and certainly not an implosion of the creative music-making process. Rather, it was a dissipation of talented artists and songwriters into new channels of creativity and popular aesthetic outlets . . . The "collapse" is more accurately described as a rearrangement: Willie Nelson had become one of the hottest names in the history of country music; Jerry Jeff Walker, through the efforts of his talented wife, Susan, had retooled his career into an extremely efficient online operation that tapped a huge fan base to bypass the staid machinery of the music industry to appeal directly to his followers; Michael Martin Murphey had readjusted his songwriting efforts and his commercial brand to accommodate a straight country market and released a series of seven top-50 albums on the U.S. Country charts from 1982 through 1990; and Fromholz had expanded his aesthetic adventures to appear in several major motion pictures and successful stage plays while continuing to write, play a circuit of live-entertainment venues, and have his songs recorded by other artists.²⁵⁵ Other artists of the period, B.W. Stevenson, Guy Clark, Willis Alan Ramsey, Townes Van Zandt, Billy Joe Shaver, Rusty Wier, Gary P. Nunn, not only survived the eighties, they thrived during the period through live performance, album sales, and particularly through having their strong catalogues of original songs covered by other top recording artists.

²⁵⁵ *Michael Martin Murphey* (#14; Liberty, 1982); *The Heart Never Lies* (#27; Liberty, 1983); *Tonight We Ride* (#46; Warner Brothers, 1986); *Americana* (32; Warner Brothers, 1987); *River of Time* (#11; Warner Brothers, 1988); *Land of Enchantment* (#33; Warner Brothers, 1989); and *Cowboy Songs* (#25; Warner Brothers, 1990; Certified Gold by the RIAA, the Recording Industry Association of America). Fromholz appeared in several nationally significant motion pictures (*Outlaw Blues* [1977] starring Peter Fonda and Susan Saint James, for example) and a collection of stage productions. A detailed list of these accomplishments appear in the "Moon Hill" section of Chapter 7, "Cultural Products."

The segue from the seventies to the eighties ushered in a new group of Austin musicians in a natural generational shift, thus creating a younger market that was represented by a new weekly publication, the *Austin Chronicle*. The *Chronicle*, established in 1981, was co-founded by Nick Barbaro and Louis Black, both active participants in the punk scene, and their aesthetic foundations understandably displayed a liberation and distance from the sounds of the previous decade and signified a sea change in popular culture reportage. There's little doubt that the "cosmic cowboys" and the progressive country scene had fallen out of favor with the popular press and media, but these local publications and regional radio stations were the very sources that had played a significant role in creating the popular monikers and the enduring definitions of the genres and styles of the decade. The cosmic cowboys were still successfully making music during the 1980s, but their exploits enjoyed less ink in the new decade although many of their compositions continued on the airwaves and on broadcast formats like *Austin City Limits* and related television and big screen presentations. Their legacies, individually and collectively were enhanced by a new generation of singer-songwriters like Steve Earle, Lyle Lovett and Robert Earl Keen who continued to reference and record their compositions in the late 1980s through the second decade of the 21st century. In sum, the cosmic cowboys continued to make music, produce hit records, develop new fans, and in some cases mass considerable fortunes by plying their trade on the international public stage in keeping with the "requirements and values of the national recording industries" that Shank claimed had eluded them in the 1970s.

This chapter began by referencing aspects of the creation myth that Shank incorporated into his narrative then moved on to consider certain arguments presented in *Dissonant Identities* that seemed inconsistent with the reports and remembrances of contemporary informants and related scene observers. Revisiting the creation myth and layering in additional observations by Shank has been an effort to round out my ethnographic interpretation of Austin's music scene framed as a prolific climate of creativity. This enhanced rendition continues to argue that the key protagonists were dedicated to the art of songwriting . . . They were songwriters before they were cowboys, Indians, heroes, villains or other colorful characters that these storytellers might have encountered during their mind's-eye imagineering. This expanded rendition also

considers the role of the support players to argue that they were much more than a rag-tag assemblage of musicians who "were certain that they were onto a sure thing" and incorporated "a performance style that emphasized intoxicated looseness, spontaneity, and a tongue-in-cheek attitude toward their own professional status."²⁵⁶ I now move on to another slice of Austin music history. The period of the late 1960s when many of the causal components of the successful 1970s scene took shape.

²⁵⁶ Shank, p. 244. This footnote requires expanded context: Shank borrows this notion of intoxicated spontaneity from Hugh Cullen Sparks (not "Speedy Sparks" who Shank incorrectly names in the index; "Speedy" Sparks" is a long-time bass-player for Doug Sahm, and even though Hugh Cullen also played bass, the two are distinct Austin personalities). Hugh Cullen mentions this "tongue-in cheek attitude" in his dissertation: Sparks, Hugh Cullen. *Stylistic Development and Compositional Processes of Selected Solo Singer/Songwriters in Austin, Texas*. Ph.D Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1984. In this dissertation Sparks makes direct references to the Austin Interchangeable Band (which is where Shank gets the term and the majority of his information on the so-called group, which of course was not an official "group") and their ability to perform "often in a state of questionable sobriety." Shank however takes this concept and runs with it to support his antimodern claims regarding the musicians of the seventies avoiding real work and thinking they had it made. I address this caricature of the seventies' musicians in the section above regarding touring schedules and professional recording techniques. At bottom, what's going on here with Shank commandeering Sparks's comments on the Interchangeable Band is to once again wrap the Austin scene around his postmodern theory that argues that there was a "major transformation" in the mechanics of music-making in Austin as the antimodern ethos of the seventies yielded to the postmodern environment of the mid-eighties. This theory does not match the reality on the streets of Austin during the 1970s. Further, Shank's use of Sparks's comments about the Interchangeable Band lack accurate context and fail to reflect Sparks's affection for this group of scallywags and drunks (as portrayed by Shank)! In the acknowledgements of his dissertation, Sparks makes the following comment about the Austin Interchangeable Band: "I would be remiss if I were to fail to mention all the many unnamed sidemen, those collectively known as the Austin Interchangeable Band, who have always been the backbone of the music industry in Austin. It has been my good fortune over the years to be acquainted both personally and professionally with many of them and I owe much of my knowledge of and interest in commercial music to them. Their love for their art and craft as well as their professionalism and spirit of cooperativeness have been most inspiring." (Sparks, p. vi.)

Chapter 4

THE SOUNDS OF THE 1960S TO THE SONGS OF THE 1970S

In early 2011, I submitted an article to the *Austin American Statesman* for their "Tails of the City" series that features short essays from Austinites depicting their special relationships with the city. I wrote about my arrival in Austin during the summer of 1967 as a seventeen-year-old rock 'n' roll guitar player from Washington D.C. preparing for my undergraduate life at the University of Texas. The *Statesman* published the article, "Music in the Air," in conjunction with two other selections from fellow Austinites who had ties to the music scene in Austin in a three-article presentation titled, "Three Tales of the City, Three Lives Set to Austin's Varied Soundtracks." The series appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Statesman* on Sunday, March 20, 2011, the final day of the South by Southwest annual Music and Media Conference. What follows is the article as published:

Music in the Air

The first thing I noticed when I walked into my new apartment on Red River Street the summer of 1967 was music in the air. It wasn't the processed sounds of Muzak—although the living room of my apartment was only slightly larger than an elevator—it was a familiar pop song: "Give me a ticket for an airplane, ain't got time to take a fast train . . ." The source: a small radio built into the wall, tuned to Austin's top-40 radio station, KNOW-AM.

"Pretty cool," I thought, cranking up the volume on "The Letter," a big hit that summer for the Box Tops. In the following weeks, I cruised other radio stations and heard much more than the Billboard chart-toppers. Austin stations played original recordings by local groups like the Sweetarts and the Lavender Hill Express; they broadcast live sets from local nightclubs and interviewed local musicians. Who knew?

These eclectic radio formats served as my initial guide to the Austin music scene, a scene I found much more accessible than the highly commercial environment I knew as a guitar-playing high school student in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Listening to these real-time broadcasts of contemporary Austin bands rekindled my passion for making music, a passion I had put on hold to start college and "get serious about my future." According to the proscribed middle-class baby boomer template, it was time for me to get a college education, prepare for a career and move beyond adolescent escapades like playing in a rock band. My folks were picking up the tab and counting on me to stick with the academic program. I lasted one semester before I began to drift, kind of like a radio

station.

I found myself slipping into the current of electric guitars, oversized amplifiers and top-40 tunes. By my sophomore year, I was back in the band business. We had an accounting major on bass, a pre-med student on drums, and a repertoire long on aspirations. Our power-rock trio was ready to take on the town.

Austin was a medium-size college town of 250,000 in the late '60s, but it had the live-music momentum of a major metropolis. Within a three-mile radius of the university there were clubs and venues that hosted the full spectrum of Austin-flavored music.

The Jade Room and the New Orleans Club just east of the Capitol showcased the hot rock acts of the period. The Split Rail and the Broken Spoke on South Lamar were the premiere two-stepping country joints, and Threadgill's on North Lamar put on legendary Wednesday night jam sessions—a honky-tonk-hootenanny hybrid featuring classic country/blues pickers trading tunes with bohemian folkies from UT. Eastside clubs like the Victory Grill, Charlie's Playhouse and the after-hours hot spot, Ernie's Chicken Shack, were the epicenter of the Central Texas rhythm & blues scene. The Vulcan Gas Company, a cavernous affair with a thunderous sound system and pulsating light show, was the countercultural playground for Austin's hippies. Shiva's Headband, one of the first local acts to land a major-label recording contract, was the house band. The 13th Floor Elevators, a seminal psychedelic band, and progressive rockers like the Conqueroo and Bubble Puppy routinely joined venerable blues masters like Muddy Waters and new bluesmen like Johnny Winter on Vulcan billings. You could catch Janis Joplin at the 11th Door folk club on Red River.

Austin's municipal parks featured open-air concerts—abbreviated versions of San Francisco's "peace and love" soirees—and hometown promoters put on Sunday afternoon rock shows in ad hoc concert settings outside town like King's Village and Hill on the Moon. On the UT campus, musical events ranged from an Aaron Copeland concert in Hogg Auditorium to the Allman Brothers and Leon Russell playing outdoors beneath a cloud of marijuana smoke at Clark Field. There were "folksings" in the Union's Chuck Wagon restaurant and buskers working the Drag. Austin's municipal event venues, Palmer Auditorium and the now-defunct City Coliseum, periodically hosted national touring attractions like Bob Dylan. The city supported distinctive outdoor events like the annual Austin Aqua Festival, which introduced the "Battle of the Bands," a precursor to Austin's identity as the "live music capital of the world." Local promoter Rod Kennedy produced jazz and folk concerts at the Zilker Park Hillside Theater, a series that foreshadowed his Kerrville Folk Festival which began in 1972.

The sounds that floated through a city of 250,000 forty years ago shared a similar significance to what's happening now, as the city approaches the 1 million mark. When I became a professional guitar

player in 1970, I was fortunate to meet some of the prominent singer-songwriters who ushered in the so-called "progressive country" era in Austin and to begin touring and recording under their experienced wings. My first teacher however, was that spirited scene in the late 1960s, when the music in the air shaped Austin's climate of creativity for decades to come.

The Austin Scene of the Late 1960s

Short of the influx of the exceptional collection of singer-songwriters that gravitated to Austin in the early 1970s, the most significant contributing factor to Austin's debut on the international stage was Austin's music scene of the late 1960s. This prolific period has been overshadowed by the lavish attention paid to the progressive country decade that followed. In many respects, the 1970s was a more convenient decade to cover from a journalistic perspective. The era was conveniently summed up under the rubric of "progressive country," "redneck rock," or similar monikers that signified the unification of two disparate cultural groups, most commonly the rednecks and the hippies. Inasmuch as the media coined these phrases, they were not shy about using them.²⁵⁷ And, in light of the national airplay and chart activity generated by the records released by Murphey, Walker, Nelson, Stevenson and others, this group of Austin-based singer-songwriters enjoyed their fair share of media attention. There were many other styles and musical currents at play in Austin during the 1970s. World-class talent waited in the wings—outstanding musicians and stylists like Eric Johnson and Stevie Ray Vaughan, young writers with knapsacks full of songs and ideas—and proto-scenes bubbled that would soon enjoy their time in the international klieg lights. But through the bulk of the 1970s, the ink, the airwaves, and the media cameras largely focused on the so-called cosmic cowboys.

Unlike the 1970s, the local music scene in Austin during the late 1960s lacked a unifying theme. There were certainly high-points of national exposure with chart successes like "You're Gonna Miss Me" by the 13th Floor Elevators that peaked at #55 on the *Billboard* Pop Singles chart in 1966 and "Hot Smoke and Sassafras" by Austin rockers Bubble Puppy that peaked at #14 on the *Billboard* Pop Singles chart in 1969, but

²⁵⁷ The term "progressive country" was coined by KOKE-FM, "redneck rock" was coined by writer Jan Reid, and "cosmic cowboy," although the title of Murphey's song, was commandeered by music critics to define the contemporary sounds, players, and participants of the period.

short of the term "psychedelic rock" that was commonly applied to these and other adventurous Austin rock bands, there was not a pan-Austin moniker that contemporary media sources adopted to define the mélange of local music-making during the late 1960s.²⁵⁸ The lack of a common category was not a deficiency; it was a refreshing accuracy. Like many mid-sized American cities during this period that were college towns with diverse ethnic and sociological bases and notable Bohemian underpinnings, and like many municipalities that hosted large military installations or state capitals that periodically welcomed an assortment of legislators and their accompanying entourages, Austin's music was all over the aesthetic map. Austin did exhibit a defining characteristic that set it apart from other urban climates of creativity during the late 1960s.

Austin had an uncommonly robust commercial music scene that enabled a qualified musician to make a living. A young player could pursue their individual musical aspirations while earning a steady paycheck by practicing their craft. Ernie Gammage, a highly respected and active voice in the history of Austin music and the co-founder of one of Austin's premiere 1960s-era rock bands, the Sweetarts, commented on the Austin scene of the 1960s:²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ For a comprehensive assessment of the career of Roky Erickson and the 13th Floor Elevators, see: *Eye Mind - The Saga of Roky Erickson and the 13th Floor Elevators, the Pioneers of Psychedelic Sound* by Paul Drummond. (Los Angeles: Process Media, 2007).

²⁵⁹ The following information is drawn from a vita from Ernie Gammage supplied to the author in early 2011 titled "Music and Music Business Development Bio:" Ernie Gammage has been performing professionally since 1963. As a vocalist and bassist, his early bands included the Sweetarts, who signed in 1965 with the Dallas-based Vandan label and then with Sonobeat Records. Their Sonobeat single, "A Picture of Me," was purportedly the world's first stereo 45. Later bands included Plum Nelly, a mainstay of Austin's burgeoning "progressive country" scene of the 1970s, Mother of Pearl, the popular pop/rock group that earned a slot on *Austin City Limits* TV show, and Ernie Sky & the K-Tels. Gammage is a founding figure in the development of the Austin music industry. His work with the Austin Chamber of Commerce in the mid-1980s began efforts that continue to this day. Gammage has served in a leadership capacity in the Texas Music Association (president), the Austin Chamber of Commerce's Austin Music Advisory Committee, Austin Music Industry Council and Entertainment Industry Council (chairman), Austin Community College's Commercial Music Curriculum Development Committee and Commercial Music Advisory Board (chairman), and City of Austin Music District Committee (chairman). Gammage's contributions and development materials are housed at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas in the Troupe Earnest Gammage III Papers, 1981–1992.

Austin bands rose to regional prominence on the crest of an unbelievably vibrant fraternity party and club scene in the mid-60s Austin, Texas. Playing three parties a weekend was not uncommon, and this didn't include club dates. The musical variety was an incredible hodge-podge of styles that mimicked what was heard on the Top-Forty radio stations of the day. It was all rock 'n' roll!²⁶⁰

The "hodge-podge" that Gammage mentions reflects the dynamic musical environment during the 1960s as legions of baby boomers began to rock 'n' roll a path to their majority. The boomer generation embraced the light-hearted rock of the late 1950s and 1960s, the country-pop crossover hits of Chet Atkins' "Nashville sound," soul music, Motown, and hits from young crooners and divas in the wake of the Elvis explosion. The 1960s introduced the commercialization of American folk idioms through Peter, Paul and Mary and the countercultural poetry of Bob Dylan and by mid-decade the U.S. welcomed the tougher, blues-oriented sound of the British Invasion with groups like the Rolling Stones and a contingent of hard-charging guitar stylists like Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Jimmy Page. Then of course, there was the ubiquitous influence of the Beatles. Gammage reduces these major trends in American popular music to a typical band repertoire for the Austin party market:

Because the party scene demanded that the bands know the latest songs, it was not unusual to find Sam and Dave, the Beatles, Little Johnny Taylor, Johnny Rivers, the Beau Brummels, The Byrds, Buddy Holly, Otis Redding, and Sly and the Family Stone all in the same set, not to mention Smokey Robinson, Rufus Thomas, Manfred Mann, or Eddie Floyd. As the decade matured, the music became more adventurous with the advent of Cream, The Band, Jimmy Hendrix, the Doors and a host of other legends. It was just a great time to make music, and the original music of that period reflected all these styles.²⁶¹

The 1960s was a great time to make music and the act of reproducing these popular sounds on Austin's stages represented a powerful cultural interconnection

²⁶⁰ Gammage, Ernie, from an interview with the online magazine *Lance Monthly* in 2001: "An Interview with the Sweetarts - One of Austin Texas's Premier Bands of the Sixties," by Mike Dugo for *Lance Monthly*. © Mike Dugo, *Lance Monthly*, Chief Staff Writer (U.S. '60s Garage Band Columnist). *Lance Monthly* is an online publication and according to their website, they focus on "rock 'n' roll music of the '50s, '60s, and early '70s, performed by groups from those decades." (<http://www.lancerecords.com/>).

²⁶¹ Sweetarts Interview, *Lance Monthly*, 2001.

between the sociological diverse elements of a generation. A decade before the symbolic passing of the cultural peace pipe between the hippies and the rednecks during the progressive country years, Gammage's contemporary repertoire was etched into the developing sensibilities of the boomers by way of a mass AM radio market and the emergence of a freewheeling FM format that opened the floodgates of innovative broadcast programming. This eclectic musical mix was reinforced through television appearances of top rock groups like the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show, the Rolling Stones on Dean Martin, or the weekly antics of the Monkees on NBC. From transistor radios on the beach to the family TV set, or from the broadcast power of the big-city broadcast centers and the mega-watt output of border radio in the southwest to rock 'n' roll movies on the silver screen, pop music permeated the daily lives of the baby boomers.

Before forming the Sweetarts, Gammage played with one of the seminal copy bands of the 1960s, the Fabulous Chevelles. This three-piece rock combo—guitar, bass and drums—focused on the latest top-forty hits and played a special role in the development of Austin's lucrative live-entertainment market. Charlie Hatchett, the Chevelles' bandleader, was guitar player, a law student, and the city's most aggressive and effective booking agent. When Hatchett graduated from law school, he bypassed a legal career and dedicated his efforts to his booking agency. Hatchett Talent reigned as the top grossing copy-band agency in Central Texas for decades. Hatchett and his associates secured an incalculable number of gigs for generations of Austin musicians. According to Gammage, "There was an unbelievable amount of work [during the mid- to late-1960s] because the University of Texas was loaded with fraternity boys whose weekends were devoted to partying."²⁶² This supercharged market required that musicians deliver the latest songs to an informed audience in a crisp and convincing fashion. This was a considerable challenge for several reasons. The sheer volume of the international pop-music market and the accelerated turnover on the national charts made for an extensive body of new material. Different clients required different styles of music and as Gammage illustrates above, the top copy bands traveled with an extensive repertoire. There were not only new songs; there were new sounds. Many of the top hits

²⁶² Sweetarts Interview, *Lance Monthly*, 2001.

featured technological sound enhancements, different styles of amplifiers and guitars, new electronic keyboards and sometimes even novel synthesizer effects. Young rockers spent considerable time in their local music stores checking out the latest gadgets and keeping up with the expanding parameters of sound reinforcement technology. Riding the sixties' song and sound waves required routine workouts and regular homework assignments.

The reference to homework is appropriate for the Austin scene of the period because band members interested in maintaining their popular standing in the hierarchy of working musicians had to master their weekly assignment by learning the new tunes on the charts and rehearsing them with their group. Further, this exercise provided these young players with a musical foundation that would inform their entire professional careers. This process involved much more than simply learning the chord structures of few new songs. Determining the basic chord structure was relatively easy. Most of the popular hits were simple progressions that revolved around predictable chords.²⁶³ And, if all else failed, one could invest \$1.25 and purchase the sheet music to the particular troublesome title and learn the chords from the tablature that accompanied the scored music.²⁶⁴

The real challenge was determining how the popular band got their particular sound; what combination of instruments were involved; how the various instruments layered in and out of the arrangement; the structure of the vocal harmonies; the nature of the rhythm track, the way the drums and the bass guitar laid down the basic groove, and the texture of the support instruments. They needed to learn the chord voicings that the rhythm instruments employed and the appropriate passing chords; the characteristics of the lead instrument breaks and the tones and inflections used on the recordings; and the role of various embellishment sounds like percussion instruments or special electronic effects. In essence, this involved listening to a cut over and over, studying all the component parts and often improvising elements when a players' particular band didn't

²⁶³ The efficacy of progressions, chords, structure and how the simple components of music theory blend into the evolution of the Austin scene is addressed in the next chapter.

²⁶⁴ "Tablature" is the charting out of the guitar chords for popular songs that is positioned above the standard musical staff that enabled players who were unable to read the intricate scores a way to easily determine the basic chord structure.

have a horn or a string section. It involved moving the tone arm on the phonograph back a few grooves until one mastered the inflections of their individual part. Through this pragmatic and often cumbersome approach, many young Austin musicians—most of whom couldn't read music—were trained as ad hoc musicologists by earning their weekly paychecks in their respective copy bands.

Most significantly, this procedure applied to a specific group of copy-rock musicians who were prominent in Austin's pop-music scene of the late 1960s, a group that populated the top bands who regularly played the fraternity and sorority parties, the local outdoor concerts, and the nightclubs around town during the period. Names like Ernie Gammage, Charlie Hatchett, Al Staehely, John Staehely, Gary P. Nunn, John Inmon, Leonard Arnold, Layton DePenning, Richard Mullen, Patterson Barrett, Chet Himes, Michael Christian, Donny Dolan, Jerry Potter, and Todd Potter come to mind. Many of these names may not register with the casual observer, but when a student of the Austin scene considers the extensive collection of record albums produced during the early 1970s, these are the names they will find in the recording credits. This list includes the names of key music business operatives and recording specialists in the ongoing Austin scene. As mentioned, Charlie Hatchett continued as a top talent agent through the 1990s and still plays with his popular group, the Chevelles in the 21st century. Al Staehely is a successful music business attorney based in Houston, Chet Himes went on to engineer the Christopher Cross albums in the early 1980s for Warner Brothers Records and remains active in the Austin studio scene, and Richard Mullen provided the award-winning engineering excellence for the recordings of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimmie Vaughan, and Eric Johnson. All of these talented individuals were active contributors to the Austin copy-rock scene of the late 1960s. They were all instrumental in establishing the singular climate of creativity that welcomed a new generation of singer-songwriters to Austin in the early 1970s.

"The act of learning 'other people's material' is not as cool as doing your own." This statement summarizes many of the attitudes I observed as a "copy-rocker" during the late 1960s in Austin. Then and now the practice of mastering copy music has been considered by many aspiring musicians to be a second-tier undertaking. The true path to success lies in developing one's original material. Hit songs, after all, aren't created by

tediously copying a previous chart-topper. Hit songs are created by building something from the ground up!²⁶⁵ This certainly rings true, but learning copy music and pursuing original compositions are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they work hand in hand. At bottom, to the beginner, it's all "copy music!" For centuries the great classical instrumentalists have spent countless hours learning "other people's stuff," and contemporary rock players have similarly studied the work of their predecessors. To illustrate this process, I will recount my initial meeting with now legendary guitarist Eric Johnson during my tenure as a copy-rocker in Austin.²⁶⁶

In 1969 I was a slapdash rock guitar player in a small power rock trio that focused on the rougher sounds of Cream, Led Zeppelin, Hendrix, and other guitar-oriented bands. The bass player, Rusty Keith and I lived in a small apartment on 45th Street; we were trying to maintain our status as UT undergraduates, but spent the majority of our time listening to, playing, or dreaming about music. In the evenings, we began hearing what sounded like a rock concert somewhere in the neighborhood. We recognized the music—Cream, Zeppelin, Hendrix, B.B. King—all the styles we liked, and we soon found the source of the sounds. It was an attractive, middle-class home at the end of Barrow Avenue, only a few hundred yards from our small apartment. As we learned later, the house belonged to Dr. Johnson, an Austin physician, and his son Eric lived in the renovated garage attached to the main residence.

One evening when the local concert began, Rusty and I decided to pay a visit. As we approached the house it was obvious that someone was playing the guitar in the garage, and when we tapped on the door a young man with striking blue eyes answered.

²⁶⁵ The subject of "building something from the ground up" is addressed in the next chapter where I argue that there are a finite number of building blocks in Western music. The grand canon of Western music dating back to the Middle Ages is essentially a product of twelve specific notes. This limited selection of "musical DNA" suggests that the way the components are mixed, matched, and combined has a great deal to do with the ultimate output of a song. This is why listening to the songs of others, considering the specific parts, how they fit together and why, is a worthy lesson for aspiring young players.

²⁶⁶ Native Austinite Eric Johnson (b. 1954) is one of the most highly respected guitar players in the world. He has earned seven Grammy nominations with one win in 1992 for his song "Cliffs of Dover" from the album *Ah Via Musicom*, for "Best Rock Instrumental Performance." He is regularly featured in *Guitar Player* magazine and similar contemporary publications, and is generally considered as one of the most innovative and creative guitar players of the last thirty years.

We explained that we had a band, we'd heard the music, we were curious, and he invited us in to listen as he went about his practice session. He was playing along with a Cream cut, "Sittin' on Top of the World," a live version of an old blues number off the *Goodbye Cream* album, and I simply couldn't believe what I was hearing. The recording was quintessential, 1960s-era, live Eric Clapton that highlighted many of his signature licks, sounds, and phrasings. Johnson had captured them perfectly and in subsequent visits to Johnson's guitar lab, he displayed similar prowess in imitating the styles of other guitar greats of the day like Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, B.B. King and various venerable blues and jazz players. To have mastered the intricacies of such a stylistic range was an incredible accomplishment for a fifteen-year-old high school student. Even with my limited grasp of the instrument, I realized that I was witnessing something truly exceptional.

Learning the contemporary nuances of rock guitar performance required a unique set of sonic skills. Even the most detailed music score was inadequate as an instructional tool and, as mentioned, the majority of the young players were musically illiterate. Determining the proper notes was simply a preliminary step. In the case of a guitar player learning a new song, the six-string explorer had to analyze the tone of the recorded instrument—Was the sound heard on the recording a product of the guitar, the amplifier, or the variable settings on each instrument? It is important to consider that electric guitarists were playing guitars and amplifiers. Was the guitar signal highly processed in the recording process; in other words, were there sound effects added in the studio and could those effects be produced in a live environment? How was the performing guitarist approaching the strings? Was the player bending notes to arrive at a certain pitch or was he sliding up to the appropriate note? What was the recording artist's vibrato technique—Was it a slow, rolling and reserved style that typified Clapton's approach or a quick, shimmering vibrato that characterized B.B. King's style? How was the player on the recording achieving the long sustained notes that mimicked the sound of a continuous bow motion on the strings of a violin? Was it a function of a feedback loop between the guitar and the amplifier or was it inherent in the type of guitar that was being played? These are a few of many technical challenges involved in the discovery process of reproducing a section of recorded guitar music and these examples typified the techniques that Johnson explored every night in his practice sessions.

Johnson had meticulously studied the popular guitarists of the period; he had mastered their every nuance, and was well down the path of absorbing the delicate styles of the jazz and blues masters of previous decades while he was still in his teens. His grasp of technique and his technical wherewithal to navigate the fret board was simply remarkable. What is truly amazing is his practical application of this extensive inventory of guitar tools in creating his thoroughly individual style. By blending these influences, by maintaining a rigorous practice regimen, and by balancing technique and imagination Johnson created an ethereal plane of six-string interpretation and an ingenious new approach to the electric guitar. In an interview with *ACL* producer, Terry Lickona, Johnson shared some insights about his approach to music:

The guitar presents a daily challenge to stay focused on my craft and inspirations. Every day I hone in on how I'm playing and I consider where it all comes from. I'm constantly trying to figure out a way to reinvent what I'm doing and try to take it to another place. Not necessarily a more complicated place, but a new aperture to travel through. To me, that's the real challenge, and when I do stumble on something—whether it falls from the heavens or comes through diligent work and discipline—I feel like I've found a jewel among the pebbles. It's through this daily search that I've developed my approach to the guitar and tried to create my own signature sound.²⁶⁷

Johnson's "daily challenge" has undoubtedly produced a "signature sound," a career of unparalleled excellence, and has altered the way new generations of musicians approach the electric guitar. Johnson's "daily challenge" that I initially observed in its aesthetic infancy in 1969 was shared by many of the dedicated musicians in Austin during the late 1960s. Granted, Eric Johnson's efforts and the musical products of his extraordinary approach occupy a singular tier in the evolution of popular American music, but the fundamental approach of meticulously studying the popular sounds of the day was not lost on players like John Inmon, Leonard Arnold, Layton DePenning, Gary P. Nunn and other aspiring players of the period. Like Johnson, they were determined to contribute to the course of modern American music; they valued the popular sounds of the day and were curious to discover why they were in fact "popular." These musicians

²⁶⁷ From Eric Johnson's post-*ACL* filming interview with Terry Lickona, from the archives of the Exhibition, "*Austin City Limits: Making Music-Making History*." (2005, NBMA&M [New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music]).

entertained a deep respect for their talented predecessors and they found Austin's unique climate of creativity *and* economic opportunity conducive to their ongoing musical missions.

There is little doubt that there were other unique climates of music creativity at play around the country. There were myriad college towns populated with affluent baby boomers eager to experience the ubiquitous presence of *their* music and *their* identifying trends in popular culture. The youthful American demographic was replete with pop-music wannabes and there were innumerable living rooms across the country with novice musicians huddled around turntables trying to replicate the latest songs and sounds that defined their current cultural tastes. Austin was different. This central Texas city stood alone for three reasons. First, musicians could make a living in Austin's healthy live-music economy during the late 1960s. This aspect has been addressed above. In sum, Austin copy-bands could sustain a steady paycheck through weekend frat parties and club dates while pursuing their strategic "big-time" dreams. Second, there was a viable recording infrastructure in Austin during this period. This aspect is addressed immediately below through the analysis of Sonobeat Records. And, third, because of the lucrative live-music environment and the practical experience gained by working with a professional regional recording and promotional operation, Austin musicians were primed for the influx of the singer-songwriters in the early 1970s. This relationship between the extant Austin music scene and the new arrivals concludes this chapter.

Before moving on to Sonobeat Records, it is important to consider the significance of a "record" in the music world of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Stated simply, to make a record was a big deal. It signified an immediate leap in credibility and was considered a passport to the big time. As discussed in other sections of this study, recording during this period was an expensive, labor-intensive undertaking. "Making a record" was a multi-step process that involved the physical transfer of analog audio tracks from one format to another. Multi-track recordings were mixed to a final two-track master tape, transferred to an acetate test pressing to verify fidelity, then on to a mother master that served as the template from which a stamp was fabricated and used to "press" the grooves into a vinyl disc that emerged as a 45 RPM single or 33¹/₃ long-playing album for public sale. Consequently, when the expectant musician finally received their

"record" in 1969, they were in possession of a specialized cultural product that represented a substantial investment on the part of third parties in the band's talent and in their future. The group that made a record at this time was therefore special, they were professionals by virtue of this accomplishment, and considered to be a cut above their contemporaries.

Sonobeat Records

Much like the popular reportage of the 1970s, contemporary treatments of the late 1960s have focused on certain themes while overlooking others that have been essential in the development of Austin's long-term musical and aesthetic development. Just as the commonly accepted history of the seventies focuses on Threadgill's, the Vulcan, the Armadillo and the arrival of Willie Nelson, the commonly accepted treatments of the late 1960s focuses on select developments like the national popularity of the 13th Floor Elevators and their "psychedelic" sound and other key acts of the period like Shiva's Headband and the Conqueroo as well as the role of the Vulcan. These pioneer bands were key contributors to the evolution of modern Texas rock music. The focus on these figures is well deserved, but there is another story to be told about music-making in Austin during the years leading up to the acclaimed decade of the 1970s. It's a story not readily available in the popular journalistic and academic accounts that can be framed around the history of an independent Austin recording company, Sonobeat Records.

As Austin's popular copy bands experienced success in the live-entertainment market, many of these acts were simultaneously working on their "original" material and that effort often led them to Sonobeat Records. This small record company, originally established in early 1967 by Bill Josey, Sr. and his son, Bill Josey, Jr., grew from their affiliation with one of Austin's radio stations, KAZZ which secured its FCC license in 1957 and began broadcasting in 1958. The station and the ensuing record label became prime players in the evolution of the Austin music scene of the late 1960s. In the various sources named in Chapter 2 that address the history of the Austin scene of the 1970s and by extension, the ramp up to that prolific decade during the late 1960s—Jan Reid, Archie Green, Larry Willoughby, Bill Malone, Joe Nick Patoski and Bill Crawford, Alan C. Turley, Rick Koster, Barry Shank, and Gary Hartman—Sonobeat Records is not

mentioned.²⁶⁸ Nonetheless, Sonobeat was one of the most influential institutions in Austin's music history during the late 1960s and touched the careers of many of the key local musicians who would help shape the scene of the 1970s.

Like many advances in the history of American popular music and the entertainment industry, Sonobeat Records was rooted in the radio broadcast business.²⁶⁹ The seeds of Sonobeat were initially planted when Bill Josey, Jr. signed on as a DJ with Austin's KAZZ-FM. In 1964 KAZZ-FM was a broadcast novelty: It operated on an FM bandwidth thus enabling it to operate with a higher quality stereophonic signal. The station played a selection of "album cuts" rather than the singles common to AM stations. KAZZ had a wide-open programming format and "was credited by *Billboard* magazine as the first FM station in the U.S. to regularly program rock 'n' roll music."²⁷⁰ And, in what might be its most novel practice, the station routinely broadcast live from Austin-area nightclubs featuring the hot young acts of the era. Bill Josey, Jr. described how the Sonobeat seeds developed in the Austin market:

The formation of Sonobeat was influenced by and to some extent a natural extension of the KAZZ live remote broadcasts, if not of KAZZ itself. Bill Josey Sr. was KAZZ's general manager, Bill Jr. (whose "air name" was Rim Kelley) was its afternoon DJ and, during 1967, its program director, and Bill Sr. and Rim alternately hosted KAZZ's Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night remote broadcasts. Indeed, the live broadcasts introduced the Joseys directly to a broad cross-section of talented Central

²⁶⁸ It is entirely possible that I might have missed a reference to Sonobeat Records in these various texts, but there were no notable references to Sonobeat or the Josey family in these sources. Discussions that related to the late 1960s in the years ramping up to the 1970s focused on the Vulcan Gas Company, the 13th Floor Elevators, Shiva's Headband, and the Conqueroo that Reid initially presented in 1974. That said, there are various sources like Archie Green whose essay on the etymological basis of the term "cosmic cowboy" and Bill Malone whose work was a grand survey of country music in the United States would have little reason to visit this period of Ausin music history.

²⁶⁹ Since the introduction of broadcast radio in the early 1920s, radio stations have factored significantly into the growth of the recording industry. This is largely due to the technological requirements of the broadcast business. In the course of their day-to-day operations, radio stations had the microphones, amplifiers, audio reproduction equipment and technical personnel required for a fundamental broadcast effort. This was the same equipment necessary to make a sound recording as well as to broadcast an audio signal. Early radio stations were proto-recording studios and commonly played that role particularly through the first half of the 20th century as recording studios were developing on a parallel path.

²⁷⁰ From the Sonobeat Website "History" section: <http://sonobeatrecords.com/history1.html>. Hereinafter, "Sonobeat Site."

Texas musicians and their managers. When the Joseys decided to form Sonobeat, KAZZ offered access to musicians and to equipment and facilities the Joseys couldn't otherwise afford.²⁷¹

By 1967 the Josey team had many of the essential components in place for a small recording enterprise. They had access to microphones, an Ampex 354 professional 2-track tape recorder, they had the support of the local nightclubs who welcomed the live broadcasts and the bands who were eager to get their music out on the airwaves. The KAZZ-FM studio engineer designed and built a portable stereo mixer for location recording and with this key component, Sonobeat began a brisk building process that would soon yield a productive record label with notable national connections. Throughout the late 1960s Bill Josey and his son created a catalogue of high-quality audio recordings and commercial releases of young Austin musicians who would play a fundamental role in Austin's progressive country scene and in other scenes of national prominence.²⁷²

In 1968 Sonobeat was a going concern with an intense recording schedule that included an eclectic selection of Austin bands—Shiva's Headband, the Sweetarts, the Conqueroo, Afro-Caravan, and local favorite, the Lavender Hill Express—bands that were regular visitors to Austin—bluesman Johnny Winter and rockabilly notable Ray Campi—and folk music standouts like Allen Damron. This active recording schedule typifies Sonobeat's ongoing efforts through the late 1960s. This small company captured the music of an array of Austin-based and Austin-friendly bands. Sonobeat developed

²⁷¹ Sonobeat Site.

²⁷² The history of Sonobeat Records is a story that operates on many levels of contemporary American popular culture. The references I borrow from the Sonobeat story that relate to the nationally recognized "70s scene" represent only a slice of the Sonobeat purview of music Texana and Americana. The Joseys recorded many Texan musics—African-based bands (Wali and the Afro-Caravan for example), a variety of Latino groups (the nationally acclaimed Lee Arlano Trio), old-school country bands, Austin jazz musicians, Austin east-side blues, soul and R&B players, and an extensive collection of gospel music. Bill Josey, Sr. was a retired Naval officer who was a PT boat skipper in the Pacific theater during WWII and his son, Bill Jr. (aka "Rim Kelley) went on to a successful legal career. In 1973, Josey Senior moved the Sonobeat operation to an old church location in Liberty Hill that he called "Blue Hole Sounds" and continued to record regional talent. In early 1975 this venerable Austin recordist was diagnosed with cancer and in September 1976, Bill Josey, Sr. succumbed to lymphocarcinoma. At the the turn of the 21st century, Bill Josey, Jr. began collecting and archiving the Sonobeat tape library and created a first-class website that stands as a "Mini-Smithsonian" for Austin music and popular culture during this prolific period of Austin music history.

connections with some of the major labels of the day. In 1968, after releasing a single by Johnny Winter that created a regional stir, they sold a live Winter album recorded at the Vulcan Gas Company to Liberty Records in Los Angeles that launched the career of this young Texas blues player.

Sonobeat recorded and released a collection of singles that made regional stars out of several of the top local groups of the period. The list of bands and their recordings is extensive—Georgetown Medical Band, South Canadian Overflow, New Atlantis, Mariani (Vince Mariani, an extremely talented and progressive rock drummer quite popular in Austin during the late 1960s), to name a few—and the release of their music on the popular regional airwaves was a boon to the early careers of many Central Texas musicians. Hearing these popular bands on the radio invigorated the regional fan base, it expanded the drawing power of the groups in local clubs and significantly stimulated the entire Austin scene.

Other Sonobeat groups would produce many of the musicians who helped define the songs and sounds of the early 1970s. Plymouth Rock for example, featuring guitarist John Inmon and drummer Donny Dolan both of whom would later work in Jerry Jeff Walker's Lost Gonzo Band garnered regional airplay with their release "Memorandum" in 1969. The Sweetarts featuring Ernie Gammage had several notable single releases, particularly their 1967 single, "A Picture of Me" that was highly praised in the national trade publication *Cash Box* magazine. And the Lavender Hill Express featuring Rusty Wier, Leonard Arnold, Gary P. Nunn and Layton DePenning became one of the most popular bands in Texas through three single releases on Sonobeat Records.²⁷³ Sonobeat not only recorded these groups and released the records, they actively promoted the singles by sending advance copies to radio stations around the state and followed up with telephone campaigns for airplay. The Joseys worked with independent record distributors to insure that the records were available in regional markets and they worked with a band's managers to facilitate band appearances in key markets where their single was generating radio play.

²⁷³ Lavender Hill Express released three singles on Sonobeat Records: "Visions" (1967), "Watch Out" (1968), and "Outside My Window" (1968). All of these releases received strong airplay on regional radio stations aided by the efforts of their manager, Mike Lucas who was the program director and popular afternoon DJ at KNOW radio in Austin.

Sonobeat was a first-class regional record label that was instrumental in grooming a generation of talented Austin musicians for a career in music. At the same time, the Joseys were bringing the creative efforts of these regional players to a fresh and culturally invigorated Austin demographic. They created a professional template for a successful recording operation, they connected Texas talent with components of the mainstream recording industry, and they researched and implemented progressive recording techniques like releasing stereo (rather than mono) 45-RPM singles. They offered regional bands an avenue for a public review of their music through their collective experience in radio, recording and promotion. Through their creative efforts with Sonobeat the Joseys provided a profound and enduring boost to the Austin music scene and a generation of young musical seekers. They accomplished this not only through their expertise and research; they exhibited an ability to bring various elements of the Austin community together. This was no small task considering the diverse social, political and cultural environment of the period, an environment that Rossinow insightfully described in his chapter titled, "This Whole Screwy Alliance: The New Left and the Counterculture" which highlighted the notion of "'cultural' activism."²⁷⁴

This reference is not intended to suggest that the Joseys were politically motivated. It is intended to illustrate that they were operating in a highly charged socio-political environment where rock 'n' roll and all its radical connotations were at play in Austin and that creating a record label marketing this type of music involved a unique cultural challenge in the community. Given this challenge, Bill Josey, Sr. and Bill Josey, Jr. were uniquely qualified as a father and son partnership. Josey, Sr. was a retired Naval officer, a WWII combat veteran with an affection for gospel music and the radio business, and Josey, Jr. was a dedicated disc jockey and student of popular culture absorbed in the contemporary music of the day who regularly interviewed top national acts on KAZZ-FM who passed through Austin on promotional tours. Their singular partnership was dedicated to creating a professional business model that presented high-quality recordings that reflected the exceptional creativity of a young generation of talented musicians. The Joseys and their eclectic Sonobeat recording catalogue

²⁷⁴ Rossinow, p. 247.

represented the pragmatic unification of seemingly disparate generations years before the hippies and the rednecks congregated at the Armadillo.

At bottom, the late 1960s was a robust period in the evolution of Austin music. There was a lucrative live entertainment scene anchored in the weekend fraternity and sorority party market, the local nightclubs enjoyed solid and sustained sales, and through the trans-generational efforts of Sonobeat Records, the recordings of popular bands echoed on the regional airwaves. The prominent singer-songwriters who gravitated to Austin in the early 1970s were not met with an aesthetic or music business vacuum. They established their creative roots in a fertile musical environment populated by a community of talented and capable musicians.

Kick-Starting the Popular 1970s Scene

The final section of this chapter traces a connection between members of the Austin rock 'n' roll community and several of the prominent singer-songwriters who would establish aesthetic bases in Austin. This particular connection was one of several similar connections between Austin's rockers and peripatetic songsmiths and nationally recognized entertainers. Doug Sahm for example was in and out of Austin in his typical rambling style before moving back to Texas from the San Francisco Bay area in 1971. Sham ultimately settled in West Austin close to his favorite watering hole and entertainment venue, Soap Creek Saloon. Willie Nelson left Nashville and after an initial stay in the Helotes-Bandera area, he set up shop not far from the Armadillo in 1972. Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt were regular Austin visitors playing at the original Saxon Pub and Castle Creek located in the building that had housed the Chequered Flag. There were many such connections between the nationally acclaimed songwriters and entertainers and the Austin rock scene of the period, and what follows is one of the earliest links and one of the most strategically significant. This fortuitous connection begins with my initial encounter with Steven Fromholz at the Chequered Flag in 1970 then continues to explore the paths that brought Michael Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker to Austin.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ This story is most conveniently relayed through an autobiographical approach. I was not a primary progenitor in the forthcoming sequence of events. I was simply a participant observer.

Shortly after meeting Fromholz at the Chequered Flag, he expressed an interest in experimenting with some of his songs or with some of the Frummox material in a rock 'n' roll format. Fromholz and Dan McCrimmon's recent album, *From Here to There*, was a folk music recording, but several selections featured bass and drum arrangements and the two songwriters were interested in expanding their accompaniment parameters. At that time I was playing in a copy-rock band called the Eternal Life Corporation with a typical instrumental set-up of guitar, bass, drums and keyboards featuring a Hammond B-3 Organ with a Leslie tone cabinet that duplicated many of the "hit sounds" of era. My band mates were upper division or graduate students, they were solid musicians, and on my coaxing, they attended a Frummox show at the Chequered Flag and enjoyed what they heard.²⁷⁶ They expressed their approval for this genre-blending experiment and we invited Fromholz and McCrimmon over to the band house for a jam session.

The initial challenge in this folk-rock adventure was modifying the band's volume to allow our guests with their acoustic instruments to be heard. This may seem like trivial consideration, but issues surrounding band volumes often had a great deal to do with the band's particular sound. The argument from players wielding electric instruments maintained that they had to play at a certain decibel level to create that signature sound or to generate their favorite tones. This is true to a degree—there are definite "hot" levels that allow guitar players to accomplish specific effects that are not possible at lower decibel levels. Still, volume was often a crutch for electric instrument stylists and rock bands and our folk-rock adventure was dead on arrival if the rock component of the equation carried on like it was a Saturday night at the ΔΤΔ frat house.

Further, my experience reveals only one stream of activity in a more intricate collection of circumstances that culminated with Fromholz, Murphey, and Walker establishing lasting ties to Austin and its population of world-class musicians, support personnel, and music business operatives. It is my intention to continue this research and seek out the recollections and remembrances of my associates and fellow travelers who shared these experiences.

²⁷⁶ I mention the group's academic standing to suggest a degree of sophistication in artistic tastes and musical styles. The bass player, Charlie Cobb, was finishing up his MBA at U.T., drummer Michael Christian commuted to Texas State University in San Marcos (Southwest Texas State at that time) where he studied art and design, and keyboard player, Don McQuarie, was in the final stages of his dissertation, writing about Marxism for the Sociology Department at U.T. They shared my enthusiasm for the "wooden" music presented by Fromholz and McCrimmon and were happy to participate in this "folk-rock" experiment.

This was an important lesson of our rehearsals with Fromholz and McCrimmon: The arrangement had to revolve and evolve around the song; the electronic layering behind the material these two folk musicians brought to the session had to allow the lyrics and the subtle melodies breathe.

After two rehearsal and working up five or six up-tempo "Frummox" songs, the folk singers liked what they heard and were interested in a public unveiling of this curious mixture. The band was excited about playing with these well-known musicians who had recently released an album thus giving them the status of "recording stars" in they eyes of the young rockers. The folk musicians seemed to feel like had been given the keys to a high-performance sports car and they were eager to take it for a spin around the block. The Eternal Life Corporation was scheduled to play an outdoor show on an upcoming Sunday at the Hill on the Moon, the popular Hill-Country concert setting several miles west of Austin. I checked with the producers of the event, asked their indulgence, and they welcomed this modified rock & folk format. The Eternal Life Corporation played several songs that Sunday evening, Frummox came on and played several of their acoustic numbers, then we all convened on stage for a combined set. The folk-rock combo was well received by the local audience, several folks visited with us after the show with questions about the nature of the presentation, whether this was some new band that they could look for around town, many offered their encouragement, and Crady Bond, the owner of the property mentioned that he'd like to have us back for a future date. The major development of the evening as it would apply to the future of the early 1970s Austin scene rested with Fromholz's reaction to the folk-rock adventure. When we drove back into town began talking about forming a band. Evidently, Fromholz liked sports cars.²⁷⁷

The idea of a Fromholz band had been on his mind for several months. Since initially meeting Fromholz at the Chequered Flag, I had become a regular visitor to

²⁷⁷ To be clear, the fact that Fromholz was determined to start a band was not the procuring cause in the forthcoming paradigm shifts that shaped the nascent Austin scene of the early 1970s. Similarly, it was not that fact that I was a representative of the prolific Austin rock 'n' roll environment. Rather, it was the fact that Fromholz, as a respected member of a burgeoning group of extremely gifted singer-songwriters that included Michael Murphey, Jerry Jeff Walker, and others, recognized the creative potential of Austin's robust talent pool. Further, once Fromholz set his desire into motion, that decision yielded an unintended set of circuitous circumstances that ultimately affected the careers of Michael Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker.

Fromholz's home in Colorado. When I had a break from my band responsibilities in Austin, I would make the drive north and spend time with Fromholz and his lady, Janey Lake in the small mountain town of Gold Hill outside of Boulder. When Fromholz came to Austin, he would stay at my place and I accompanied him to his gigs in Houston, Dallas and San Antonio. During his Texas visits I introduced him to other musicians who were leaders in our regional scene like Gary P. Nunn, John Inmon, and Leonard Arnold. In terms of talent and experience, I was the junior member of this collection of contemporary rockers and it was gratifying to me to bring this successful recording artist to our rock 'n' roll tree house! Soon, some of these Austin players joined me in my trips to Colorado and a healthy Austin-Colorado musician exchange took shape. I remember Colorado trips with Nunn and the extremely talented singer-songwriter Richard Dean.²⁷⁸ These visits to Colorado were aesthetic adventures where young, headstrong urban musicians traveled to the primitive mountain retreat of a counterculture songster who was immersed in playing guitar and writing songs. They were romantic expeditions into a frontier of creativity.

Steven and Janey lived in a small cabin the community of Gold Hill, an abandoned late 19th-century mining town that was home to a Bohemian population of artists, writers, musicians and several families who manned the University of Colorado's meteorological station on a nearby mountain peak. Gold Hill wasn't really a town. There were no paved roads, no municipal amenities, and no commercial activities and with the exception of the Gold Hill Inn. This was the community's most elegant structure complete with running water and flush toilets that operated as a restaurant for several months each year catering to tourists who would venture up the mountain passes and switchbacks during the summer months. Gold Hill was a hippie hideaway and Fromholz and Janey opened their tiny home to their new friends from Texas.

I recall extended stays in Gold Hill when Nunn, Dean, Fromholz and I would spend days passing around guitars, songs, and ideas. It was an impromptu music salon, a

²⁷⁸ Richard Dean, a native Texan, had been living in Colorado in the late 1960s and, he was a regular on the Texas folk music circuit playing the Chequered Flag in Austin, the Rubaiyat in Dallas, and Sand Mountain in Houston. At the time I met Fromholz, Dean had relocated to Austin to play with a new rock band, Genesee with Gary P. Nunn and John Inmon. Dean and I spent time together playing his songs and I would accompany him from time to time when he performed as a single in Austin. I would later join Dean in a band project based in Colorado.

learning experience for all concerned that strengthened the ties between two groups of musicians who weren't commonly associated—a coterie of young Austin rockers who made their living on stage cranking out the top tunes of the day interspersed with the occasional "original" and a group of folkies who made an appreciable part of their living by shaping ideas, words, and melodies into songs that they publicly performed and floated in the commercial recording market. This exchange between musical camps had been underway for several months by the time Frummox and the rock band convened at Hill on the Moon.

This Sunday evening concert, an improvised musical mix performed for a handful of Austin hippies on a dusty Austin hillside, was not a seismic cultural event. The various picking sessions in Rocky Mountain hideaways or in Austin living rooms were hardly monumental. But these events coupled with Fromholz's determination to create a band did instigate a fortuitous chain of events. Not long after the Sunday evening Frummox-Eternal Life show Fromholz invited me to move to Colorado to build the band that we had been discussing. Fromholz was eager for a new direction. Circumstances in his musical career were shifting. ABC Records who had released the Frummox album was in the midst of a major shake up and the subdivision responsible for Fromholz and McCrimmon's recording future, abc probe, was in the mother company's crosshairs. This exceptional album, *From Here to There*, was destined to die on the corporate vine.²⁷⁹ Fromholz's enthusiasm for the Frummox project waned accordingly and he and McCrimmon drifted further apart as Fromholz focused on his solo career.

In the spring of 1971 I packed up my Volkswagen hatchback and moved to Colorado. My initial stop in the Rockies was Denver where I visited my songwriting friend who I had played with in Austin, Richard Dean. Dean had recently relocated to Denver to begin a new musical project with fellow songwriter Jim Schulman, another native Texan who was a regular on the regional folk circuit. Schulman had secured the support of a group of Denver investors who were willing to underwrite a band and recording project. Schulman and Dean were in the process of assembling their new band,

²⁷⁹ *From Here to There*, that includes the original recordings of "Texas Trilogy" and "Man with the Big Hat" would enjoy a resurgence in later years to become a highly valued collector's album. I believe *From Here to There* was one of the strongest folk-music records made in the late 20th century.

Timberline Rose. After a short visit in Denver, I continued on to meet Fromholz in Gold Hill to begin work on our new band. In my travel time between Austin and Gold Hill there had been a flurry of activity and when I arrived at Fromholz's doorstep, I learned that Fromholz had already found a band. Stephen Stills had recruited him for his 1971 international summer tour. Evidently Fromholz and Stills were acquaintances, Stills had mountain home in the Gold Hill area, the rock star had been keeping up with Fromholz's music and felt that this talented folk singer would be the ideal number-two man in his post Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young solo tour. Fromholz and the new Stills band, later to be known as Manassas, were beginning rehearsals immediately and although Fromholz assured me that we would rekindle the band concept after the Stills tour, I was currently unemployed. I returned to Denver and joined Timberline Rose.

The Timberline Rose experience was a valuable tutorial in lead guitar-song accompaniment. I was familiar with Dean's material from our time together in Austin, he was an extraordinary vocalist, Schulman brought a catalogue of well-written songs, and the musical blend of these two songwriters made for a unique light-rock contemporary sound. As a trio, Timberline Rose moved to Grand Lake on the southern edge of Rocky Mountain National Park where we had a house gig at a rustic mountain inn, the Rapids. It was an idyllic setting that provided the threesome an opportunity to rehearse daily and earn a steady, albeit meager, source of income. The plan was to continue to develop the Dean-Schulman song catalogue, add additional players, and record an album in the fall. Several untoward developments derailed these plans. The principal investor was killed in a motorcycle accident and shortly thereafter Schulman decided that I wasn't the right guitar player for the project. I was let go and retreated to Boulder to await Fromholz's return from the Stephen Stills summer tour. In truth, Schulman and I simply didn't get along, and as the events unfolded, relocating to Boulder was one of the most advantageous "retreats" I ever made. Timberline Rose continued their band-building efforts by recruiting several outstanding Austin musicians, Johnny Richardson on lead guitar, my past bandmate in Eternal Life, Michael Christian on drums, and Robert McEtee on bass but the band was unable to secure the new financing for the proposed recordings. Nonetheless, the connection between Austin musicians and out-of-town songwriters continued to grow through the expansion of the Timberline Rose band.

While living in Boulder, I met Michael Murphey and his bass player, Bob Livingston. They were on a tour swing through Colorado and Texas. Like Dean and Schulman, Murphey and Livingston were Texas natives who had moved elsewhere to seek out their break in the music business.²⁸⁰ At the time of our meeting, Murphey and Livingston were living in the San Gabriel Mountains outside San Bernardino dividing their time between working on their song catalogues in the small mountain town of Wrightwood and commuting to Los Angeles to conduct their music-related business. I joined the duo on lead guitar and we played a series of club dates in Colorado and Texas. While playing in Austin, I introduced Murphey to Gary P. Nunn, an introduction that would develop into a long and fruitful relationship. After approximately a month on the road I accompanied Murphey back to California where we continued to play music and write songs. During this period, I joined Murphey and Livingston in a Los Angeles studio to record a multi-song demo tape. Murphey was at a juncture in his career where he was determined to land a major recording contract. He had enjoyed a lucrative career as a staff songwriter for Screen Gems in Los Angeles and had recently completed an extensive recording project with Kenny Rogers and the First Edition. Murphey's next logical step was to take his music in his own voice to a broad American audience and the recording session in Los Angeles was an attempt to secure that valuable connection.

Murphey was a gracious host. He took me along on his Hollywood rounds and I met a variety of established players in the music business—members of the First Edition rock band who had sponsored the recording sessions, record producers, publishers, and a variety of real-time operatives in the business. Still, the center of activity on this California adventure was his cabin in Wrightwood where we continued to play music and experiment with the rock 'n' roll sounds I contributed to his songwriting efforts. This addition was a very important consideration in the evolution of the Austin music scene. The blending of rock 'n' roll guitar sounds and related rock textures into the songs of the writers associated with the early Austin scene was a fundamental aspect in the evolution of the music of the period. Although Murphey and I didn't realize it at the time, it would only be a matter of months until a number of Austin-based players were in full swing with several prominent singer-songwriters. There was about to be a "little bang" in

²⁸⁰ The details of this encounter are presented in Chapter 6.

Austin that would affect the futures of various hometown rockers and several nationally acclaimed songwriters.

The culmination of the California visit was an extended picking session at Murphey's home. Fromholz had returned to Colorado from the Stills tour and after several telephone exchanges, it was decided that he would join Murphey, Livingston and me in Wrightwood to work on a songwriting project. Murphey and Livingston along with Guy Clark had been involved with songwriter and hit recording artist Roger Miller in a project called Mountain Music Farm. Mountain Music Farm was a progressive music publishing company fashioned like a songwriting cooperative wherein the participants would draw a small stipend, while they worked individually and collectively to create marketable songs that would be presented to potential recording artists through Roger Miller's prestigious organization. Murphey and Livingston reasoned that Fromholz would be a positive addition to this unique publishing venture, plus, everybody wanted to get together, play music and catch up. Fromholz summoned his long-time sidekick and bass player, Travis Holland, and they drove west from Denver to the San Gabriel Mountains.

The week that followed was a memorable event. Charles John Quarto, an exceptional poet who had been collaborating with Murphey on various songs, joined us in Wrightwood, the songwriters tried out new material, there were extended jam sessions on old rock and country favorites, and Fromholz had a pocket full of hilarious stories from his summer spent with Stills and what he called the "Rock 'n' Roll Crazyes." Big plans which seemed extremely clever at the time bounced around the room, notepads with lyrics and chord charts piled up on the coffee table but soon reality ebbed back into the mix as the various players realized that they had to return to business of making a living in the nightclubs and listening rooms around the country. Fromholz, Holland and I returned to the Denver-Boulder area to round out the band we'd been contemplating for months, and Murphey and Livingston had more dates booked in Texas in the upcoming weeks. Murphey's trip to Texas would yield a defining moment and a long-awaited milestone in his career.

Murphey and Livingston were scheduled to play the Rubaiyat in Dallas, the small folk club where Murphey had played many of his earliest shows, and through the

intervention of an old friend in Dallas, they auditioned for one of the most successful record producers in the country, Bob Johnston. As Livingston related the story,

We went to Dallas, Texas and this guy Bob Johnson[sic], the guy that produced Dylan, Simon & Garfunkel, Johnny Cash, Flatt & Scruggs - I mean you name it - This fellow named R.D. Caldwell that we knew in Dallas says, "I know that guy [Bob Johnston]." So I said, "If you know him R.D., then have him come to see us!" and by God he did! One little Saturday afternoon, we were in *The Rubyat* [sic] in Dallas and we played for Bob Johnson. We went to Nashville the next week and cut *Geronimo's Cadillac*, Murphey's first record.²⁸¹

On the recommendation of R. D. Caldwell, Johnston had flown to Dallas for the express purpose of listening to Murphey's songs. He met the musicians at the club on a Saturday afternoon, and after listening to only two or three songs, he said to Murphey, "O.K., you've got a record deal," and then requested that they come to Nashville the following week to record.²⁸² At this point in his career, Johnston was operating as an independent record producer, he was not affiliated with a particular record label, and would routinely take a group into the studio, record an album, then place the finished product with a major recording company. This was the route he had in mind for Murphey.

The following week, Murphey, Livingston, and poet/lyricist Charles John Quarto drove to Nashville and settled into Studio A at Columbia Records in Nashville with Bob Johnston.²⁸³ There were no accompaniment musicians; Johnston had Murphey and Livingston set up just as they would at a live performance and begin going through songs. Johnston recorded each selection onto a multi-track format with Murphey on guitar with

²⁸¹ From an interview with Bob Livingston conducted by Chris Oglesby on December 4, 2000 at Livingston's office in Austin Texas. Oglesby hosts a website that "Explores the Legends of West Texas Music, Art & Literature, virtualubbock.com at <http://www.virtualubbock.com/index.html>. The complete Livingston interview can be found at the following internet address: <file:///Users/craighillis/Desktop/Bob%20Livingston%20Interview.webarchive>. Interestingly, R.D. Caldwell was a carpenter and had done extensive work on Bob Johnston's Nashville home. Caldwell had relocated to Dallas, he was a Murphey fan, and when he learned that Murphey and Livingston had a date booked at the Rubaiyat, he called Johnston and invited him to Dallas.

²⁸² From the Bob Livingston Interview, 03-19-2011.

²⁸³ The initial Murphey-Livingston sessions were recorded at one of the main studios at Columbia Records, commonly known as "Columbia A." It was not a Columbia Records project. Johnston had that particular studio booked that week for George Jones who Johnston was then producing for Columbia. Johnston moved the George Jones' sessions to a later date to accommodate the Murphey recording sessions.

the occasional switch to piano, and Livingston on bass. The vocals were recorded live with the instrumental tracks and each song was recorded only once. After laying down twenty-five songs in two days, Johnston said something like, "Thanks guys! That should do it!"²⁸⁴ Johnston's plan was to review the various songs, select those he wanted to include on an album and add accompaniment instruments later. Murphey thought at the time that they were recording a demo session of his songs, and he, Livingston and Quarto returned to Texas.

Several weeks later Johnston called Murphey and asked him to come back to Nashville to finish the album. Murphey was surprised. What he believed was going to be a demo session of his songs was about to become his first album. Johnston liked what he heard from the Columbia A recordings; he had selected the songs that he wanted to complete for the record, and requested that Murphey return to the studio for overdubs. In the interval between the original Nashville recordings and Johnston's call to return, several events had transpired that would have a marked affect on the Austin music scene.

First, Livingston received a call from Ray Wylie Hubbard asking him to join his group Three Faces West in Red River, New Mexico. Hubbard and Livingston had been good friends for years and Livingston loved the laid-back scene in Red River and had a long history playing there. Three Faces West owned the venue where they played in the resort town, the work was therefore steady and the money was exceptional. Livingston moved to Red River and joined Hubbard and Rick Fowler to become the third face west replacing the retiring bass player Wayne Kidd. Second, Murphey had moved to Austin and had been playing with Austin musicians Gary P. Nunn and guitarist Leonard Arnold. When Murphey fielded the call from Johnston, it was Nunn and Arnold who accompanied him for the overdub sessions.

Once back in Nashville the threesome from Texas added additional instruments and vocal parts to the existing tracks, ace Nashville session player, Kenny Buttrey, laid down the drum tracks and they recorded one final song for the album, "Geronimo's Cadillac," a tune recently written by Murphey with lyrical help from Charles John Quarto the song became the title cut for the record. Murphey's first solo album, *Geronimo's Cadillac*, was released on A&M Records in the summer of 1972 and the single,

²⁸⁴ From the Bob Livingston Interview, 03-19-2011.

"Geronimo's Cadillac," reached #37 on the national pop charts.²⁸⁵ Murphey had finally begun his career as a solo recording artist, and that beginning was firmly rooted in Austin and energized through the collaboration of established Austin rock 'n' roll musicians.

When Fromholz, Holland and I returned to Colorado, we began organizing the Fromholz band, and once again, like the band-building efforts of Timberline Rose and Michael Murphey, Fromholz and company tapped the extensive Austin talent pool to bring on board a highly respected musician, drummer David Fore previously of Bubble Puppy. Bubble Puppy was one of the most powerful and influential rock acts in contemporary Austin music history. This statement is based on the group's recording success during the late 1960s with the highest charting single release of the era.²⁸⁶ Further, Bubble Puppy enjoyed the respect of their peers. The musicians of Austin considered this four-piece rock group to be an extemporary band that represented a standard of performance excellence.²⁸⁷ The significance of Fore's involvement in the Fromholz band, and by extension, the significance of the band itself, lies in the eclectic blend of the musical styles and musical experience that characterized this prolific period. Not long before the Fromholz band hit the stages of small venues in Colorado and Texas, Fromholz had been playing to sold-out concerts at Madison Square Garden and similar prestigious venues on the Stephen Stills tour, Travis Holland had been playing bass with Jerry Jeff Walker in listening rooms across the country, David Fore had been in the studio recording the Bubble Puppy follow-up album for ABC-Dunhill Records with Steppenwolf bass player Nick St. Nicholas producing, and I was playing for intoxicated fraternity boys and their dates in Austin. Musical styles were on the move and the Fromholz ensemble typified this unlikely yet aesthetically productive *mélange* of young musicians.

²⁸⁵ Bob Johnston's song selection for the album was a fortuitous boost for my efforts as a novice songwriter. "Crack Up in Las Cruces," a song Murphey and I wrote while traveling from Texas back to his home in Wrightwood shortly after our initial meeting, was included on the album.

²⁸⁶ Bubble Puppy's single, "Hot Smoke and Sassafras," from their 1969 album, *A Gathering of Promises*, peaked at #14 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. The 13th Floor Elevators had released a previous charted single with "You're Gonna Miss Me," released in 1966 that reached #55 on the *Billboard* Hot 100.

²⁸⁷ A Bubble Puppy performance in Austin was strongly attended by fellow musicians. They not only appealed to a popular rock market, they were considered a "musician's band" and a common study in professional stage delivery.

The Fromholz band, flippantly called "Captain Duck and the Farmer's Electric Co-op Boys" was a short-lived musical adventure. After several months of dates in small settings in Colorado and Texas markets, after many nights of high-energy performances underscored by Fromholz's entertaining stage antics and his ability to connect with an intimate audience, the performance opportunities faded, Fromholz's focus reverted to his familiar sanctuary of songwriting, and the band floundered in a collective ennui. I was still living in Colorado and in a routine phone call to Austin, I discovered that Murphey was trying to find me to join the new band he was assembling to record his second album. I gathered up my guitars and amplifiers and moved back to Austin to join Murphey and Gary P. Nunn for rehearsals for the forthcoming album.

When I rejoined Murphey in Austin, he and Nunn had moved into a 1940s-era motor court with a large main house where they resided with surrounding cabins for band members and a large outbuilding customized as a rehearsal hall. Leonard Arnold who had played guitar on the *Geronimo's Cadillac* album had moved on to another rock band, Bob Livingston had returned from New Mexico and Murphey had added a drummer, Michael McGeary from Southern California. Just as the new Murphey band was centralized at the motor court on North Lamar Boulevard in 1972, songwriters and musicians from different parts of the state and the country were beginning to centralize in Austin. B.W. Stevenson had relocated from Dallas and was working with a band of Austin-based musicians. Willis Alan Ramsey was living in west Austin and had recently completed his album for Shelter Records. Rusty Wier, a rare Austin native, was building a strong following in town and in a few short months Jerry Jeff Walker would arrive at the motor court to visit his friend Murphey and almost forty years later, Walker still lives in Austin.²⁸⁸ Later in 1972, Fromholz began spending a great deal of time in town. He would eventually create a new a band that included Leonard Arnold and Michael Christian, the drummer with the Eternal Life Corporation and Timberline Rose and move to Austin permanently to begin a new recording career with Capitol Records. Doug Sahm was back in Austin after his late 1960s escape to the San Francisco Bay area and that fall Willie Nelson played his initial concert at the Armadillo World Headquarters.

²⁸⁸ The circumstances of Walker's arrival in Austin are discussed in Chapter 6. As a preview to that treatment, Walker had a new recording contract with MCA Records, he was on his way to Los Angeles to record, but elected to stay in Austin and use Murphey's band for the recording.

1972 was the year of critical mass for the Austin scene of that decade. By the end of that year most of the primary players were in place: An exceptional group of singer-songwriters had gathered in Austin from all parts of the country and had called upon the city's talent pool to join them in their music-making adventures. Austin's exceptional "support-musician depth chart" was a product of the city's energized scene of the late 1960s. The majority of these songwriters had secured recording contracts with national recording companies and those who were still shopping for deals like Fromholz and Wier, would soon affiliate with major labels. The business at hand was to write, arrange and record songs. The next chapter explores the history and significance of the song in Western history and addresses certain structural aspects of the contemporary songs that defined this special decade in Austin music history.

Chapter 5

SONGS MATTER

Songs are important. Although they mean different things to different people and play different roles in different societies, they are an essential component of civilization. Songs are important because they generate practical results. They are cultural tools and like all tools, they *do* things. Songs operate on a personal level: They can recharge our emotional batteries or provide a convenient conduit for emotional release. They serve as reference points in our lifeline for memories or as signifiers in our relationships with our friends, loved ones, associates, or adversaries. They help us access buried feelings or ambiguous memories, define our dreams or fortify our hopes for the future. They can recast life's challenges in accessible or humorous tones and help us deal with such trials with dignity and grace.

Songs also operate on a larger social scale: Long before there were standardized writing methodologies and historiography, songs served as the repositories for histories and cultural mores and the conduit through which such information was passed from one generation to the next. As the barriers of time and distance receded through the centuries, the power and pragmatic value of the song has continually expanded in proportion to advancements in technology. Songs can mobilize a mass social movement, pacify a troubled population, or define a national identity. Despite their vast cultural utility, songs don't discriminate or play favorites. They operate uniformly at all levels of society, from urban alleys and country roads to the super highways of commerce and the gilded halls of power. These powerful, multi-minute creations, equally available to anyone within earshot, play a significant role in our personal lives and in the larger scope of American culture. Stated simply, songs matter.

The development of the song through the centuries has been driven by the long-standing symbiotic relationship between music and the sister art of poetry. The challenges that face the songwriter are similar to those that face the poet. Like the poet, the songwriter struggles with the difficulties of putting complicated feelings into words, or probably more tediously, putting simple feelings into words. How does one describe "happy" or "sad" for example? In addition to conveying emotions, it's equally difficult to

structure our ideas and concepts into accessible formats for others. Indeed, some of the most ethereal and intricate ideas—the notion of gravity or the essence of time and space—are routinely communicated through mathematics rather than words. Songs and poetry operate as emotional equations, universal axioms at home in the inquiring minds of curious thinkers around the world. Analyzing and communicating grand social concepts present the writer with other unique challenges. How does one describe in accessible terms the significance of freedom or bondage? Tasks of this magnitude certainly tax the skills of the poet but the songwriter must introduce the additional dimension of music and blend the written word with melody, meter, and a delicate mix of audio zest to create a successful song. The essence of solid songwriting involves assimilating and understanding a feeling or an idea, presenting it in succinct yet genial language, couching it in an appealing melodic package of unique sounds and sonic textures to insure a noteworthy and memorable delivery that percolates in the public imagination and evokes an emotional response in the listener. In essence, the popular song, or at least that strain of creativity that strives as "art," is a singular blend of poetry and music. Consequently, contemporary Western musicologists refer to this singular blend as the "art song."

Art Songs in Western History

The earliest examples of the art song surfaced during the Middle Ages. Although the marriage of lyrical message and music dates back to ancient civilizations, written evidence of these compositions rarely appeared before this period. Prior to the art song, the grand majority of music emanated from the church, and because clerics were the scribes du jour, the surviving musical notations reflect the dominance of the religious form. There are enough surviving examples of secular music however to determine that art song notation appeared by the ninth century.²⁸⁹ These examples demonstrate that the

²⁸⁹ Stevens, Denis, Ed. *A History of Song*: New York • London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970. p. 15. From the essay "The Middle Ages" by Gilbert Reaney. In his essay, Reaney makes clear that although musical notation developed "from about the seventh century A.D." (p. 15), the extant manuscripts are ninth-century artifacts. He laments this by noting that, "A few very early songs have been preserved of secular origin, but for the most part the notation is too rudimentary for a transcription to be possible. This is particularly disappointing since the date attributable to these compositions show that they go back to the seventh century in some cases." (p. 15)

historic art song has two enduring characteristics: First, it's a synergistic blend of verse and melody. This combination generally includes musical accompaniment, but strictly defined, it can simply be a poetic lyric delivered in a melodic style by a solo vocalist. Nonetheless, even in the absence of extensive instrument notation, musicologists concur that the "early secular song in general had an improvised accompaniment."²⁹⁰ Second, early renditions of the art song might just as well be called the "secular song" as both connote the marriage of poetry and music created beyond the walls of the monastery or the pale of the church. As such, these new "synergistic blends" moved beyond ecclesiastical content to include worldly themes—songs rooted in the lives of the common folk or songs reflecting the ventures of the cultured class; songs of love, humor, conquest and challenge—themes aimed at a wider audience that had long been the demographic for contemporaneous poetry.

As musicologist Mary Ann Malloy notes, "an art song strives to be the perfect combination of music and literature, based on four elements: poet, composer, singer and accompanist."²⁹¹ The composer of the era used "the full resources of the art form to embellish the poet's text," in an effort to present the lyric "through a complimentary, coordinated partnership among the four significant elements [the poet, composer, vocalist and accompanist]."²⁹² This aesthetic connection between music and poetry is eloquently expressed by the seventeenth-century Baroque composer Henry Purcell in the preface to his opera, *The History of Dioclesian* that premiered in London in 1690.

Musick and poetry have ever been acknowledg'd Sisters, which walking hand in hand, support each other; as Poetry is the harmony of Words, so Musick is that of Notes; and as Poetry is a Rise above Prose and Oratory, so is Musick the exaltation of Poetry. Both of them may excell apart, but sure are most excellent when they are join'd, because nothing is then wanting to either of their Perfections: for thus they appear like Wit and Beauty in the same Person.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 15.

²⁹¹ From the website, "Artsong Update" featuring Malloy's article, "'What is Artsong?'" <http://www.artsongupdate.org/Articles/What%20is%20Art%20Song.htm#SWRMIAAS>

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Stevens, p. 10.

These eleventh- and twelfth-century pieces that personified "Wit and Beauty in the same Person" embraced the language of the era to lampoon the controversial practices of the church and address other social conditions relevant to the lives of the composers and their peers. They were propagated by the Goliards, a group of "wandering scholars, students and clerics in minor orders who left behind a body of secular Latin songs."²⁹⁴ These early art songs could be labeled medieval "protest songs" and not surprisingly, many were drinking songs. The significance of the Goliards' repertoire rests in the fact that their compositions marked a clear departure from the religious music of the day. These characteristics were reflected in the work of the most popular group of the so-called High Middle Ages, the Troubadours from southern France and to a lesser degree, the Trouvères from northern France and the Minnesingers of Germany.²⁹⁵ These entertainers traversed Europe in troupes of poets, storytellers and actors with the accompaniment of professional instrumentalists called minstrels or jongleurs. As mentioned, the content of their musical offerings ran the gamut of meta-religious topics that addressed the cares, concerns, hopes and dreams of a cross section of medieval society. The Troubadours usually played their own instruments—viols (early violins), harps, wind instruments and various forerunners of the modern guitar—and appeared as single artists or small ensembles. In this fashion, they were precursors to modern singer-songwriters. Both groups depended largely on the largess of vested interests: In the case of the Troubadours it was often the beneficence of royal courts and in the case of the twentieth-century singer-songwriters—before the ubiquitous influence of the Internet in the last decade of that century—it was generally the underwriting of large record companies. Both groups traveled extensively as single acts or as self-contained ensembles, both focused largely on secular music, and both depended on "head arrangements" and improvisation rather than depending on written scores for their performances.²⁹⁶ Both groups routinely embraced the common vernacular even though

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 16.

²⁹⁵ The "High Middle Ages" dated roughly from 1100 through 1350.

²⁹⁶ A "head arrangement" is a modern musical term that connotes recall through memory rather than depending on a written score. In his essay, "The Middle Ages," Gilbert Reaney defines what might be considered a medieval "head arrangement" commonly used by the Troubadours: "Secular song on the other hand was so often learned by heart that special circumstances were required before it was written down." Stevens, p. 42.

they came from a cross-section of social classes with many participants emanating from privileged backgrounds.²⁹⁷ The Troubadours, the Trouvères, and the Minnesingers established a promising link between the peripatetic song craftsmen and the public at large just as the traveling songwriters of the 20th century established their personas and their messages with the common folk like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger.

Once it successfully breached the walls of the medieval church, the art song began a long evolution that would culminate in its role as the "popular song" of the modern era. Songs experienced notable changes in style and social utility during the Renaissance. The powerful cultural, political, and philosophical currents that defined the era served as agents of natural selection in the art song's march to modernity. In turn, this evolution empowered the art song as repositories for histories and current events and as conduits for the exchange of ideas and emotions. By necessity, the song became more malleable and increasingly sensitive to the progressive trends and tastes of the people. "This feature of flexibility was one that distinguished Renaissance song from its predecessors."²⁹⁸

One of the most enduring song-related developments during the Renaissance was a shift in the choice of accompaniment instruments and the configurations of accompanists. During the Middle Ages the instruments of choice included viols, harps, wind instruments (trumpets, recorders and bag pipes for example), and various drums and bells. The preferred musical support for the medieval vocalist was the small ensemble. During the Renaissance however, several long-standing and adaptable stringed instruments, the lute and the vihuela, gained tremendous popularity throughout Europe

²⁹⁷ Gilbert Reaney expands on several of the points touched on above by differentiating between the sensibilities of medieval musicians and their audiences and the tastes of modern musicians and their audiences in the following passage: (It's important to note that in speaking of "music in more than one part" or "part-music" Reaney is referring to ensemble music that's designed to embellish or reinforce the monodic [single-voice] performance.) "The advent of music in more than one part is probably more important to us than it was to the medieval musician. Part-music can in fact be traced from the ninth century, but it does not seem to have attracted much attention at first. Moreover, as we have seen, early medieval secular song is written in the manuscripts for a single voice only, though minstrels and jongleurs did usually add an improvised accompaniment. The earliest important collections of part-music are for church use, and go back to the twelfth century. It is probably due to the diligence of monks that they still exist today." Stevens, pp. 41-42. And, to bring the analogy into the 20th and 21st centuries, many modern traveling songwriters came from well to-do families like Townes Van Zandt while other came from middle-class backgrounds like Jerry Jeff Walker and Steven Fromholz.

²⁹⁸ Stevens, p. 68.

and eclipsed other familiar instruments of the day. Many vocalists embraced these guitar-like instruments in an attempt to become self-sufficient in their own accompaniment. This development is encapsulated by Denis Stevens in his essay, "The Renaissance:"

Musicians learned to master individual instruments, and in [the] course of time various kinds of bowed- and plucked-string instruments were developed as media for polyphony.²⁹⁹ After a century in which the harmonic hegemony of song-accompaniment was unquestionably interlinked with the ensemble, the lute came to be regarded as an ideal instrument for conveying the necessary structure and characteristics of any given accompaniment so that at long last the singer could make himself, if need be, entirely independent of other musicians. The lute was not an easy instrument to learn or maintain, but once its essential technique had been mastered a whole new realm of possibilities was opened up for professional and amateur musicians alike.³⁰⁰

This passage once again foreshadows essential elements of the late twentieth-century singer-songwriter—a single vocalist with a commercial repertoire, self-contained and road worthy with an easily transportable stringed instrument ideal for composition and solo performance.

Although the lute and the vihuela were both precursors of the modern guitar their individual characteristics are worth noting. The lute is a plucked string instrument with a teardrop shape, a deep round back, and a wide neck that usually supports eleven strings—five sets or "courses" of strings with each two-string course tuned in unison complimented by a single high treble string. The lute's fingerboard has moveable frets of animal-gut that wrap around the neck. The headstock or pegbox that houses the hardwood tuning pegs slopes back at a sharp angle away from the neck to counterbalance the string tension, and the instrument looks and sounds like a very large "deep-dish" mandolin with a frequency response similar to a modern twelve-string guitar. The vihuela or vihuela de mano as it was known in Spain, was a close relative of the lute with a parallel cultural pedigree. Both instruments made their way to Europe through the

²⁹⁹ Polyphony connotes the blending of two or more melodic voices or parts to create a sonic texture or sound as opposed to monophony that connotes a single melodic voice to create a sonic texture.

³⁰⁰ Stevens, pp. 68-69.

Iberian Peninsula during the Arabic, Jewish, and Christian cultural milieu of the Middle Ages, and both shared many structural and sonic characteristics. The vihuela was generally a twelve-string instrument with six sets or "courses" of strings tuned in unison similar to the lute's eleven-string format described above. It also had the moveable animal-gut frets like the lute and was tuned in a similar fashion. The vihuela didn't have the sharply receding headstock, the headstock was in line with the neck, and the instrument didn't have the dish back. The vihuela was a flat-back design and it had an hourglass shape unlike the teardrop configuration of the lute. By all accounts, it resembled the modern guitar. These innovative characteristics in total made for an instrument that was much easier to make, it was easier to play and keep in tune, and compared to the lute, it was inexpensive to own. Accordingly, the vihuela became exceptionally popular throughout all levels of European society. The popularity and ubiquity of the vihuela and lute coupled with their portability kindled a newfound enthusiasm for music, song and public performance during the Renaissance. Just as the medieval art song helped music breach the walls of the monastery and find a secular audience, the lute and the vihuela forged a musical path from the royal courts and concert halls to the streets and alleys of the common folk.

The popularity and accessibility of these instruments during the late-16th and 17th centuries coupled the widespread enthusiasm for the songs and sounds of the period led to another important development during the Renaissance. The emerging European community of printers and typesetters recognized the commercial opportunity in the growing demand for sheet music. People wanted to be part of the contemporary scene; they wanted to share their the music with family, friends, and in the case of professional musicians, they wanted to expand their market share by mastering the popular compositions of the era. Many of the intricate musical scores used by medieval ensembles were reduced to simplified renditions that featured the voice part in standard staff notation and the accompaniment part, most commonly written for the lute, in accessible tablature. A new market for songbooks emerged and musicians with various skills and interests had access to the art songs of previous generations as well as the "hits" of the day. Again, Stevens' perspective is helpful: "Song publishers in the sixteenth century, as in the nineteenth [and indeed, the twentieth], sought the largest clientele

among the middle-class or well-to-do amateur . . . "³⁰¹ The increased accessibility of printed musical scores continued to obscure the boundaries between music and poetry, the art song and its message played an increasingly important role in the lives of Europeans across the social-economic hierarchy, and the musical developments of the Renaissance presaged the format of the American post-Civil War songwriter and the musicians of the 20th century. Much like their earlier counterparts, aspiring young musicians or seasoned professionals of the modern era could purchase the sheet music for a new Stephen Foster song, the score from an Irving Berlin Broadway musical or the latest Bob Dylan hit and with adequate practice, they could master the songs on their instrument of choice. This was the logical outcome of the Renaissance art song's steady evolution into the hit song of late 19th- and 20th-century American popular culture.

Early Songwriting in America

Predictably, American song craft initially surfaced in the New England colonies and was born of artisans, merchants and clergy, all part-time musicians and composers and all strongly influenced by trans-Atlantic European hymnody and Anglo-Celtic folk music. Like other proto-American art forms, many of these creations had religious themes—hymns, psalms, and sacred anthems. But unlike the religious songs of the Middle Ages that were written by a cloistered clergy, most of the colonial selections were penned by secular writers and those that were written by colonial clergy weren't necessarily designed as strict religious texts. Early American songs were rooted in local environments and activities, many focused on the challenges of taming a virgin land New World experiences. By and large, these were "art songs." Indeed, at this point in the evolution of the modern song, it might be more accurate to use the phrase "popular song" rather than art song because by the late 17th century, as songwriting expanded as commercial activity in Western Europe, songs were becoming increasingly popular in colonial America.

In the wake of the American Revolution, the young republic maintained strong cultural ties to the British Isles well into the 19th Century. Music historian Hans Nathan observed that, "the American public, particularly in the towns, sang all the songs that

³⁰¹ Stevens, p. 69.

were current and fashionable in Great Britain, even after the Revolution."³⁰² An excellent example of this lingering trans-Atlantic umbilical link is our National Anthem. The lyrics of course, were the product of a four-stanza poem, "Defence [sic] of Fort McHenry," written by the American lawyer and amateur poet, Frances Scott Key during the War of 1812. It was set to music by Key's brother-in-law who recognized that the rhythmic meter of the poem adapted nicely to a jovial drinking song that was popular in America at the time. The song, "The Anacreonic Song," was originally written in the late-1700s by a young Englishman, John Stafford Smith, as the constitutional song for a select London social club of amateur musicians of the same name.³⁰³ "The Anacreonic Song" became popular in Great Britain and made its way to the new republic by way of the trans-Atlantic cultural conduit in the early 19th century. "The Star Spangled Banner," ultimately adopted as the National Anthem by a congressional resolution in 1931, was a curious confluence of Old World melodic revelry and New World lyrics.

The most dominate domestic influence on American popular music in the first half of the 19th century was Negro minstrelsy, the theatrical impersonation by white entertainers of contemporary African Americans—the vast majority of whom were enslaved in the South—and their unique music, dance, mannerisms and vernacular. Negro minstrelsy is largely considered the first distinctly American theatrical genre and as such it embodied song, dance, comedy, skits and other popular components of early 19th-century stage presentations. It was the musical pieces that provided the essential spark of the genre's public popularity, a spark that operated on two levels. First, the early

³⁰² Stevens, p. 413.

³⁰³ Fine points of the history of the "Star Spangled Banner" differ. Certain accounts suggest that Key wrote the words with Smith's popular melody in mind while others suggest that Key's poem was later coupled with the song, also known as "To Anacreon in Heaven," as suggested above through the intervention of Key's brother-in-law or through other post-poem circumstances. Accounts also differ on the date of Smith's melodic composition ranging from the mid-1760s to 1780 and on the author of the original exotic lyrics (probably a member of the Anacreonic Society) that highlighted wine, women and love inspired by an early Greek lyric poet. Historians agree however on the lyrical side of the equation . . . Key wrote the poem while detained on a British warship during the September 1814 bombardment of Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor. The basic tenants of this tale as they apply to this study hold true: Key's poem was adapted to the melody of a popular British drinking song. The majority of this account is drawn from the website, The Gloucestershire Portal (<http://www.visit-gloucestershire.co.uk/index.html>), the English county of Smith's birth where the Stars and Stripes currently flies over the Gloucester Cathedral in honor of Smith's melodic contribution to American history. Also worth noting, the spelling of "Anacreonic" often appears in various texts as "Anacreontic."

minstrel songs were a combination of the familiar and the exotic. The basic melodic structures drew from Scottish and Irish folk idioms that had been common in the colonies and the new Republic for quite some time, and the lyrical content and performance style drew from a romanticized interpretation of the life and entertaining antics of the romanticized Southern slave. The early minstrel song was a parody of seemingly benign, child-like "others" from a mysterious, unexplored continent, parodies that regularly evoked robust responses from predominately white, common-class audiences. Second, minstrel songs were portable cultural products that members of the audience could take with them beyond the confines of the theater. The 19th-century patron couldn't transport the stage, the lights, the audience, the complex choreography, or the general ambiance of the theater, but they could easily leave a popular stage presentation with the memory of a melody and a set of lyrics. Popular songs traveled, and that which couldn't be recalled was accessible through the sheet music of a particular selection. As the primary tool of conveyance between the author and the public, sheet music was usually offered for sale at the performance, a common practice with traveling minstrel shows of the era. Because of their melodic familiarity, their content, their humoristic singularity, and their availability through sheet music, minstrel songs surfaced as a strong current in the mainstream of American popular culture during the first half of the 19th century.

To grasp the significance of Negro minstrelsy in American music history, it's helpful to point out the difference between minstrelsy, the music influenced by the mannerisms African American Southern slaves, and "blackface." African American tropes in popular entertainment predated the fashionable minstrelsy trend in 19th-century America. Professor Eileen Southern reports that "So-called Negro songs had been in circulation in England as early as the mid-eighteenth century; they were performed on the concert stage and published in song collections."³⁰⁴ Southern also mentions that "contemporary sources report the singing of 'Negro songs' as early as 1769," in both the urban theater and in traveling performance troupes.³⁰⁵ Musicologist Hans Nathan underscores Southern's observations:

³⁰⁴ Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans A History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971. p. 89.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 89.

Negro minstrelsy . . . developed from acts such as Charles Dibdin [a contemporary dramatist and actor] presented in London from the seventeen-eighties on (*though not in costume*) and from appearances of Negro characters in English plays, as for example the scenes of Mungo, a humorously disreputable servant, in Dibdin's comic opera *The Padlock* (performed in 1768). This kind of entertainment, along with its music, was well known in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century America.³⁰⁶ (*Italics mine.*)

The operative phrase in Nathan's quote above is "though not in costume." English and American performers did not routinely employ the burnt-cork makeup, the tattered and torn wardrobe of the romanticized Southern slave, the accentuated choreographed movements, or the Negro vernacular until the 1830s. It was only when performers embraced the full on-stage costume complete with makeup that the genre gained national recognition. The theatrical development of the blackface Negro character is generally associated with Thomas Dartmouth Rice, "later called 'Daddy Rice' Father of American Minstrelsy."³⁰⁷ Rice was not the first actor to incorporate blackface into his act, but he did package various characteristics of the quixotic Negro into a successful stage routine through his creation of the colorful personality, Jim Crow. Eileen Southern presents an excellent genesis account of Jim Crow, the character who became one of the most popular entertainment icons in 19th-century popular culture:³⁰⁸

As the story goes, Rice was in Louisville, Kentucky, [1829], when he heard the singing of an old, deformed stable-groom and conceived the idea of imitating the black stable-hand in a stage act. Rice observed that the man sang a funny little song as he went about his work, that he moved with a very curious shuffle, made almost ludicrous by the deformity, and that every so often, at a certain point in the song, he gave a little jump into

³⁰⁶ This quote is drawn from Nathan's essay "The United States of America" from the Denis Stevens text, *A History of Song*, p. 416. Nathan's quote also references his previous publication, *Negro Impersonation in Eighteenth Century England* in *Notes* (September, 1945).

³⁰⁷ Eileen Southern parenthetically refers to Rice as the "Father of American Minstrelsy" in *The Music of Black Americans*, page 90.

³⁰⁸ HERE: And successful it was! The quote about Queen Victoria and Jim Crow regarding ubiquitous popularity in the Boston Newspaper: At the height of Rice's success, *The Boston Post* wrote, "The two most popular characters in the world at the present are [Queen] Victoria and Jim Crow."³⁰⁸ Website reference> ^ Strausbaugh 2006, p. 76 *et. seq.* from the book, Strausbaugh, John (2006). *Black Like You*. Tarcher. ISBN 1-58542-498-6

the air. According to minstrel-historian R. Allston Brown, the song belonged to the folk tradition of slaves in Kentucky.³⁰⁹

Rice took his act to New York, it was an instant hit with the urban audiences, and the link between minstrelsy and blackface came to dominate theatrical trends for decades to come.

Negro minstrelsy enjoyed a booming national popularity for certain socio-political reasons as well. By the third decade of the 19th century, America was riding a strong wave of nationalism engendered by the recent victory in the war of 1812, the country's "Second War of Independence." Any perceived conditions of international probation regarding America's wherewithal to flourish as an independent nation state had been successfully met, any lingering Tory sentiments had been dispelled, and the broad populace was eager to proceed with the business of being Americans. In light of this affirmation, many songs surfaced that incorporated the emerging minstrelsy style, songs from well-liked stage creations like the black urban dandy "Zip Coon" with lyrics like, "I pose you heard ob de battle New Orleans, / Whar ole General Jackson gib de British beans . . ." ³¹⁰ This widespread notion of folk-based nationalism was abetted by the ascendancy of Andrew Jackson to the Presidency in 1828. A common-born, military hero was now the head of state, and after the hoi polloi left their muddy boot tracks on the carpets of the White House during Jackson's egalitarian Inauguration festivities, they moved along to the taverns, the lowbrow theaters and the every-day entertainment venues to enjoy the popular Negro minstrelsy shows of the day. The theatrical presentations that publicly denigrated the African slave fostered "a shared feeling of superiority to blacks [that] was one of the few things that united a nation of immigrants, many of them more recent arrivals than the African Americans they mocked."³¹¹

A small collection of talented African American performers began to join their white associates on the minstrel stage in the later 1840s bringing innovations in dance,

³⁰⁹ Southern, p. 90.

³¹⁰ "Zip Coon" (New York: J. L. Hewitt, ca. 1830-1835), in *Popular Songs of Nineteenth-Century America*, p. 260, as quoted in Emerson's book, *Doo~Dah! Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture*, originally published: New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. This quote is taken from the paperback Da Capo Press edition, 1998, p.62. The character Zip Coon became the urban counterpart to the rural Jim Crow. Zip Coon was the well-dressed, cosmopolitan figure opposite the down-home character of the romanticized plantation slave.

³¹¹ Emerson, p. 62.

song, and musical arrangements, and by the early years of Reconstruction, various all-black minstrel troupes toured domestically and internationally. Although their influence and the influence of minstrelsy in general lingered through the early years of the 20th century largely as an influential component of the vaudeville stage, the nascent styles of blues, ragtime and ultimately jazz eclipsed the popularity of minstrelsy in the African American aesthetic community. Still, Negro minstrelsy in all its racial configurations played a profound role in the evolution of the American popular song and the development of our country's entertainment industry. The genre provided the commercial foundation for one of America's first internationally recognized songwriters, Stephen Collins Foster.

Foster wrote many of the popular minstrel titles of the day, he was instrumental in the success of Edwin Pearce Christy's tremendously popular troupe, Christy's Minstrels, and went on to play a seminal role in shaping America's musical identity. With over 200 published songs, he was "the first American composer to support himself (though not for long and not luxuriously) from the sales of his sheet music."³¹² With compositions such as "Oh Susanna," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Camptown Races," "Old Black Joe," and "Beautiful Dreamer," all songs that reverberate in American popular culture in the 21st century, "Foster blazed the trail that eventually led to Tin Pan Alley."³¹³ The quality and scope of his work coupled with its widespread acceptance in America's rapidly developing marketplace of popular culture provided the essential template for the professional songwriter.³¹⁴

Also at play during the latter half of the 19th century was a prodigious assortment of industrial, social and technological advances that permeated the fabric of American life and played an important role in the evolution of the popular song. Post Civil War America was marked by the rise of "big business" as corporations, trusts, and massive companies moved the Industrial Revolution west on tracks of steel powered by steam, sweat and entrepreneurial innovation. By 1888 there were 150,000 miles of railroad lines that linked established cultural centers east of the Mississippi with western cultural

³¹² Emerson, p. 12.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Curiously, Stephen Collins Foster was born on July 4, 1826, the same day that American icons and founding fathers John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died.

outposts. Musicians, sheet music, entertainment troupes, plays, operas, and musical instruments moved west on the rails of commerce carrying music and the popular arts to all quadrants of an expanding nation. Urban centers expanded dramatically at railheads and shipping centers as imports, exports, and an influx of immigrants streamed through American ports and inland destinations that changed the demographic texture of the country. These booming population centers created an invigorated demand for entertainment and, at the same time, offered new opportunities for artists to make a living and take their respective trades to new territories and audiences. American popular culture was on the move, and the impending innovations in applied science and technology would reconfigure the fabric of music and media in America.

An Alternating Current of Creativity

An empirical indicator of this surge in practical creativity is evidenced by the activity of the United States Patent Office. Created in 1790, the Patent Office "recorded only 276 inventions during its first decade of existence," but during the decade of 1890, it "registered 234,956" inventions.³¹⁵ According to historians George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, "These advances in technology [during the last three decades of the 1800s] altered the lives of ordinary people far more than did [the] activities in the political and intellectual realms."³¹⁶ The telephone, the transmission of electricity, the incandescent light bulb, the phonograph, the motion picture, and other mass media innovations redefined the way average Americans created and shared aesthetic products, particularly the popular song. These innovations, coupled with an incredible thrust of artistic creativity, forever changed the way music was made and marketed in America. These developments of the late 19th- and early 20th-century launched the framework for the modern music business. It was a framework best described as an alternating current of creativity: A two-way exchange that channeled songs to the public while channeling remunerations for their use back to the artists who created them.

This alternating current of creativity was a two-leg circuit: The first leg routed the composition to the public through technological innovations in the recording of audio

³¹⁵ Tindall, George Brown and Shi, David E. *America A Narrative History* (Third Edition). New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984. p. 780.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 781.

performances and the creation of sound reproduction devices. Early sound recording techniques enabled the performer to capture their version of a song through a mechanical process that employed a delicate needle to etch the sound waves captured by an exaggerated "gathering horn" onto a malleable cylinder or disc. The rudimentary recording was then played back through the reverse process—The needle processed the etchings back through a "listening horn" by way of a cylinder player or a Victrola designed for discs. Mechanical techniques soon yielded to electronic techniques that transferred an extended frequency range to a more durable disc that were then played back on phonographs.

Prior to the availability of these "home-player" products, the standard dissemination of the popular song had been through sheet music and public performance. A common practice of song sharing during the period involved a trip to the local music store where a patron would select several pieces of sheet music, request the in-house piano player to perform the tunes, and select the printed pieces they wanted to take and play at home. The advent of the mechanical and electronic reproduction devices however, bypassed the necessity of sheet music, and the song was available on a device that reproduced the music in the American living room. The technology continued to improve, and by the early 1920s, radio broadcasts brought the song to mass audiences by transmitting designated frequencies through the ether and for the first time in history, there was literally music in the air. Sheet music sales maintained a strong market share well into the mid-20th century, but the innovations in recording technology and listening devices marked a major paradigm shift in the industry.

The second leg of this alternating circuit of creativity routed revenues and recognition back to the songwriter. The dawn of the professional American songwriter and the dawn of a formal structure that guaranteed writer's rights went hand in hand. Consequently, funds generated through the sale of sheet music, the sale of playable devices like cylinders, discs, and records began to flow back to the songwriter. Eventually there would be fees attached to the use of songs in live performances and in broadcast media that benefited the writer. The most important aspect of this "flow-back" leg of the circuit was the evolution of American copyright law.

The concept of copyright—essentially the "right to copy" a work of art that was legally linked to the obligation to pay a fee for that privilege—had its roots in English Law. The "*Statute of Anne*" of 1710 guaranteed book publishers the rights to the monies generated through public sales and the author in turn enjoyed royalty payments that were defined by whatever arrangements he or she negotiated with the publisher. The original notion of copyright for musical compositions came into play sixty-seven years later through English case law with the decision, *Bach v. Longman*, 98 Eng.Rep. 1274 (K.B. 1777), that situated printed sheet music under the *Statute of Anne*. The United States Congress enacted the initial American interpretation of the English precedent through the Copyright Act of 1790. This Act extended the copyright duration previously defined by the *Statute of Anne* to fourteen years with a fourteen-year renewal. It's important to note however, that the United States Copyright Act of 1790, unlike the *Statute of Anne*, did not include musical compositions. Musical works in America eventually found federal protection with the Copyright Act of 1831 that designated a term of copyright protection of twenty-eight years with a fourteen-year renewal. The Copyright Act of 1909, the third act in this progression of legislative copyright initiatives was arguably the most significant of this legislative triumvirate. It maintained the period of copyright protection for a twenty-eight-year term but established an extended twenty-eight-year renewal. It also required that original works must be "published," which is to say that the composition must be transcribed, submitted, and registered with the Library of Congress and that a notice of copyright must be "affixed" to the composition (i.e., to the sheet music) to insure that the composition enjoyed the benefits of federal statutory protection. The Act further designated that those original compositions that did not satisfy these standards fell beyond the pale of copyright protection into the realm of "public domain." Additionally, the Copyright Act of 1909 established the first "compulsory mechanical license." This innovative section of the Act (Section 1(e)) opened the commercial floodgates to allow other performers to record and/or perform the original works of other artists once that original work had been published, recorded, and offered for public sale. If, for example, a songwriter wrote a commercially viable song in 1915, and the songwriter published it, recorded it, and released it, then other performers had the right to

re-record that song.³¹⁷ The performer who re-recorded it would adapt it to their particular style, use their musical arrangement and essentially "make it their own." The performing artist could then enjoy the commercial benefits of that song by securing a mechanical license and paying the appropriate a fee to the composer for the use of that song. This development provided the legal framework that enabled aspiring performers to choose from a rapidly expanding catalogue of copyrighted material to perpetuate their own careers with the statutory caveat that guaranteed the songwriter a fee for the use of their original composition.³¹⁸ These legislative acts, particularly the Copyright Act of 1909, established the substructure for American copyright law during the accelerated shifts in late-19th- and early-20th century music business environment. The basic provisions of the Copyright Act of 1909 remained in play and determined the "publishing procedures" until the revised Copyright Act of 1976.³¹⁹

During this late 19th- and early 20th-century period, the practice of paying recording artists residual royalties for their performances on commercially released cylinders, discs, and phonograph records became a standard practice. Although performance royalties—sometimes referred to as "artist" or "record" royalties—were neither initiated nor governed by federal or state laws, the progressive climate of

³¹⁷ This is a fine point of copyright law. There is a difference between a "mechanical license" and a "compulsory mechanical license." If, for example, Michael Martin Murphey writes a song, he maintains the right to record and release that song first or grant permission for the initial commercial recording and release of the song. This is the essence of the "mechanical license." Once that song has been recorded and released for public sale, either by Murphey or the by a person to whom Murphey has granted the original mechanical license, the composition can be recorded and released by anyone. The right for "anyone" to record it after the commercial release of original version cannot be denied the opportunity to record it, hence the "compulsory" nature of the mechanical license. The recipient of the "compulsory mechanical license" must however pay Murphey or his publisher the statutory licensing fee.

³¹⁸ The mechanical licensing rate per the Copyright Act of 1909 was 2 cents per song. If, for example, an early 20th-century record company released a 78-rpm recording that featured two songs (one song per side), that company would pay the composer of the "A-side" song 2 cents and the composer of the "B-side" song 2 cents, or if both sides were the work of a single composer, the company would pay that composer 4 cents per unit sold. The 2011 mechanical licensing rate is 9.1 cents or 1.75 cent per minute of playing time or fraction thereof, whichever is greater. A contemporary record company releasing a CD that included 10 different songs, for example, would be liable for at least 91 cents that would be paid to the various composers of the songs.

³¹⁹ The Copyright Act of 1976 would bring appreciable changes to the long-standing statutory copyright environment of the earlier 20th century and will be addressed later in this dissertation as applicable.

codification that focused on the enduring value of musical compositions and intellectual property stimulated business and contractual innovations in the songwriting industry. Because recorded music was readily available in the public sphere through technological delivery systems (cylinders, discs and phonograph records), the demand for related commodities like sheet music, stage shows, bands for hire, and musical instruments increased accordingly. This infusion of capital into a booming music industry floated an armada of musical boats on the supply-side of the equation. Large record companies and distributors, publishing companies, and the established purveyors of live entertainment fared well in the early 20th century. The demand side of the equation, consumers and fans that were rooted in the arena of popular culture also played a defining role. The same technological advances that were responsible for an array of innovative commodities, particularly with respect to "listening" devices, helped establish a massive fan base. In this new climate that celebrated the popular song—a climate that enjoyed an exponential burst during the 1920s when radio seeded the airwaves with popular songs—a collection of recording stars appeared in the aesthetic firmament. Popular entertainers were thus empowered by their fan base and vigorous product sales to negotiate with recording companies to their advantage and establish a share of this revenue stream through the financial mechanics of performance royalties.

In addition to the monies generated through copyright legislation and performance royalties through record sales, a third revenue stream developed during this period that benefited those who wrote the songs and created the music. This revenue source focused on the use of copyrighted material in public settings, what came to be known as performance rights. Early advocates for performance rights reasoned that public venues like nightclubs, theaters, concert halls, amusement parks and related businesses that benefited from the use of original compositions were indebted to the composer. Consequently, the U.S. Copyright Act of 1909 presented language that enabled songwriters and publishers to grant such entities the right to use their copyrighted materials for a negotiated fee. There was little chance that the individual songwriter could successfully monitor all their "public plays" in the modern marketplace, and from this necessity grew America's Performing Rights Societies.

Early Performance Rights Societies date back to mid-19th century Europe. The first performance rights society in the United States was the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) created in 1914. Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) was established in 1930 in the wake of the huge radio broadcast boom of the 1920s.³²⁰ Prior to the advent of radio and broadcast media, the mandate of performing rights organizations had been to seek out and contact public venues that used copyrighted material; survey the various titles and compositions they used in their standard business operations; negotiate and collect the appropriate fees; and distribute the net revenues to their societal members. This mandate was exponentially expanded when popular songs found their way into the parlors and living rooms of American families nationwide through radio broadcasts. Copyright use, and by extension, copyright revenues, experienced an exponential upswing beginning in the 1920s and reined as the dominant source of performance rights income throughout the 20th century.

This alternating current of creativity at the turn of the 20th century—the purveyance of songs to the consumer and the concomitant flow of revenues back to the songwriter and publisher—set the stage for the business of songwriting in modern America. And the first major player on this stage was Tin Pan Alley, an energized cloister of music publishers and songwriters in New York City who established the musical trends of the times and established the general protocols between songwriter, publisher and recording artist for the ensuing century.

Tin Pan Alley

Tin Pan Alley was a physical location in New York City—a collection of buildings, tenements and storefronts on 28th Street between 6th Avenue and Broadway

³²⁰ There is little doubt that BMI was a reaction to radio and its extensive use of songs on the airwaves (hence the name *Broadcast Music Incorporated*). But the birth of BMI was also rooted in the exploding ethnic diversity of American popular music, specifically derivatives of blues and jazz forms. BMI, founded 25 years after ASCAP, sought out a new generation of songwriters and composers, and given the popular music trends of the day, many of the initial BMI inductees were "of color" or from a lower social class. (This comment needs to be handled more delicately, but at bottom, back then, ASCAP was the high-brow and BMI was the low-brow.) There was another Performance Rights Society that came into play during this period, specifically, the Society of European Stage Authors and Composers (SESAC) in 1930. SESAC was the Canadian version of ASCAP and BMI, it represented a number of American songwriters and composers, and remains a major player in the field in the 21st century.

that were converted into small offices for songwriters and music publishers.³²¹ It was more than a place; it was the focal point for a major shift in the entertainment industry during the early 20th century. This unique neighborhood became the financial nexus for a booming creative enterprise; it became the symbol of the American popular song; it was recognized as the national capital of contemporary songwriting and as such, it was a magnet for aspiring songwriters and publishers from all points of the compass. Tin Pan Alley provided the songs and the sheet music that were the cornerstones for minstrel shows, vaudeville troupes, stage plays, Broadway musicals, touring bands, and for the repertoires of popular vocalists who depended on Tin Pan Alley writers for their next hit song. The United States government created the laws that linked the song and the dollar and this neighborhood and its inhabitants provided the physical plant, the products and the marketing machinery for America's initial song factory.

The ethnic diversity of New York City with its steady influx of European and Mediterranean immigrants was a noteworthy contributing factor to the eclectic mix of American popular music. This pioneering urban song factory made significant strides in leveling the aesthetic playing field, thus enabling talent and productivity to trump the ethnic boundaries and the segregated social and business mores of the 19th century. Jews worked with Anglo-Saxons, new immigrants worked with American "blue-bloods," classically trained composers worked with street-wise musicians and lyricists who embodied the emotions of the every-day citizen, and Tin Pan Alley songwriters of all stripes embraced the influence of African American musical derivatives. Tin Pan Alley was the pragmatic unification of art and commerce. It provided the creative batteries that powered the previously mentioned alternating current of creativity, and signified the genesis and organization of the modern songwriting and music publishing profession in the United States.

Music publishers, empowered by contemporary federal copyright statutes, capitalized on the tremendous financial potential of the song. An early example of this

³²¹ The moniker, "Tin Pan Alley," has several origins, but the most popular version describes the sound that characterized the area. The individual offices had upright pianos where resident songwriters went about their business of composing the next hit song, and during the warmer months of the year, with the windows open, the resulting cacophony was said to resemble the sound of an endless collection of tin pans striking together.

potential is the song "After the Ball," a Victorian era waltz written in 1891 by Charles K. Harris. This song sold over five million copies of sheet music at the turn of the century making it one of Tin Pan Alley's biggest success stories.³²² Inspired by this tremendous success and the promise of other powerful compositions, publishing companies sought out songwriters and paid them to write songs. They provided office space and a piano; they routinely suggested topics for songs and discussed contemporary trends with their writers; and they aggressively worked the market to place songs in moneymaking formats. Songwriters sought out publishing companies looking for professional representation to place their works with up-and-coming acts, hot bands, or contemporary singing sensations. Popular recording artists frequented the publishing houses looking for their next big hit, and conversely, publishers went to great lengths to present their select titles to performance icons for their consideration.

Publishers hired "song pluggers," adept piano players and performers—many of whom were songwriters themselves like George Gershwin—to filter through the music community and present the publishing company's wares to nightclubs, concert halls, theater troupes, band leaders, and anyone who had an in-house piano and was willing to listen. It was not uncommon to have a publishing company representative visit a dozen nightclubs, present songs to scores of potential recording clients, and visit several of the popular vaudeville companies to pitch songs all in a single evening. Music stores, the largest retail source of sheet music, regularly hired in-store song pluggers to play the latest songs to facilitate sheet music sales.

Tin Pan Alley was the first of many other songwriting and publishing centers in America. In the early decades of the 20th century similar scenes developed in Chicago, New Orleans and other major cities. Los Angeles became a highly productive music center as independent film companies moved to Southern California to capitalize on the beautiful year-round weather and diverse countryside that enabled a variety of location filming environments. On the west coast, songwriting, publishing and custom musical scores increased proportionately with the output of the independent film studios and by the 1930s, Hollywood was internationally recognized as a headquarters for hit songs,

³²² "'After the Ball': Lyrics from the Biggest Hit of the 1890s," from History Matters, the U.S. Survey History Course on the Web @ course <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5761/>

heartthrob crooners, big bands, and world-class recording artists independent of the film industry.

Another notable example of the expansion of songwriting and music publishing as a promising American industry was the ascendance of Nashville as a music center. With the success of the powerful radio station WSM and its Grand Ole' Opry broadcasts beginning in 1925, country music—more accurately labeled hillbilly or mountain music at that time—streamed into kitchens and living rooms of working-class Americans nationwide. Through the power of radio, Nashville connected with rural markets and popular country entertainers, songwriters and music business entrepreneurs accessed a new music loving and highly loyal demographic. Nashville readily developed a countrified Tin Pan Alley song factory and established the commercial underpinnings for Music City U.S.A.

Tin Pan Alley maintained considerable momentum through the 1940s. After WWII, phonograph discs, demo tapes and the ubiquity of radio broadcasts replaced the conventional song pluggers and prospective new songs flowed freely between music publishers, record producers and popular recording artists. The New York based national songwriting and music-publishing capital of the early 20th century gave way to other song centers like Los Angeles and New York which signaled the eclipse Tin Pan Alley as an institution. By the time rock 'n' roll, country music, and related pop songs began to dominate the charts in the late 1950s, Tin Pan Alley was becoming a romantic subject of songs rather than their source. But the seminal tenants of the Tin Pan Alley model coupled with the federal copyright statutes of 1909 established the basic practices and commercial mores of the American songwriting industry throughout the 20th century.

Reading the American Songbook in Austin

Tin Pan Alley created a template for the writing and the marketing of songs in America. From New York, the template evolved in Los Angeles, in Nashville, and in other creative centers around the country but above all, the process continued through the 20th century as writers shaped emotional and meaningful messages into melody and meter and commercial entities sold these handcrafted products to a receptive American audience. The ultimate result was the American Songbook, loosely defined as the "best"

or at least the most "popular" songs from the turn of the 20th century through the 1960s. Such a collection includes Tin Pan Alley titles, hits from the big band era, Broadway musicals, Hollywood musicals, jazz interpretations, motion picture soundtracks and even certain country and rock songs. There will never be a consensus on this creative canon, which of course makes it a wonderfully *American* canon, but nonetheless, the influence of this illusive collection of songs and styles influenced the Austin music scene of the 1970s. This influence came through the sensibilities and experience of the songwriters who migrated to Austin during this period, particularly Steven Fromholz, Michael Murphey, and Jerry Walker, whose work and songwriting styles are analyzed in the next chapter. Fromholz is a student of the romantic crooners of the 1930s and 1940s. His baritone voice lends itself to this full and expressive style, and many of the intricate chord structures in his ballads sample the big band arrangements of the same period. Michael Murphey literally maintained a "Tin Pan Alley West" lifestyle as a staff writer for Screen Gems in Los Angeles during the late 1960s. His disciplined work ethic and his wide range of music styles are reminiscent of the practices of the New York writers of the early 20th century. Jerry Jeff Walker is the personification of a modern American troubadour. By the time Walker moved to Austin in 1972 he had assembled the pages of his songbook by sampling the popular sounds of past generations on the highways, the streets and in the alleys of America.

A final example of the connection between the Austin scene of the 1970s and the development of the popular song in 20th century America is Willie Nelson's *Stardust* album. Five years after moving to Austin in 1972, Nelson wanted to acknowledge some of the songwriters he had long admired. In December 1977 he assembled his band under the direction of producer Booker T. Jones (Booker T. and the MGs) and after ten days in the studio, Nelson and company had captured the following American standards:

- "Stardust" (Hoagy Carmichael, Mitchell Parish)
- "Georgia on My Mind" (Hoagy Carmichael, Stuart Gorrell)
- "Blue Skies" (Irving Berlin)
- "All of Me" (Seymour Simons, Gerald Marks)
- "Unchained Melody" (Hy Zaret, Alex North)
- "September Song" (Kurt Weill, Maxwell Anderson)
- "On the Sunny Side of the Street" (Dorothy Fields, Jimmy McHugh)
- "Moonlight in Vermont" (John Blackburn, Karl Suessdorf)

"Don't Get Around Much Anymore" (Duke Ellington, Bob Russell)
"Someone to Watch Over Me" (George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin)

Stardust was released in April 1978, it was met with positive reviews, it raced to the number one spot on the *Billboard* country charts and became the most successful album of Nelson's career selling over twelve million copies worldwide. Whatever ethereal connection existed between Nelson and these great American songwriters was certainly appreciated by a large collection of music enthusiasts around the globe.

Songwriting and the DNA of Western Music

I conclude this chapter with some thoughts on songwriting and music theory. I have little formal training in either field, so once again I revert to my role as a participant observer and hope that my field notes are helpful despite my theoretical shortcomings.

The act of writing a song is a complex undertaking that involves an inexhaustible set of variables. The lyrical effort depends on the writer's level of literary competency, experience, or motivation. It might depend on their philosophical or spiritual disposition, their emotional state, or their grasp of the relevant material. Their writing effort might depend on a professional songwriting obligation or a grand artistic goal. The variables associated with creating the lyrical content of a song—the story, the plot, the message, the mood, or the moral—are as vast as the writer's imagination and the circumstances surrounding the writing process. The musical aspects of a song however—the notes, the chords, the key, and the related musical components—are fundamentally more manageable. There are musical methodologies that have developed over the centuries that largely define how music is written, performed and passed between generations. Music theory is a greybeard among intellectual pursuits and is steeped in empiricism and repetitive practice. The challenge of musical composition in all its complicated configurations essentially boils down to twelve basic building blocks—a dozen seminal components of musical DNA. The entirety of Western music is built upon only twelve distinct notes.

I arrive at this hypothesis through practical experience. As mentioned, I am not trained in music theory, I cannot read music, and I've had very few formal music lessons. My musical training is a product of playing by ear, learning songs by listening to records,

by watching other musicians, and by teaching entry-level guitar students since 1966. As a young guitar teacher I was able to piece together some simple mathematical relationships between the notes on the guitar fretboard, simple scales, chord structures and progressions. These observations evolved into a system that I retrospectively call a "matrix method" of guitar instruction. The matrix format is based on the six strings of a standard guitar and the first twelve frets on the neck that facilitate a complete octave—six strings and twelve individual notes on the fretboard that yield an elongated 6x12 rectangular matrix. I didn't study scales as a beginning player, but by studying the sequence of notes up the neck on a string-by-string basis, I was able to ascertain where the whole-step and half-step intervals fell and how they related from one string to the next.

The guitar is very logical instrument. If for example you can play an E chord in the first position (which is located at the end of the neck next to the tuning pegs), you can slide that basic formation up one fret, "barre" the open strings with you first finger on the first fret, and instantly create an F chord. If you slide this configuration up another two frets, you have a G chord. To make the same transition on a piano you have to learn how to play an E chord and then learn how to reconfigure the fingering positions to play an F or a G chord. The guitar involves a simple process of moving formations up and down the neck. Although the guitar is initially much more physically demanding—for beginners it's actually painful to apply the pressure necessary to make the notes sound clearly—from a structural point of view, it is much more accessible. As a teacher of beginning guitar, I was intrigued with the uniform matrix methodology in forming new chords. In sum, the logic of creating new chords was simple and encouraging to beginning players. Even though the physical challenge of configuring these new chords up and down the neck was difficult, new students readily understood the simple relationships of the sequence of notes and chords. They "got it" and that was very encouraging.

I began applying the mechanics of this simple guitar matrix to other relationships between notes, chords and chord progressions and have developed a set of Axioms that relate to the process of making music on the guitar. These Axioms are helpful learning tools that provide an alternative to the cumbersome task of mastering music theory. I've

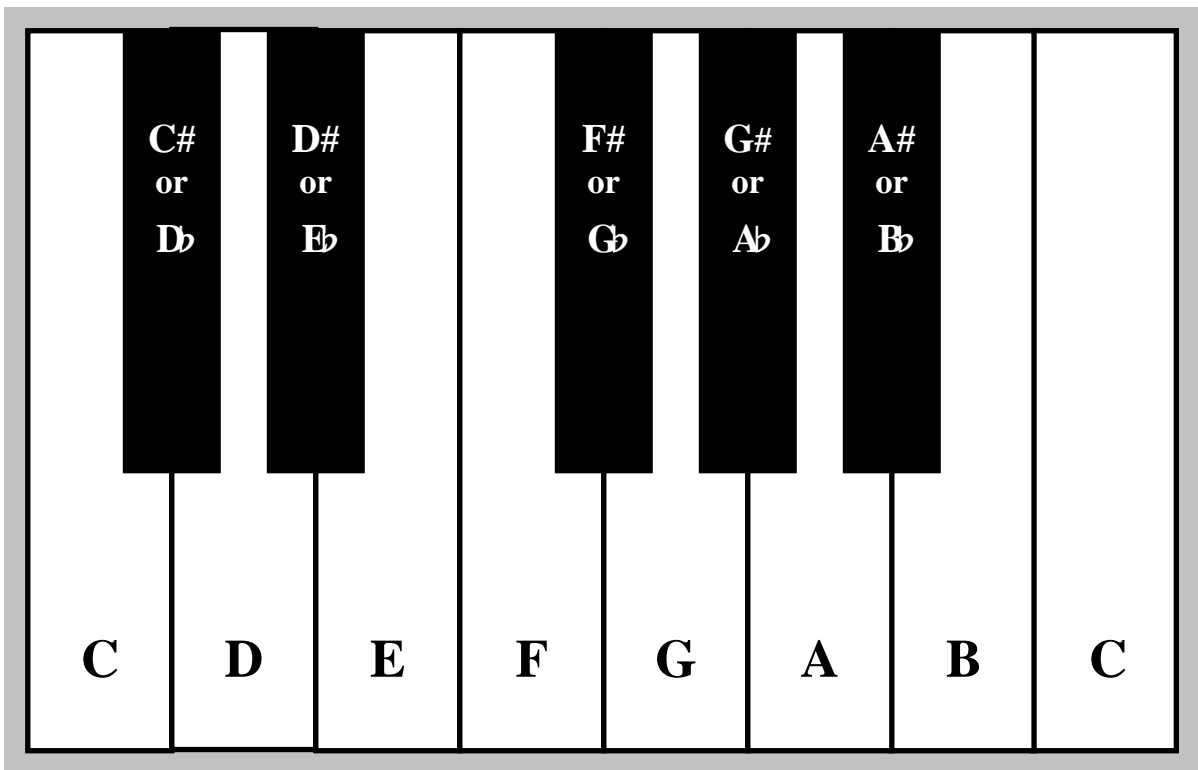
presented these fundamental propositions to beginning guitar students to equip them with a pragmatic foundation in theory that they can readily incorporate into their day-to-day playing. By utilizing these basic rules the aspiring guitarist can easily ascertain basic chord progressions, form minor or seventh chords, transpose from one key to another, readily determine relative minor chords and easily access countless tricks of the trade that sound far more difficult than they are. It's a simple approach that generates immediate gratification and a sense of accomplishment. Further, these Axioms enable players at all levels to communicate with their fellow musicians which is essential in band settings. Finally, it's a methodology and musical language common to the professional players who populated the Austin scene of 1970s.

Discerning this shared musical language is tremendously helpful in analyzing the technical aspects of the songs and the songwriters relevant to this study. The inherent subjectivity in the act of songwriting underscores the need for a practical platform of communication. A shared jargon, even one as primitive as the forthcoming matrix method, can be useful in establishing common ground in the discovery process. This position is a continuation of an argument advanced earlier in this dissertation relating to establishing a "cognitive link between what we *hear* and what we *call* it, especially when discussing genres, sub-genres and musical styles."³²³ Developing such a "cognitive link" between sound, style and language is an attempt to alleviate the common practice of lining up a litany of modifiers to describe a style, a genre, or a musical texture. For example, a description like, "Her music is a cross between blues, rock, jazz, and country and represents a fresh approach in the Americana genre," tells us very little about the fabric and feel of the music in question. In an attempt to avoid this rambling and ineffective technique, I'm offering this simple matrix method to establish a common vocabulary to better understand the structure and characteristics of the popular compositions under study. The narrative below presents the simple Axioms that map out the simple relationships between notes, chords and chord progressions relative to the contemporary songs and sounds of the seventies.

As mentioned, there are twelve basic notes in Western music. Music in Asia or in other parts of the world might incorporate more and/or different notes, but in Western

³²³ From the Introduction, p. 19.

music—the musical styles that developed in Europe during the Middle Ages that immigrated to the New World in the early 17th century—there are only twelve basic notes. A note, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* is a single sound of a given musical pitch and duration, also called a tone in America.³²⁴ More specifically, a note coincides with a particular frequency. The "A" note just above middle C on a piano oscillates at 440 cycles per second (440 Hz). This is a worthy example because A440 is the note accepted by International Organization for Standardization as the general tuning standard for musical pitch.³²⁵ And like A440, all musical notes sound at distinctive frequencies ranging from 20 cycles per second (20 Hz) to roughly 20,000 cycles per second (20,000 Hz) and this frequency spectrum represents the common range of human hearing. These twelve notes connote a basic "Periodic Table of Tones," to borrow from Chemistry, and are conveniently represented on the keyboard of a piano:



³²⁴ Kennedy, Michael. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* (Third Edition). (London: Oxford University Press, 1980). p. 455.

³²⁵ The American music industry reached an informal standard of 440 Hz in 1926, and has used it in instrument manufacturing. This standard was taken up by the International Organization for Standardization in 1955 and reaffirmed by them in 1975. Although A440 is still not universally accepted it serves as the audio frequency reference for the calibration of musical instruments. (ISO 16:1975 Acoustics -- Standard tuning frequency [Standard musical pitch]).

These observations suggest the first Axiom that applies to the matrix method and to the foundations of making popular music:

Axiom I: There are twelve notes used in Western music. These twelve unique tones are the basic building blocks or essential DNA components from which all composition and theory follows.

The sequence of notes beginning at middle C and continuing up the scale through the B note that precedes the C octave note comprise the "Periodic Table of Tones." These same twelve notes repeat every new octave whether ascending or descending the piano keyboard. Further, each new octave voicing of a note ascending the scale sounds at *twice* the frequency of its lower predecessor. Middle C for example sounds at 262 Hz and the octave C sounds at 524 Hz. Each new octave voicing of a note descending the scale sounds at *half* the frequency of its higher predecessor. The same middle C that sounds at 262 Hz sounds at 131 Hz in the lower octave. The black keys on the piano signify the sharps (#) and flats (*b*). The black key immediately following the middle C in the keyboard illustration above labeled C# or Db actually depicts a single note. There is no difference in the tone or frequency of a C# or a Db, it's simply two names for the same note and calling that note a C# or a Db is based on the context in which it is used. This holds true for all black keys on the keyboard and by extension, to all "sharp and flat" notes in all musical settings. Further, the tonal relationships on the piano apply to all musical instruments and all musical relationships. Also worth mentioning is the concept of intervals, more commonly known as half-steps and whole-steps. The black keys on the piano are placed irregularly between the white keys. This arrangement reflects the standard sequence of the basic twelve notes. The intervals of some notes are whole-steps while the intervals between other notes are half-steps. The interval between C and D for example is a whole-step, while the interval C and the adjacent black key, C#/Db, is a half-step, and the interval between that same C#/Db note and the adjacent D is a half-step. Following the notes chromatically up the scale therefore is a sequence of half-steps.³²⁶ This illustrates an essential characteristic of the Periodic Table. There is a

³²⁶ "Chromatically" in this context means moving from one note to the next adjoining note. Technically, a chromatic scale is a musical scale with twelve distinct pitches each a semitone

half-step between E and F and between B and C. There are no passing notes between these notes and this applies in all circumstances. The significance of this simple observation comes into sharper focus in the process of building scales which is addressed below. These observations regarding the static relationship between E and F and B and C suggest the second Axiom:

Axiom II: There is always a half-step between E and F and between B and C. (In terms of the Periodic Table of Tones therefore, there are no E#/Fb or B#/Cb notes.)³²⁷

These two Axioms define the twelve basic building blocks, their sequence, and their structural relationships. These Axioms also illustrate several basic mathematical observations regarding the foundation and creation of musical scales. Every note provides the basic tone for its signature scale. Accordingly, there are D, E, F, G, A, and B scales as well as D#/Eb, F#/Gb, G#/Ab, A#/Bb, and C#/Db scales that accommodate the sharp and flat keys. All of these scales have three things in common that relate to the matrix method and the Axioms offered herein.³²⁸ The first two commonalities have been mentioned: All scales are derivatives of twelve basic notes (Axiom I) and all scales reflect that there is always a half-step between E and F and between B and C (Axiom II). The third commonality has to do with how scales are structurally sequenced, which provides the groundwork for the third Axiom:

Axiom III: In any given eight-note *major* scale, there is always a half step between the third and the fourth note of the sequence and between the seventh and eighth note of the sequence. All other intervals are whole-steps.³²⁹

apart. In other words, a chromatic scale is twelve sequential notes (the basic twelve building blocks) linked by half-steps.

³²⁷ Several of my more enlightened colleagues with backgrounds in music theory inform that in certain circumstances the notes E#, Fb or B#, Cb are notated as such. Nonetheless, there is no specific frequency assigned to these notes and the notation of an E# or an Fb would yield the same tonal frequency as an E or an F just as the notation of a B# or Cb would yield the same tonal frequency of a B or a C.

³²⁸ Scales have many things in common, but as mentioned, the three commonalities suggested above relate to the simplified matrix method and purposefully avoids a probing (and undoubtedly a far more accurate) analysis of scales.

³²⁹ I'm told by colleague, Kevin Mooney, who is on my dissertation committee and who is indeed a truly *trained* musician-guitarist with excellent reading skills that Axiom III applies only to major scales. For that reason, I added the word "major" into the sentence above and italicized it.

To illustrate, consider the basic C scale. This scale is commonly used as a reference because it is the only "perfect scale" void of any sharps or flats. The scale is made up of eight notes anchored at the lower frequency by a C note and resolved at the higher register with an octave C note. Taking the relevant notes from the piano keyboard and transposing them onto a "left to right" simple illustration (as seen below in the example of a C scale) will be helpful in creating new scales based on Axioms I, II, and III:

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Notice that moving from note 3 to note 4 constitutes a half-step and moving from note 7 to note 8 constitutes the other half-step as mentioned in Axiom III. The utility of this observation is seen in the process of building a new scale, take the key of D for example. For convenience, I display the basic twelve notes from the Periodic Table in their natural sequence. By pulling the appropriate notes from the basic twelve-tone inventory and placing them in the proper order as defined in Axiom III, we can build a D scale and by using the same techniques, we can build a scale for any key. Here is the twelve-tone inventory:

C	C# <i>σDb</i>	D	D# <i>σEb</i>	E	F	F# <i>σ</i> G_b	G	G# <i>σAb</i>	A	A# <i>σB_b</i>	B
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We begin with the root note of the scale, D, move up a whole-step to add the E note, move up another whole-step which requires the F#/G_b note, then, per Axiom III, we advance a half-step and add the fourth note of the scale, the G note. The fifth note would be the whole-step to A, the sixth note would be the whole-step to B, the seventh note

For the purposes of my so-called matrix method however, Axiom III has merit: The mission at hand is simply to develop a communicative format between non-music-reading popular music players and in this effort, I believe the matrix method is helpful.

would be the whole-step to *C#/Db*, and the final note requires a half-step between the seventh and the eighth note as required by Axiom III to resolve the scale with the octave D note. Graphically, the scale unfolds as follows:

D	E	F# <i>fh</i>	G	A	B	G# <i>gh</i>	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

In this fashion it is possible to create a scale for any key by simply remembering that there is always a half-step between E and F and between B and C (Axiom II), and in laying out the scale there is always a half-step between the third and the fourth note and between the seventh and the eighth note (Axiom III).

Through the application of these three Axioms the student can then move on to create chords—a combination of three or more tones that sound together in harmony—and chord progressions which are series of chords that are common to a particular key and form the harmonic foundation of popular songs. There are countless well-known songs in the American canon that contain only three chords like "Home on the Range," "Clementine," or "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Most classic blues songs have only three basic chords; pop songs like "Rock Around the Clock," "Hound Dog," even "Louie Louie" are all three-chord wonders; folk music and country songs generally embody a three to four chord format and even the National Anthem has only five chords. The grand majority of hit songs over the last 150 years are based on fundamental chords and basic chord progressions.

Forming a chord involves uniting three notes of a particular scale, the first note, the third note and the fifth note to create what is commonly called a triad. A simple C chord therefore includes the base C note, the third note of the scale, E, and the fifth note of the scale, G, or in other words, it's a "1-3-5" note combination or triad. A Cm chord (C-minor) involves the same three notes except the "three" note is flatted by dropping it a half-step (E to *Eb*) to yield a Cm triad: C, *Eb* and G, and a C7 chord (C-seventh) maintains the basic triad and adds a fourth note which is the flatted seventh note of the scale—B is the seventh note of a C scale and is flatted by taking the note down a half-step to produce a *Bb*—which yields the following C7 combination: C, E, G + *Bb*. All

chords are similarly designed, each with their unique structural formula. To create an augmented chord you add this, to form a major-seventh chord, you lower that, or to create a suspended-fourth chord you tinker with the basic scale by employing a different chord formula. These three Axioms coupled with subsequent chord formulas illustrate how chords are made and enable an aspiring student to map out a challenging new chord and expand their musical vocabulary.

Progressions involve combining chords into familiar groupings to create songs like the examples above. Through the centuries, specific chord combinations have become common fare because they sound pleasing and *feel* familiar to Western musical sensitivities. The most common progression in Western music is the simple three-chord progression that is the product of selecting three designated chords from a scale, specifically the first chord, the fourth chord, and the fifth chord. A standard C progression for example would include the chord derived from the root note of C, followed by the chord built from the fourth note of the scale, F, and completed with the chord derived from the fifth note of the scale, G. In classic music jargon the first chord is known as the "tonic," the fourth chord is the "subdominant" and the fifth chord is called the "dominant." In modern parlance, the tonic is generally called the one-chord, the subdominant is the four-chord, and the dominant is called the five-chord. These are either written as Arabic numerals, 1-4-5, or in Roman numerals, I-IV-V. Therefore, the common phrase, "1-4-5," simply refers to a standard chord progression.

This information provides the essential tools to wade into the contemporary musical jargon that is relevant to this study of songs and songwriters. It is a form of "music-speak" that I initially learned as "Nashville shorthand" that enables popular-music practitioners to communicate regardless of their level of competency in reading music or what is technically known as "musical notation" that involves the use of classical symbols written on a staff or stave.³³⁰ Nashville shorthand is simply a phrase that many Austin musicians adopted during the 1970s that goes by many names. Some refer to the practice as "reading charts" others refer to the Nashville number system and there are many subtle variations of this ad hoc notation. Scholar and classically trained musician

³³⁰ The staff, or stave, is a set of five horizontal lines and four spaces that represent different musical notes of a specific pitch.

Hugh Sparks makes the following observation in his 1984 dissertation, *Stylistic Development and Compositional Processes of Selected Solo Singer/songwriters in Austin, Texas*, in describing the communication techniques used by Austin musician Wink Tyler and his band: "[Tyler] could read Roman numeral harmonic progression charts though he, like the studio musicians in Nashville, used Arabic numerals [rather than Roman numerals]."³³¹ Sparks singles out Tyler because his band was known for their ability to accompany country music stars passing through Austin in need of a band. Tyler and company would acquire a song list from the traveling singer and chart out the material in advance by listening to their records. Or, given their level of proficiency, they could simply "wing it" by communicating the "number system" on stage.

This is how various performances and jam sessions often unfolded in Austin during the progressive country years. If a new songwriter came to town or was passing through and wanted to use a band or a few extra musicians, then players from Austin's pool of support musicians would gather for the task. In this fashion writers like Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, or Keith Sykes could readily pick up sidemen in Austin if they wanted to expand their stage show. In such an impromptu setting, it was common for one of the musicians who might be familiar with a certain song the performer was going to play to mention to the others that "this is a 1-2-4-5 in C with a 6-minor in the bridge." This meant the song was in C, the verse contained a C, D, F and G that there would be a A-minor in the bridge. The common practice was sit back and listen to the first verse, discern the structure and layer in additional instruments as the song developed. This phenomenon was accurately described by long-time guitar and bass sideman, Travis Holland:

Now, as to the ability of the musicians in Austin to just go from one band to another without spending weeks rehearsing, well, most of the people had several years of music experience under their belt. They were comfortable on stage, they might be familiar to a certain extent with [the songwriter's] material, and they usually knew the other pickers in the band. But mostly, they were receptive enough to listen and watch while

³³¹ Sparks, Hugh Cullen. *Stylistic Development and Compositional Processes of Selected Solo Singer/Songwriters in Austin, Texas*. Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, p. 46.

they were playing, to figure out what was going on and what the band was trying to do. They had a willingness to lay back and figure out what was supposed to happen. And if you've got that, you can play with anybody. That was why they were flexible. It wasn't because the music was the same from one songwriter to the next. Sidemen didn't come to Austin much. Because if they did, they had better be damned good, if they wanted to earn a living there.³³²

In the situation that Holland describes, one of the players who might be familiar with the song structures would be communicating the changes through hand signals or subtle verbal cues. This was a common practice on stage and in the recording studio where such "shorthand" charts were routinely used rather than formal musical notation. One aspect of Holland's observation is worth highlighting, specifically, that the support players "were receptive enough to listen and watch while they were playing," in an effort "to figure out what was going on and what the band was trying to do." This illustrates a basic theme common to the experienced sidemen of the period—a reverence for the song. Good musicians let the song tell them what to play.

I now turn from the history of the song to an analysis of certain songs that are relevant to the Austin scene and to the essence of their creators by examining the early professional careers of three prominent Austin-based songwriters—Steven Fromholz, Michael Martin Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker.

³³² Holland, p. 84.

Chapter 6

THREE TEXAS SONGWRITERS - STEVEN FROMHOLZ, MICHAEL MARTIN MURPHEY, AND JERRY JEFF WALKER

I have argued that songs were the brick and mortar of the Austin scene of the 1970s and I now turn to the creators of these building blocks. I focus on Fromholz, Murphey and Walker for several reasons: I've worked extensively with each of them and feel very familiar with their work. They were defining figures in the early seventies scene, they were instrumental in bringing Austin music into the national spotlight and they were my primary mentors. I met them within a two-year period between 1970 and 1972. I've co-written songs with Fromholz and Murphey and have contributed to the arrangements on Murphey's and Walker's albums. I've served in a booking and management capacity with Fromholz and Murphey and produced several albums for Fromholz. We were very close during the early Austin years and maintain strong ties to this day.

Rather than presenting a survey of their accomplishments and extensive song catalogues, the following analysis highlights landmark songwriting-recording projects in their individual careers. In discussing Fromholz, for example, I focus on his three-song *Texas Trilogy* that depicts the life of a young man growing up in a small Texas town. With Murphey, I single out a double-album recording project he wrote for the popular country-rock ensemble Kenny Rogers and the First Edition about the rise and demise of an ephemeral silver mining town in the Mojave Desert at the turn of the 20th century, *The Ballad of Calico*. And in discussing the songwriting methodologies of Jerry Jeff Walker, I feature the making of his successful 1973 album, *¡Viva Terlingua!*. The information offered in these narratives addresses their personal and professional lives from their early years through the decade of the 1970s. The conclusion of this chapter offers a comparison of their individual styles and their impact on the evolution of popular American music.

Steven Fromholz

Fromholz's most highly respected and enduring work was a product of his early career in 1967 when he wrote three songs about his native state. *Texas Trilogy* is one of

the best works ever written about life in rural Texas. It tells of Steven Fromholz's experiences growing up in the small town of Kopperl in Bosque County and includes the songs "Daybreak," "Trainride," and "Bosque County Romance." In sum, the three songs portray the people and their seemingly mundane lives as they move through their relationships, their vocations and try to shape youthful dreams into a durable reality. The songs map out the lay of the land, the structure of the towns, the course of the rivers and the railroad tracks that slice through the county. They depict what those tracks take away what they bring back home from Waco, Fort Worth, and the curious world beyond the county's borders. The songs describe the friction inherent between the hometown social mores and NASA-paced trends in science and technology and the NASCAR-paced trends of popular culture in 20th-century Texas.³³³ *Texas Trilogy* is an exceptional participant-observer-based ethnography set to lyric and melody. These compositions stand the test of time and the perpetual recycling of popular culture. They are tough old tunes, not unlike their author, and seem to take on greater meaning as the decades slip by as Americans log more and more miles on urban freeways far removed from the dusty roads of small towns and rural settings. There's a great deal of beef on the historical bones of this small county, and the story that Fromholz tells typifies the joys and challenges of survival, growth, and prosperity shared by generations of agrarian families throughout America.

"Daybreak" begins the *Trilogy* with the lines, *Six o'clock silence of a new day beginning, is heard in the small Texas town*, and then describes the morning's beginnings, *Like a signal from nowhere, the people who live there, are up and moving around*. And like countless other American mornings, the day begins with routine tasks:

'Cause there's bacon to fry, and biscuits to bake
On the stove that the Salvation Army won't take
You open the windows and turn on the fan,
'Cause it's hotter than hell when the sun hits the land.

After describing the early activities of the locals, Fromholz introduces Walter and Fanny who *own the grocery that sells most all that you need* who have been *up and*

³³³ Interestingly, Bosque County has the same population in 2010 that it had at the turn of the 20th century, 10,000 Central Texans. Cited from the book, *Texas Trilogy - Life in a Small Texas Town*. (Hillis, Craig, *Texas Trilogy - Life in a Small Texas Town*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.)

working since early this morning because they've got the whole village to feed. These life-long residents of Kopperl put out fresh eggs and throw bad ones away that rotted because of the heat yesterday, and they make sure they keep the store all dark so you can't see the flies that settle on round steak and last Monday's pies. And a few doors down from Walter & Fanny's grocery is Sleepy Hill's Drugstore where the café is open and the coffee is bubbling hot, where all the folks that ain't working will sit there till sundown and talk about what they ain't got. They'll exchange stories and gossip and someone reports that someone just blew a clutch in the old pickup truck and it seems that folks everywhere have been riding on a streak of bad luck . . . It's one thing after another in the small town as the residents move from day to day: The doctor bills came and the well has gone dry, and it seems like their grown kids don't care whether they live or die.

Having presented the lyrics for "Daybreak," Fromholz returns to the song's signature introduction riff to establish a musical bed for the following monologue:

Hell, I can remember when Kopperl, Texas was a good place for a man to live and raise a family. 'Course that was before they closed down the cotton gin. Has it been that long ago? Seems like only yesterday that ol' Steve Hughes lost his arm in the infernal machine and walked all the way home bleedin' to death.

New highway helped some when they dammed up the Brazos to build Lake Whitney. Brought some fishermen down from Dallas and Fort Worth. Town sure has been quiet, though, since they closed down the depot and built that new trestle out west of town. You know, the train just don't stop here anymore. No, the train just don't stop here anymore.

The underlying chord structure then segues from A-minor to D, takes off on crisp upbeat tempo that suggests the rhythmic feel of steel wheels on rails as the second song begins. "Trainride" laments the loss of the railroads and subtly differentiates between two eras in the county's development with a focus on shifting generations.

Well, the last time I remember that train stoppin' at the depot
Was when me and my Aunt Veta came riding back from Waco
I remember I was wearing my long pants and we was sharing
conversation with a man who sold ballpoint pens and paper
And the train stopped once in Clifton
Where my aunt bought me some ice cream
And my mom was there to meet us
When the train pulled into Kopperl.

The song then moves to a chorus that is underpinned by a series of rapidly changing chords as Fromholz takes the listener from his childhood memory of a train ride on the vibrant Santa Fe line to the early 1960s where *kids at night break window lights and the sound of trains only remains in the memories of the ones like me; who have turned their backs on the splintered cracks in the walls that stand on the railroad's land.* The Kopperl Depot is now a fractured shell with a fading Santa Fe logo on weathered wood where Fromholz and his friends *used to play then run away from the Depot Man.* The song then moves back to a time when the depot was the nexus of the small town's commerce and the logo on side of the building was crisp and clean. It was a time when the visiting trains were the link to the excitement of a world of possibility beyond the county line:

I remember me and brother used to run down to the depot
Just to listen to the whistle blow when the train pulled into Kopperl
And the engine's big and shiny black as coal that fed the fire
And the engineer he'd smile and say, "Howdy, how you fellas?"
 And the people by the windows
 Playing cards and reading papers
 Seemed as far away to us
 As next summer's school vacation.

After the second chorus, Fromholz makes a seamless modulation from the key of D to the sister key of G to introduce the third song of the *Trilogy*. "Bosque County Romance" reads like a blue-collar-agrarian epic poem about the life, the times and the challenges of a young couple making their way on a small farm outside of Kopperl. The characters are real. Fromholz knew the protagonists, Billy Archer and Mary Martin, who graduated several years before him at Kopperl High School and stayed in Bosque County to work the Archer family farm.³³⁴ The author recalls that *Mary Martin was a schoolgirl*

³³⁴ When I was researching the book *Texas Trilogy*, I interviewed Billy Archer at length, and he concurs with the essence of Fromholz's representations. As Fromholz says in "Bosque County Romance," Billy Archer and Mary Martin married just out of high school but Mary died approximately fifteen years later and Archer remarried another Bosque County native whose name was also Mary. This is the couple I interviewed prior to the book's publication in 2002. Both informants agreed with that Fromholz's song accurately reflected the essence of the farm-ranching experience in Bosque County. All of the events highlighted in the song didn't

just seventeen or so, when she married Billy Archer about fourteen years ago. They were just a couple of young kids, not even out of high school and the all folks in Kopperl said it wouldn't last, but when you grow up in the country, you grow up mighty fast. Fromholz mentioned that they married in a hurry, in March before school was out, and many of the locals said that she was pregnant, "Just wait and you'll find out." The gossip proved to be true: It came about that winter one gray November morn, the first of many more to come a baby boy was born.

In the chorus, the song describes the challenges of making a living from the land, and by extension, the challenges that confront myriad American agrarians who embrace the Jeffersonian dream of the yeoman farmer:

And cattle is their game
And Archer is the name
They give to the acres that they own
If the Brazos don't run dry
And the newborn calves don't die
Another year from Mary will have flown
Another year from Mary will have flown.

Still, the seasons changed, and the cycle continued, times got tough, and Billy *kept what cattle his daddy could afford*, and made his rounds around the ranch by *bouncing across the cactus in a 1950 Ford*. But there were challenging years when *the cows were sick and skinny, and the weeds was all that grew, but Billy kept the place alive, the only thing he knew*. Mary maintained the home front; she *cooked the supper*, and she *scrubbed the clothes*, and *Mary busted horses*, and she *blew the baby's nose*. *Mary and a shotgun kept the rattlesnakes away*, but *how she kept on smiling, no one could ever say*. But the couple persevered because *cattle is their game, and Archer is the name, they give to the acres that they own*. Fromholz then takes the story into its final verse and weighs in on the efficacy of the forces of nature in their efforts to keep "what cattle his daddy could afford:

Now the drought of '57 was a curse upon the land
No one in Bosque County could give ol' Bill a helping hand

specifically happen to the original Archer couple, but the informants agreed that they were representative of the period under study.

The ground was cracked and broken and the truck was out of gas
And cows can't feed on prickly pear instead of growing grass
Well the weather got the water and snakebite took a child
And a fire in the old barn took the hay that Bill had piled
The mortgage got the money and the screwworm got the cows
The years have come for Mary she's waiting for them now.

After a final chorus, "Bosque County Romance" revisits the beginning chord structure and the melodic signature riff that defines the beginning of "Daybreak" with a relaxed modulation from the key of G to the original A-minor format to bring the listener back to the original set, setting and tonal feeling of *Texas Trilogy*:

Six o'clock silence,
Of a new day beginning
Is heard in the small Texas town
Like a signal from nowhere
The people who live there
Are up and they're moving around
'Cause there's bacon to fry
And there's biscuits to bake
On the stove that the Salvation Army won't take
And you open the windows
And you turn on the fan
'Cause it's hotter than hell
When the sun hits the land . . .

Over the last forty years *Texas Trilogy* has carved out an indelible niche in the hierarchy of Lone Star creative works. These three songs and the accompanying narratives are an amazing work of musical ethnography, and its genesis is equally amazing. This a story best told by the author in his autobiographical reflections during an interview on April 14, 1994. The following transcription touches on Fromholz's experience in the United States Navy during the middle 1960s:

I got my draft notice for the Army in 1965. I didn't want to go to Fort Hood or Fort Polk or *Fort Anything*, so I signed up with the Navy. After basic training in San Diego, they sent me to Electronic Technician's School at Treasure Island up in San Francisco. That was in late September of 1965. There I was, a fledgling musician and songwriter who loved to get out and play, right in the middle of the biggest damned hippie scene of the sixties. I experienced what a lot of young folks experienced back then:

I had Uncle Sam yelling in one ear and my “artistic urges” whispering in the other. Thank God I’m a Gemini!

I played a lot of music in San Francisco and that's when I wrote *Texas Trilog*y. I wrote the *Trilog*y in one setting. When I got started, it just seemed to flow along, like it been hiding in my head for years. And actually, I guess that's really true. After a few hours of working on it I had the chord changes in my head and all the lyrics written down. I learned it that afternoon and sang it that night at the Drinking Gourd to a packed house. I thought I sang it very well but when I finished, the room was total quiet and I thought, "Oh Jesus, I really screwed up this time!" But then after about fifteen seconds the room exploded and everybody just went nuts! I figured at that point that I might be on to something good. That was a great night for me. I'd never written a song, much less three songs, in such a short time, and I'd never experienced such immediate approval for my work. It's very rare in this business to have that happen.³³⁵

The magic of *The Trilog*y started for me the night I met Steven Fromholz. It was a crisp evening in the fall of 1970. I was a rock and roll sprout struggling through my fourth year at the University of Texas in Austin. My lady-friend at that time was an avid acoustic music fan and insisted that we go out to the local nightclub, the Chequered Flag, and hear this great folk-duo "Frummox." Steven Fromholz and Dan McCrimmon were touring in support of their popular 1969 ABC record release, *From Here to There*, an album that was generating a considerable bohemian buzz nationally with particularly favorable reviews of the lead cut, *Texas Trilog*y. Folk music wasn't my music of choice back then and I anticipated a rather dry evening. After all, the early seventies were the days of peace, love and brown rice when rock music rolled over America's acoustic sensibilities and the “British Invasion” had recaptured the pop market of the colonial youth. But I knew that the Chequered Flag had ice-cold beer in big frosty schooners that was guaranteed to take the edge off any impending musical ennui.

Once Frummox hit the stage I was anything but bored. Indeed, that evening at the Chequered Flag was an aesthetic wake-up call that had a profound effect on my musical future. I stayed for both shows, transfixed by one great song after another and enlivened by Steven's humorous stage patter. Steven and Dan presented melodies that were both delicate and dynamic, well-balanced harmonies, and lyrics that painted an extremely vivid picture and resonated internally long after I left the club. I was particularly

³³⁵ Interview with Fromholz on April 14, 1999.

impressed with *Texas Trilogy*. This unique three-song suite blended history and insight with words and music that transcended the normal parameters of song crafting. *The Trilogy* guided the audience through the *bigness* of growing up in a small Texas town and by extension revived the *bigness* of the experience in the lives of the song's characters.

Segle Fry, manager of the Flag, was kind enough to introduce me to Steven and Dan after the show. As is often the case with touring musicians, the end of the last set at the club signaled a retreat to the hotel for some serious song swapping and party pickin'. That night was no exception. Steven was even more of a character off stage than on, and as we passed the guitars around a spark grew between us that eventually kindled a lifelong friendship. He liked my guitar playing and I was bowled over by his writing and performance talents. Simply stated, we hit it off, and in the months to come I visited as many Frummox gigs as I could and occasionally sat in with Steven and Dan. I became the official Frummox sidekick and was happy to have Steven bunk at my place when he was in town for a show. He returned the favor by inviting me up to visit him and his better half, Janey Lake, at their hideaway home in Gold Hill, Colorado.

During the winter of 1970-71, I was a regular visitor at the Fromholz-Lake homestead in the Rockies high above Boulder. Gold Hill was a rustic community of artists, university types and pine-huggers with no stores, no paved roads or other related commercial blemishes. It was a hippie heaven tailor made for an aspiring songwriter from Kopperl, and a picker's paradise for an energized rock 'n' roller from UT. Our wooden guitars came alive in the high, dry air and Steven's big baritone filled up every corner of Janey's front room. The isolated mountain environment, the warmth of Steve and Janey's hospitality and the cozy song sessions around the pot-bellied stove linger as magic moments in my musical upbringing. I learned a great deal about songs and how they came to be and, thanks to Steven's patience, I developed some guitar skills that, in a very small way, contributed to his inexhaustible store of original works.

That was forty years ago. Since those early days in Gold Hill Steven and I have played innumerable gigs together and registered more than our share of road miles. After four decades I'm more convinced than ever before that Fromholz is one of the greatest songsmiths ever to pick up a guitar. After all these years as a listener, a friend, and a sideman I can pinpoint a definitive "one-two" punch in Steven's songwriting. He has a

unique poetic talent that reduces complicated real-life situations into simple, accessible lyrics. He then blends idea and lyric with chord and melody into a synergistic musical whole. His compositions move beyond the staid country three-chord format. He regularly tosses in structural curve balls. This might involve a delicate chord selection that sounds effortless and natural upon delivery as if the song had been a standard for decades . . . It sounds as if you could pick up your guitar and easily play along. Quite often however, reproducing the tune is somewhat challenging. This is not to imply that such changes are extremely difficult—indeed, they're usually not—but there is generally a singularity in structure layered beneath the initial perception and the assumed chord configuration. In time, and by working with other gifted songwriters I began to recognize this quality of a "simple and familiar initial impression" versus the reality of a more intricate substructure. This concept is difficult to relate verbally but profits from referencing a familiar song and explaining its harmonic organization. Consider the opening bars of the ubiquitous Beatles' song "Rocky Raccoon."

I choose this title because in hearing the opening chord sequence, most baby boomers immediately recognize the song as "Rocky Raccoon." The short segment I'm referring to feature the chords for the lyrics "Now somewhere in the Black Mountain hills of Dakota there lived a young boy named Rocky Raccoon. One day his woman ran off with another . . . " Most intermediate guitar players who hear this light-hearted Lennon-McCartney tune usually identify a very simple chord passage, Am (A-minor) to D7 (D-seventh) to G7 (G-seventh) that resolves on the base chord of C when the lyrics reach the word "another," which is the end of the short 24-beat section under study. This initial impression is fundamentally correct, but there's an added nuance responsible for this unique sonic texture I'm trying to describe. To wit: the opening chord is not an Am but an Am7 (A-minor-seventh) with a high seventh note (which is a G note) positioned on the third fret of first string. This gives the chord a singular ring that's slightly removed from the voicing of a regular Am. The chord sequence then moves to a simple D7, but the high G note stays in place, thus producing what is essentially a D-seventh chord with a suspended fourth that lingers for only four beats before dropping the suspended fourth to resolve to the simple D7 that also lingers four beats then moves to the G7 for eight beats before shifting to the C chord on the word "another." A simple "Nashville-

shorthand" type chord chart (that displays the actual chords rather than numbers) would be as follows:

Chords: Am7+G (eight-beat chord introduction)

Beats: / / / / / / / /

Chords: Am7+G

Am7+G

Beats: / / / / / / / /

Lyrics: Now somewhere in the Black Mountain Hills of Dakota there lived a

Chords: D7+G

D7

Beats: / / / / / / / /

Lyrics: Young boy named Rocky Rac - coon

Chords: G7

G7

Beats: / / / / / / / /

Lyrics: One day his woman ran off with

When the song reaches the word, "another," it moves to the C chord and progresses on through the rest of the composition. But in the opening 24 beats of the song, the added G note, which rings harmonically above the chords that move underneath, lends a defining texture to the beginning of "Rocky Raccoon." This is one small example, and there are countless subtleties in the ranks of late 20th-century popular songs. Other examples might include the beginning chord of "A Hard Day's Night" (a G7+sus 4) or the simple D6 chord that introduces "The Fool on the Hill." These are all clever, innovative chords and note structures that are easily overlooked on first blush. These nuances are evident in Murphey's extensive song catalogue as discussed below, and to a degree, in Walker's songs, where the most prominent example is the subtle inclusion of an E chord in the phrase leading up to the chorus of "Mr. Bojangles."

Beyond these delicate chord and note structures there are configurations and tonal voicings evident in Fromholz's music reminiscent of the big band compositions, sophisticated orchestral arrangements, and other progressive styles dating from the 1930s through the early 1960s. Western swing, for example, is a Texas-based development that fused the chord charts and orchestral arrangements of the big bands with country-flavored instruments like twin fiddles, steel guitar, and prominent "inside-chord" jazz-oriented guitar styles. Other early styles that influenced Fromholz's musical apprenticeship were

"cool jazz" of the 1950s exemplified through the work of Miles Davis and Dave Brubeck and the "Nashville Sound" pioneered by Music City U.S.A. impresario Chet Atkins later in that decade.³³⁶ These multiple genre influences can be seen in the work of Murphey and Walker.

All three of these songwriters came of age during the post-WWII years.³³⁷ The baby boomers grew up in one of the most dynamic and innovative periods in the history of popular music. Not since the "Jazz Age" has there been such a flurry of novel styles and genres coupled with broad-based advances in broadcast media and music marketing formats. Undoubtedly, it was during the early decades of the 20th century that American blues and jazz debuted on the international stage powered by the advent of radio and technological advances in the mass production of recorded discs. The post-WWII era however had an even more aggressive growth curve on popular music and media fronts. There was an impressive array of new music introduced during this period. Country music for example, evolved from its hillbilly roots and its "country & western" moniker to the "country" music that reigned during the 1950s and beyond. Bill Haley and His Comets and Elvis Presley rolled out rock to a young American audience, and groups like the Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul and Mary sparked a commercial folk hootenanny boom distinctly removed from the genre's depression-era socio-economic message. The Eisenhower years through the early sixties were packed with new musical whims from hula hoop songs to countless dance-craze songs as well as surf music, hotrod songs popular vocal groups like The Four Freshmen. The post-WWII years introduced a dizzying inventory of technological innovations in the music and media industries—television, magnetic recording tape, the transistor radio (as a precursor to the iPod), the refinement of multi-track recording, the shift from Hi-Fi to Stereo, the 45 RPM single, and the long-playing record album. The *Billboard* Hot Recording Charts became the

³³⁶ Fromholz's writing techniques often operate beyond the pale of the common 1-4-5 pop and country hit formats. "Late Night Neon Shadows," previously mentioned in considering the songwriting and publishing business in Nashville, is an example of structural formats "beyond the pale." Another example of many in his extensive catalogue is a Latin-flavored composition called "Isla Mujeres." Both of these compositions are analyzed in the section below, "Fromholz's Unconventional Imagination." For a detailed treatment of the "Nashville Sound," see the *Austin City Limits* section in Chapter 7: "Cultural Legacy - Cultural Products."

³³⁷ Fromholz was born on June 8, 1945; Murphey, on March 14, 1945; and Walker, on March 16, 1942.

industry standard for commercial success and FM radio changed how America listened to music.

This initial generation of baby boomers was exposed to a larger and more diversified collection of paradigm-shifting music and media trends than any generation before or since. One could effectively argue that the Jazz Age delivered American jazz and blues to a mass market and reconfigured the fabric and future of popular music, which of course is entirely true. But the pace of communication in the Jazz Age was "geological" by today's standards. Broadcast radio didn't emerge until the early 1920s; musical innovations traveled slowly around the country and depended largely on live performance and the dissemination of sheet music to spread to good news. One could also argue that the digital age reconfigured the entire structure of the music industry, which of course is also true. But the Internet effectively segregated musical styles and genres. Internet-era musicians commonly seek out their individual interests with the click of a mouse and create their personal play lists and specific digital salons of interest. An international menu of musical styles was readily available, but the individual seeker had to have an interest in experiencing genre and style diversity.³³⁸ This was not the case with the early baby boomers. During their formative years, there were a finite number of radio stations and television channels and even the most dedicated media buff had a limited menu of entertainment options. Hearing your favorite song on the radio could involve a considerable wait as DJs worked through their play lists. Consequently young musicians like Fromholz, Murphey and Walker experienced a variety of artistic influences by default. Consider for example what these proto-songwriters grew up listening to on the radio. The following list depicts some of the top national hits as various stages in their lives, when they were born, when they were thirteen years old and when they graduated from high school.³³⁹

³³⁸ My comments regarding the segregation of musical styles on the Internet are purely subjective and reflect conversations I've had with my peers. I believe the subject expanded beyond musical tastes to include sociological, cultural and political positions would be a fascinating study and I'm sure there are many such efforts in the works and on the shelves of bookstores. In my experience, the "Information Super Highway" is more like a toll road where individuals exit when their particular informational needs have been met.

³³⁹ This information is consolidated from various *Billboard* Chart listings on various websites and similar information from Nielson Broadcast Data Systems.

Walker, born in 1942, Top Hits:

- "White Christmas" (Bing Crosby)
- "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" (Glen Miller & Andrews Sisters)
- "Blues in the Night" (Woody Herman)
- "Jingle Jangle Jingle" (Kay Kyser)

Walker @ 13 Years, Top Hits of 1955:

- "Mr. Sandman" (The Chordettes)
- "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" (Bill Hayes)
- "Rock Around the Clock" (Bill Haley and His Comets)
- "Sixteen Tons" (Tennessee Ernie Ford)

Walker, Graduated High School, Top Hits of 1960:

- "I'm Sorry" (Brenda Lee)
- "Are You Lonesome Tonight" (Elvis Presley)
- "El Paso" (Marty Robbins)
- "Chain Gang" (Sam Cooke)

Fromholz & Murphey, Born 1945, Top Hits:

- "Sentimental Journey" (Les Brown & Doris Day)
- "On the Atchison, Topeka & the Santa Fe" (Johnny Mercer)
- "Till the End of Time" (Perry Como)
- "Don't Fence Me In" (Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters)

Fromholz & Murphey @ 13 Years, Top Hits of 1957:

- "Young Love" (Tab Hunter)
- "All Shook Up" (Elvis Presley)
- "Love Letters in the Sand" (Pat Boone)
- "Tammy" (Debbie Reynolds)
- "That'll Be the Day" (Buddy Holly & The Crickets)

Fromholz & Murphey, Graduated High School, Top Hits of 1963:

- "Walk Right In" (The Rooftop Singers)
- "Blue Velvet" (Bobby Vinton)
- "Surf City" (Jan and Dean)
- "Sukiyaki" (Kyu Sakamoto)
- "He's So Fine" (The Chiffons)

This illustrates a considerable selection of genres and styles and an evolution in the popular tastes of American listeners and the shifting formats of radio programming. These genres, styles, tastes, and programming considerations would continue to expand

and become more and more specialized as new styles entered the market and broadcast options increased significantly after the early 1960s. This did not mean that more people were listening to more styles. Listeners sought out what appealed to them, the market responded resulting in an expanded variety of categories, artists, and programming formats. When Fromholz, Murphey and Walker graduated from high school there were a handful of *Billboard* charts that covered the rock 'n' roll, jazz, country, and popular music fields. In the years that followed, the charts expanded significantly in what amounted to a dress rehearsal for the trends that would unfold when the Internet reached critical mass in the early 1990s. As an indicator of the exponential explosion in the segregated musical market, *Billboard* magazine in 2011 provides the following chart categories:

Hot 100, Billboard 200, Radio Songs, Adult Contemporary, RB/Hip-Hop Songs, Rap Songs, Adult Pop, Dance/Club Play Songs, Rap Songs, Alternative Songs/Albums, Hard Rock Songs/Albums, Folk Albums, Bluegrass Albums, Classical Songs/Albums, Latin Songs/Albums, Regional Mexican Songs, Tropical Songs, Gospel Songs/Albums, Christian Songs/Albums, Independent Albums, Reggae Albums, Albums, Comedy Albums, Kids Albums, Soundtracks, plus an extended list of International categories and various categories for releases that apply exclusively to the Internet.³⁴⁰

The argument is simply this . . . Fromholz, Murphey and Walker experienced a diverse education in American popular music that has informed their writing through the years. A similar education is certainly available in the 21st century but, given the massive digital database, such an effort would require a conscientious research methodology and a desire to seek out new musical horizons. For the three writers in question, however, it was simply a matter of having a passion for music and growing up in front of a Philco Predicta TV set and carrying around a transistor radio.

Fromholz's Unconventional Imagination

When Fromholz sat down to sort out his thoughts for some songs about his childhood in Bosque County, he wrote *Texas Trilogy* in a matter of hours. This was an uncanny achievement. It's as if he accessed a high-speed mental conduit to explore a

³⁴⁰ *Billboard.com*: <http://www.billboard.com/charts#/charts>. A visit to this site will indicate that the list above represents only about half of the various *Billboard* categories.

subliminal lockbox of memories. The circumstances, the characters, the settings, and the specific experiences of "Daybreak" and "Trainride" were real. He lived them. The story of Billy and Mary Archer in "Bosque County Romance" was similarly true to life. "The drought of '57" was most definitely "a curse upon the land." The weather decimated ranching conditions in Bosque County, and although Billy and Mary may not have experienced each and every tragedy depicted in the song, such maladies were common throughout the midsection of the county during that period. The memories and the proto-songs had been part of Fromholz's "organic database" for years. And for whatever reason and by whatever means, he was able to reach back, dust them off and bring them forward as appealing melodic and memorable songs. This is an aspect of Fromholz's unconventional imagination.

When Fromholz was honorably discharged from the United States Navy, a military psychiatrist commented in his medical release evaluation that "[Fromholz] is best suited to live on the fringe of society."³⁴¹ Since leaving the employ of the United States government and enlisting as a full-time musician, Fromholz has performed admirably on that fringe. In that role, he has often commented from the stage, "I came from a generation where 'drug testing' had a completely different meaning." The countercultural lifestyle of the late sixties and seventies provided an ideal environment to practice alternative approaches to investigative pharmacology. Some of Fromholz's songs draw from these unconventional perspectives on the chemically enhanced fringe. This is another aspect of Fromholz's unconventional frontier of imagination.

For many years, Fromholz has channeled his distinctive mental motivations into unique perspectives and alternative approaches to songs and songwriting. An outstanding example of his singular take on the delicacies of personal relationships is the love song "I'd Have to Be Crazy." This composition frames the deep-seated commitment one feels to their partner in terms of sentiment and sanity:

I'd have to be crazy to stop all my singin'
And never play music again.
You'd call me a fool if I grabbed up a top hat
And ran out to flag down the wind

³⁴¹ Fromholz Interview, September 2, 1991.

I'd have to be weird to grow me a beard
Just to see what the rednecks would do
But I'd have to be crazy, plumb out of my mind
To fall out of love with you.

I know I've done weird things
I told people I hear things
When silence was all in the bounds
There's been days when it's pleased me
To be on my knees
Following ants as they crawled 'cross the ground
I've been insane on a train, but I'm still me again
And the place where I hold you it's true
So I know I'm all right, 'cause I'd have to be crazy
To fall out of love with you.

You know I don't intend to, but should there come a day
When I say that I don't love you, you can lock me away.

I sure would be dingy, to live in an envelope
Waiting alone for a stamp
You'd swear I was loco to rub for a genie
While burning my hand on the lamp
Well, I may not be normal, but nobody is
So I'd like to say 'fore I'm through
I'd have to be crazy, plumb out of my mind
To fall out of love with you.
Yes, I'd have to be crazy, plumb out of my mind
To fall out of love with you.³⁴²

This is a very clever and entertaining presentation of an age-old message, "I love you and I'd be nuts to leave!" Just as the author can't fathom leaving his music behind, trying to flag down the forces of nature, or provoking a confrontation with a group of "good 'ole boys" that would certainly end badly, he can't fathom losing his affection for his loved one. He readily acknowledges that his standard behavioral script is not drawn from the "Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet." He operates on his own audio spectrum—"I'd Have to Be Crazy," for example, is well beyond the format of a typical 1-4-5 country song—he has an odd approach to studying insects, and he even refers to a psychedelic railroad excursion he made in the early 1970s. Fromholz boarded the Texas Chief in

³⁴² "I'd Have to Be Crazy." © 1975, Prophecy Publishing Inc., C/O Bughouse-Bug Music, Los Angeles, California.

Denver for a series of engagements in Texas and to guard against any potential travel boredom, he remodeled his train time into a genuine hippie-era "trip." In a song gleaned from that experience, the "Train Song," he described this multi-level mental adventure and can retrospectively report that he's been "insane on a train" but managed to make it safely to Austin where he was "still 'me' again." Fromholz "may not be normal," but as he says, "nobody is," and the only guaranteed test for sound set of mental moorings is through the sustained love for his mate.

Fromholz blends his individual experiences into instructional allegory that he hopes might benefit different people from different backgrounds in their various challenges and personal travels. In my judgment, "I'd Have to Be Crazy" succeeds beautifully in this task. The song reduces a complex range of feelings to a collection of assessable and unpretentious statements. This is an essential function of well-written lyrics. One of America's most prolific songwriters and popular entertainers agreed. Willie Nelson recorded Fromholz's song in 1976 on his album *The Sound in Your Mind* and the single peaked at #11 on the *Billboard* US Country Charts.³⁴³

When Fromholz decided to write a song about ecology he didn't take a philosophical approach like his friend Michael Murphey. Murphey's song, "Boy from the Country," was based on the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, the 13th-century founder of the Franciscan order who believed that nature was the mirror of God. Fromholz embraced an anthropomorphic approach and patterned his environmental musings after the instinctual behavior of birds, wolverines, buffalos, and snakes. He took his cues from the animals and their ecosystem—how they coexist in their natural habitats—and suggested that we, as the "enlightened" species, might be well served by taking our behavioral cues from "the animals." In this effort, the author employs one of his greatest assets, humor, which is another aspect of Fromholz's unconventional frontier of imagination:

Birds don't get lost in the Everglades
They follow the plan Mother Nature made for each egg that's laid
Some hatch out fine; some serve to die in the alligator
Would it do for me and you to be that true?

³⁴³ "I'd Have to Be Crazy" was recorded by Willie Nelson 1976 on his album, *The Sound in Your Mind* (Columbia Records). "I'd Have to Be Crazy" has also been recorded by Pat Green and Cory Morrow.

Hate don't exist in the wolverine
He's just uncommonly natural mean, that's a wolverine scene
His smell offends but he don't lie about bein' friendly
Could it be that you and me could be that free?

Bring to mind the buffalo
Where did the passenger pigeon go?
Will the eagle be the next to die?
Make the national bird the common fly?

Why can't we live with the animals?
And be a boa constructor's pal, or the great horned owl
The common good is brotherhood for the hooded cobra
And it should be that we could all be that good.

This song illustrates Fromholz's ability to address serious and controversial subjects in a light-hearted way. Even the most dedicated industrialist would think twice about encroaching on the habitat of the bald eagle with so many common flies waiting in the wings for their debut as the national symbol. The final verse suggests that there's a lesson to be learned from animals and the larger ecosystem—we should not only peacefully coexist with them; we should emulate their live-and-let-live posture and get along with each other. "Birds and Wolverines" characterizes a strain in Fromholz's writing that blends creative word play with humor and message. This was an effective combination for the socio-political environment of the 1970s, particularly in and around the Austin music scene. As Archie Green implies with the title of his 1981 essay, "Austin's Cosmic Cowboys - Words in Collision," there were two "worlds" in collision in Austin during the 1970s: The cosmic world of the hippie culture with the straight world of the cowboy; the progressive world of the young Austin musician with the Nashville-nurtured world of the country star; and in general, the world of the counterculture with the world of the establishment. Just as Fromholz was suited to live "on the fringe of society," he was quite adept at negotiating the perimeters of these colliding worlds. And in that effort he effectively fashioned connections between these disparate forces through his skills as a clever wordsmith and humorist in a package that was pleasing to the ear while delivering a worthy message.

Fromholz was my gateway in the world of songs and songwriting. In the spring of 1971 I moved to Colorado on his invitation to start a band and make a serious run at fame and fortune. When I arrived in Denver to begin this exciting new chapter I called

Fromholz, traveled up to his small mountain home in Gold Hill outside Boulder to discuss the new band project. The visit was a memorable experience on several levels. Fromholz told me that he'd just taken a job offer from Steven Stills to play rhythm guitar and sing second voice in his new band that would later be known as Manassas. The "Fromholz" band was on hold until he returned from Stills' upcoming summer tour. We then threw some guitars and amps into Fromholz's four-wheel drive truck and maneuvered around to mountain to Stills' house where we spent the evening in a high-energy jam session with Stills, Dallas Taylor, Fuzzy Samuels, Paul Harris and several other prominent players. My arrival in Colorado was thus bittersweet. Several weeks later, Fromholz was off to England for a series of rehearsals at Ringo Starr's mansion south of London before the summer tour. I was able to locate a temporary residence in Boulder at the home of fellow musician, banjo player Marty Javors, who was studying for his Ph.D. in pharmacology at the University of Texas in San Antonio. After several weeks of picking up gigs around the Boulder-Denver area and giving guitar lessons at Warner Logan's music shop on Pine Avenue, two bearded characters in cowboy hats showed up at Marty's house. Michael Murphey and Bob Livingston introduced themselves and said that Marty had invited them to stay at his place during their four-day booking at the Cafe York in Denver.

Michael Martin Murphey

Murphey is the only writer in this Texas songwriting triumvirate who had serious academic aspirations. His coursework at North Texas State University and U.C.L.A. in literature, writing, and classical Greek studies, coupled with his ongoing efforts as an independent scholar have significantly influenced his career. Although Murphey did not complete his degree requirements, his years in the Academy have served him throughout his professional career. After leaving U.C.L.A to pursue music and songwriting as a full-time vocation he has not revisited a formal classroom, but he regularly applies the analytical tools he acquired in college to his songwriting projects. Through my forty-year relationship with Michael, I've observed a constant theme in his life: He has always surrounded himself with books and research materials and engaged in intellectual pursuits.

I recall a four-day gig at the Irish Pub in Pueblo, Colorado in 1971 shortly after I joined Murphey as a guitar player. We spent the afternoons scouring this small industrial town for comic books, his current "cultural acquisition" project. Murphey was constantly striking off on obscure tangents from Comic Book art to the game of Chess. He rarely met an intellectual curiosity he didn't like. When I lived with Murphey at this home on Lake Travis west of Austin in 1972, the walls were covered with Edward S. Curtis prints. Coffee tables were stacked with books about this famous Western photographer along with Ansel Adams photography collections. Bookshelves housed various works by and about Albert Schweitzer and two shelves were reserved for books on gypsies and traveling carnivals, a subject that Murphey was researching for a concept album. While in Nashville working on the *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* album in 1973 there were regular forays to small record stores to find obscure country albums and out-of print songbooks. I remember visiting Murphey at his mountain home in Colorado in 1978 to discuss his offer to hire me as his manager. We spent our afternoons in discussions in a study that qualified as a comprehensive library of American Western history and cowboy culture.

In addition to his academic proclivities, Murphey has a long history in religious studies. He came from a devout Baptist family, he periodically entertained notions of seminary school, and his focus on Classical Greek and ancient civilizations at U.C.L.A. was designed as foundational research for his Bible studies. Murphey has written various traditional-style hymns as well as what might be called "Bible-Thumpin' Boogie" songs like "Harbor for my Soul," and "Holy Roller."³⁴⁴ These upbeat songs hinted at salvation but were seasoned with an adequate dash of tongue-in-cheek revivalism to avoid the appearance of proselytizing and successfully kept a young, secular concert crowd on their feet. By and large, Murphey's background in religious studies is subtly laced into his work. As previously mentioned, his composition "Boy from the Country" was based on the nature-based spiritual teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi. Songs like "Wild Bird," wherein the protagonist intercedes in the life of a wounded animal by "mending [its] wing," and then wonders, "if [his] cold white hands can let [it] go," are extensions of his

³⁴⁴ "Harbor for my Soul" is an upbeat R&B-style tune addressed in *The Ballad of Calico* section below, and "Holy Roller" is a mid-tempo rock number that chants, "Sing! Sing it now children! The rest of my life, I want to be a Holy Roller."

readings in Albert Schweitzer's "reverence for life" philosophies and are beautifully portrayed by his delicate lyrics:

Wild bird, I have mended your wing
Now I'm wondering if my cold white hands can let go
Just hold on to your fluttering heart
I know you're anxious to make a new start

And when you call me, from the down winds
Rise and fall back to the ground again
You belong in the mountains
Wild bird.

Wild bird, you have mended my soul
But I still don't know if my songs can soar like your wings
But I will sing tonight
This hymn to a life of flight

And when you call me, from the down winds
Rise and fall back to the ground again
You belong in the mountains
Wild bird.

Other compositions like "Sound of the South Canadian" reify God's natural creation through the course of waterways from storm clouds through the streams and rivers to the sea and ultimately proclaims, "I'm up to my neck in a waterfall, and I believe there's Heaven after all." These songs illustrate that Murphey ventures beyond the parameters of hymnody and, for that matter, beyond "Bible Thumpin' Boogie" songs to explore the associations inherent in intellectual disciplines, theology, faith-based writings and nature. In sum, my extended experience with Murphey suggests that on certain levels he is part pedagogue while on other levels he is part preacher who artfully employs the popular song to propound his message de jour.

Over his fifty-year career, Murphey has evidently had a grand number of "messages de jour." He is undoubtedly the most prolific songwriter I've ever encountered and although it would be difficult to arrive at an exact number, it is reasonable to assume that the titles in his catalogue number in the thousands.³⁴⁵ His songs have been recorded

³⁴⁵ In the spring of 2009 I was dining with Murphey at Sheraton Crest Hotel in Austin during the weekend of the Texas Heritage Songwriter's Association Concerts and Awards Show. During the course of the dinner conversation he mentioned to one of our fellow diners that he had written

by Flatt and Scruggs, Bobbie Gentry, Kenny Rogers, George Hamilton IV, The Monkees, Mike Nesmith, Jerry Jeff Walker, John Denver, Roger Miller, Hoyt Axton, Claire Hamill, Steven Fromholz, B.W. Stevenson, Rusty Wier, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver, and Lyle Lovett. Biographical observations of Murphey's life and his career are threaded throughout this dissertation—growing up in a middle-class family in Dallas; college at North Texas State and meeting professor and folklorist Stan Alexander, Eddie Wilson of Armadillo fame, Steven Fromholz, Travis Holland, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Spencer Perskin, Johnny Vandiver; studying at U.C.L.A. and breaking into the L.A. professional music scene; staff writer at Screen Gems, moving back to Austin and the ensuing progressive country scene—but this sequence of events as they relate to this study are best expressed by Murphey.

Every year the Austin based Texas Heritage Songwriter's Association hosts an awards show and weekend of activities honoring the state's outstanding writers. Murphey was inducted into their Hall of Fame in 2009 and returned in 2011 to take part in that year's festivities. On the weekend of March 5 and 6, we had the opportunity to spend an afternoon together, I brought him up to date on my Austin music scene research and asked him if he would submit some thoughts regarding his time in Los Angeles leading up to the time we met in 1971 with any reflections that might prove useful in my research. Later that month on March 21, I received the following email. The picture that Murphey refers to in the email (not included) is a costume shot of the four-character cast of the television pilot for a proposed series called "The Kowboys" filmed in 1969:

The attached picture was taken on the set of a television pilot when I was writing songs, playing in twang-infested hillbilly music in Southern California nightclubs (read honky-tonks), and acting in California. Well, at least I thought I was acting. This photo was made for a television series pilot called "The Kowboys," which was supposed to be a Country-Western version of The Monkees, "Western style."³⁴⁶ The pilot was rejected by the network, and as a television film, it flopped.

Back then, I wanted "The Kowboys" to make so badly it hurt. But

over 5,000 songs. This is a tremendous amount of material, but knowing Murphey's output capability, it's feasible. Consequently I believe I'm safe in making the claim, "in the thousands."³⁴⁶ During this period, Murphey auditioned for a part in the band The Monkees, the creation of rock 'n' roll impresario Don Kirshner. Although Murphey didn't get the gig, his friend and fellow Texas musician Mike Nesmith did.

it failed, and miserably, I might add. Critics said it was really bad, and they were right! So I dug in as a songwriter in my A-frame cabin in Wrightwood, California, in the piney forests the San Gabriel Mountains, and there I pursued my own vision. The San Gabriel Mountains are named for Saint Gabriel, one of seven Archangels mentioned in the Bible, the Patron Saint of Broadcasters. I guess some of Saint Gabriel's mercy trickled down upon me, because though I was pretty broke and discouraged, it was in that cabin that I started writing "Wildfire," the song that brought the most broadcast airplay of any song I've ever written.

And it was in the San Gabriel Forest and kicking around in the Mojave Desert below it that I developed my somewhat quirky mix of Rock, Country, Folk, Gospel and Aaron Copland-esque Western music. It was quirky, but it was My Quirky. Every student of poetry from the U.C.L.A. English Department (two of my classmates at U.C.L.A. were Ray Manzarek and Jim Morrison, founders of the Doors—I was overshadowed to say the least!) had their special influences and my lyrics were inspired by American poets like Edger Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology," Vachel Lindsay (the father of American "singing poetry"), Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and Carl Sandburg. And, Oh Yeah! . . . Let's not leave out those "not-so-much-like" U.C.L.A. English Department writers like Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie, Peter LaFarge, John G. Niehardt, and Harlan Howard!

After some occasional hits with my songs on the Billboard charts and a lot of disappointment, rejection, and unreturned phone calls in the Southern California's "Valley of Smoke" and the 1970 Lytle Creek earthquake, I took my three-soul M. M. Murphey Family, Whippet Dogs, bagful of songs, Granddaddy Spud's Martin Guitar, and camper-topped pick-up truck and moved back to Texas. Had it not been for a failed attempt at being a professional songwriter with his own cubicle at Screen Gems, I ended up in the artistic refuge which ultimately became the music Mecca of Austin, Texas.

After trying for more than five years to get a recording contract in Los Angeles and Bakersfield, I was "discovered" by a producer named Bob Johnston at the Rubaiyat nightclub in Dallas, Texas, where I had played my earliest shows as a teenager. Thanks to Bob, I made my first album as a Texan who traveled to Nashville, not as a California Country singer, all of whom were resented in Nashville. When it was over, I drove back to Texas, and found a house in Austin. The album, *Geronimo's Cadillac*, came out in 1972, when I was living in Austin and playing regularly at the Saxon Pub, the Chequered Flag and the now almost mythical Camelot of Texas-Hippie-Progressive Country Music, the Armadillo World Headquarters!

When you're aiming for success, it's important to get the timing of your failures right!³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ Murphey to Hillis via email, March 21, 2011.

In this narrative Murphey touches on typical encounters that are experienced by many aspiring songwriters and musicians—making a living in bars and honky tonks; nurturing a strong drive for national success and investing in fast-track options like a television series; experiencing contemporaries like Jim Morrison, Ray Manzarek and Mike Nesmith breaking through to a national audience; escaping to a natural environment for creative space and inspiration; the constant search for the elusive record deal in a major music center; and finally catching a break in an obscure urban nightclub for a fortuitous career boost. Several aspects of Murphey's formative years however stand as unique signposts in a career that has spanned five decades—his early academic approach; the eclectic nature of his "Quirky" by referencing classic American literary figures and historians of the American West; the influence of top-forty country songwriters; the enduring thread of religions' influence in his work; his professional affiliation with a major publishing company where he no doubt adopted valuable "nine-to-five" writing disciplines; and his retreat to a nascent climate of creativity in a mid-sized Texas college town where he played a key role in bringing that scene into the national spotlight.

Regarding "catching a break" in a nightclub, there are many artists that are "discovered" in nightclubs either by producers, managers, agents or promoters. Nightclubs and live-stage settings are, after all, one of the few opportunities to witness aspiring talent that has yet to secure notable media exposure. But the significance of Murphey's "discovery" circumstances lies not in the *where* but the *who*. Producer Bob Johnston came to Dallas to hear Murphey on the strength of comments he'd heard about the quality of Murphey's songs. Bob Johnston was an extremely "song-oriented" producer as evidenced by some of his top line clients—Bob Dylan, Simon & Garfunkel, Leonard Cohen, Johnny Cash, Marty Robbins, Hoyt Axton and Willie Nelson. Johnston's interest in Murphey was spurred by the young songwriter's wherewithal to create a steady stream of high-quality material, the eclectic nature of the subject matter (or in Murphey's terms, "his quirky"), his ability to shape songs around specific subjects or themes, the intellectual depth of many of the compositions, and the young songwriter's

infatuation with the song and the art of songwriting.³⁴⁸ These are all qualities that can be traced to Murphey's formative years as described in his autobiographical narrative above. These qualities also apply to a large recording venture that Murphey didn't mention.

One of the largest musical missions that Murphey took on during his California tenure was an extensive songwriting project inspired by his San Gabriel-Mojave environment, his natural penchant for the history of the American West, and his extremely active and romantic imagination. The project took root in his Wrightwood A-frame cabin and was called *The Ballad of Calico*.

The Ballad of Calico

When I initially met Michael Murphey and Bob Livingston in Boulder, Colorado in early October 1971, Murphey was in the final stages of a recording project with the country-rock group Kenny Rogers and the First Edition. Rogers and company had embraced a project presented to them by Murphey and Larry Cansler, one of his fellow writers at Screen Gems in Los Angeles, called *The Ballad of Calico*. This adventurous recording effort involved producing a double-disc concept album that portrayed the colorful past of Calico, a late-19th-century silver mining town in the Mojave Desert several miles east of Barstow, California. During the late 1960s, storytelling "concept albums" were hardly the norm in the record business and *The Ballad of Calico* marked a creative leap of faith in Kenny Rogers' already successful music career. Rogers was a native Texan born in Houston in 1938 and had experimented with several musical styles from doo-wop to folk music before forming the country-rock group, The First Edition, in 1967. The five-piece ensemble went on to release eight hit singles, most notably "Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)" in 1967 and "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town" in 1969, and by the time *The Ballad of Calico* took shape in late 1971, they had nine previous albums to their credit.³⁴⁹ Rogers had an affinity for all

³⁴⁸ These observations regarding Johnston's thoughts on Murphey are the product of various conversations with Johnston during the mid-1970s and through the process of recording two albums under his direction. Johnston was a very affable and outgoing sort, I wanted very much to learn as much as possible about record producing, and he was kind and accommodating both professionally and personally.

³⁴⁹ *Billboard Magazine*, "Calico is the First's First Concept Album." February 2, 1972, p. FE-16.

things "Western" and *The Ballad of Calico* offered a focus for his affinity. According to *Billboard* magazine,

"The Ballad of Calico" was brought to Rogers by a piano player and friend of his, Larry Cansler. Cansler and Michael Murphey had written the music, and Murphey had written the lyrics all about a place called Calico. Murphey lived in Wrightwood, a town near Calico and he was intrigued by the ghost town. In fact, he researched the town and its most well known inhabitants thoroughly and, all the stories in the album are true. It was originally 23 songs long, but was cut to 18. "We picked the most important ones and ones that would make the album flow well," says Rogers.³⁵⁰

Shortly after the town was founded in 1881, Calico had a population of 1,200 people, over 500 silver mines, a booming economy and the characteristic assortment of bars, brothels, and gambling halls counterbalanced by several churches, a frontier school house and the *Calico Print*, the local newspaper. The town's name comes from the geological formation of the "strange mountains" that surround the town "which are every color of the rainbow."³⁵¹ In the mid-1890s when the price of silver plummeted, the silver mines closed and by 1907 Calico was completely abandoned. Theme park entrepreneur Walter Knott, creator of Knott's Berry Farm in Buena Park, California, bought the ghost town in 1951 and refurbished the tiny settlement as a tourist attraction just off of Interstate 15 in San Bernardino County. Murphey reasoned that Calico and its quixotic history would provide an ideal landscape for a series of stories that tapped into the popular American imagination. Calico was a storyteller's playground, an idyllic historical setting that suggested tales of nostalgic yesterdays, western migration, dream chasing and grand opportunities, rags to riches and back again, hard work and hard play enhanced by all the adventure, romance and intrigue of the American West. Murphey's lyrics and song ideas were enhanced by the musical skills of partner Larry Cansler. Cansler began his musical career majoring in composition at North Texas State University. After graduating and a hitch in the United States Army, he moved to Los Angeles, signed on at Screen Gems in 1967 and began writing with Murphey, another veteran of North Texas State. Their combined effort yielded a collection of songs that

³⁵⁰ *Billboard Magazine*, February 2, 1972, p. FE-16.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. FE-16.

reified the romantic life and times of the silver miners, their families, their singular lifestyles and local institutions, a collection that Cansler called an "18-song rock opera."³⁵²

The title track, "Calico Silver," is recorded in two parts and serves as the introduction and the conclusion of the Calico story. The first half of the song introduces the migrant farmer heading west seeking a new future and describes the initial success of the mining enterprise and the ensuing prosperity.

No rain and the weather got warm
Broke down and I sold my farm
Headed for the silver strike,
I took my wife
Calico silver gave us life.

You could hear the miners sing
When they made their hammers ring
You could hear them singing out
Oh, when they found
Calico silver underground

Pave the streets with silver
Let the wagons roll
Don't those mountains look just like . . . Calico
Calico.

Fifteen years down in the mines
I watched the silver shine
Listened to the big wheels churn
They were turned
By Calico silver that we earned.

The second half of the title track, "Calico Silver (Reprise)," closes the album and describes the decline of the mining operation and the subsequent demise of the town:

Days were short and the laughter was long
Nails in the pine were strong
We thought nothing could go wrong

³⁵² Cansler uses this phrase in describing *The Ballad of Calico* on his website, "Larry Cansler Composer": <http://www.larrycansler.com/>. Also worth noting, it was during this period that Cansler and Murphey teamed up to write "Wildfire," which Murphey released as a single in 1975 on his album produced by Bob Johnston, *Blue Sky - Night Thunder*. According to Cansler's website, "This song has sold over five million copies and still gets an average of 250,000 airplays per year in the U.S. alone."

Not counting on
Calico silver to be gone.

Pave the streets with silver
Let the wagons roll
Don't those mountains look just like . . . Calico

No ore in the richest mine
Railroad closed down the line
Nail up your windows and your doors.
Close the stores
Calico Silver is no more

Got my wagon ready to go
Been a hundred years and more
Since we hitched up our team
And it seems Calico silver
Was a dream.

These two song sections serve as bookends that frame a collection of musical and lyrical vignettes. *The Ballad of Calico* is not a story in a classic sense. It lacks plot, protagonists, antagonists and the related literary components commonly associated with the form. What Cansler referred to as an "18-song rock opera" might be categorized as musical ethnography, a collection of audio-lyrical post cards each presenting an impressionistic account of the adventures, institutions, emotions, trials and tribulations that collectively defined the culture of Calico. This musical/cultural collage is best summarized through the following brief comments on the individual titles:

"Sunrise Overture" ~ Cansler's orchestrated portrait of a new day unfolding on the multi-layered, rugged peaks that surrounded the small mining town.

"Calico Silver" ~ The migration and the promise.

"Write Me Down (Don't Forget My Name)" ~ The haunting voice of one of many inhabitants resting beneath the unmarked headstones of Calico's "Boot Hill;" a lament requesting recognition, a plea to live on in the public memory.

"The Way It Used to Be" ~ A litany of turn-of-the-twentieth-century romantic cultural commodities—"Strawberry, fire engine, ice cream party, May Day festival, too? Wooden sidewalk, happy birthday, undertaker, blacksmith wearing big boots . . . That's the way it used to be."

"Madame De Lil and Diabolical Bill" ~ Every mining town has its saloon, its epicenter of coarse culture, and Madame De Lil demonstrates her entrepreneurial and emotional wherewithal by cleverly disposing of her unscrupulous lover caught with his hand in the till.

- "School Teacher" ~ The lonely life of the frontier schoolmarm who will "Soon be an old maid," when her "Red hair's turning gray."
- "Road Agent" ~ The regional outlaw who "lived and died by his gun." Described as a "quick money, catch penny, fly by night" character, terrorizing the local populace who were all "equal in his sight" and now lies "dead on a hill."
- "Sally Grey's Epitaph" ~ A Calico prostitute, who "came to town one day" chasing the dream, but it "wasn't long 'till she went astray." Now only graveside farewells echo through the valley as "she leaves this town today, for a better place we pray."
- "Dorsey, the Mail Carrying Dog" ~ Like Sally Grey and other characters in *The Ballad of Calico*, Dorsey was a historical figure, a true canine mail carrier who delivered the mail between Calico and the neighboring town of Yermo, and to outlying mines in the area.
- "Harbor for My Soul" ~ The gospel message that stands in sharp contrast to material message of Madame De Lil from the other side of town. If "you've worked all your life in the Waterloo mine and now [you're] gettin' old . . ." Or if your [Silver] ship [did] not come in," then there's "one thing [you] can believe in friend!" You need a "harbor for your soul."
- "Calico Saturday Night" ~ Cansler's harmonious interlude that presents the musical textures of a festive night out in Calico.
- "Trigger Happy Kid" ~ This country-flavored song about a young man who idolizes gunfighters depicts the youngster's sensibilities after witnessing the larger-than-life professional gunslinger who couldn't "find his enemies . . . gun down [his] friends." The narrator speaks to the victor hinting at a cycle of violence: "When your six-guns are empty, empty just like your eyes, your friends they won't speak then, they won't tell no more lies. Oh, you won't have to fight them. You'll have money to spend. But a little boy who hid, he saw what you did, and he's a trigger-happy kid."
- "Vachael Carling's Rubilator" ~ In the late-19th century, inventions and clever contraptions were roadmaps to the future. Calico had their own mapmaker, Vachael Carling, who's famous Rubilator (a gizmo with no clearly defined purpose), was the technical darling of the town.
- "Empty-Handed Compadres" ~ Most of the silver seekers never realized their dreams. This is their song.
- "One Lonely Room" ~ And when those silver seekers grappled with the harsh reality of their "empty-handed" quest, they often retired to one lonely room.
- "Rockin' Chair Theme" ~ Cansler's orchestrated interpretation of life's ebb and flow as seen through the eyes of the tenant on the front-porch rocking chair.
- "Old Mojave Highway" ~ Old Mojave Highway celebrates the road that runs through the desert that leads up to the town. For many coming to Calico, it was a path of hope and adventure, but for many leaving, it was a sad and broken retreat.

"Man Came Up From Town" ~ This allegorical composition addresses the relationship between humans and civilization, between people and towns and how, in the beginning, man makes town, then, through the ongoing experience, the town rises up to make man.

"Calico Silver (Reprise)" ~ The death of the town and the demise of the dreams.

As mentioned above, I became aware of this exceptional work before its public release in late 1971 when I signed on with Murphey as a lead-guitar player joining bass player Bob Livingston as the second sideman for a short tour of Colorado and Texas. I was stunned at the enormity and sophistication of *The Ballad of Calico*. Listening to the preliminary mixes of the album that Murphey played for me and charting out several of the songs he was incorporating into his live performance, I was impressed with the variety of songs and their unique structures. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I was engaged in a graduate course in song crafting. I was witnessing the delicate mechanics of employing recognizable melodic and chordal structures to create distinct new sounds and distinct new *feels*. Like my initial experience in hearing Fromholz's *Texas Trilogy*, I recognized the essential foundation of the songs and I thought I knew what was coming next and where the tune was going. But in applying my limited musical knowledge to that which I was hearing, in trying to recreate the compositions on my instrument, in trying to recreate the those singular feels and subtle chord structures, I readily recognized that I had a great deal to learn. While one of Murphey's songs might sound very familiar and accessible, the structures were often subtly unique. Of course it was precisely these delicate chord variations and innovative passing notes that yielded an enduring melody or musical passage . . . It was recognizable, it was comfortable yet it somehow it seemed different, memorable, or as Fromholz would say, "It stuck to the ribs of your mind!" This is a valuable characteristic of a successful popular song—a nuanced musical structure embodied in a simple veneer.

Recognizing the musical subtleties of the song structures and was amplified by the lyrical nature of the *Calico* songs. Each song had a purpose, each song told its own story, each operated in a historical sense to reinforce the musical ethnography, and each song left ample room for the listener's imagination. The lyrical content of *The Ballad of Calico* illustrated another valuable characteristic of a successful popular song: The ability to shape a complicated thought, emotion or message into a concise and simple

passage or phrase. *The Ballad of Calico* also exemplified the importance of research in building songs and creating valuable song catalogues. Many songwriters claim that certain songs are the product of dreams or that they are powerful mental impressions waiting to be transposed to the written word. Fromholz reports that the three songs that comprise *Texas Trilogy* were "imbedded messages" that simply needed to be drawn out and documented. Similarly, Murphey reports that "Wildfire" was largely the product of a dream sequence.³⁵³ *The Ballad of Calico* however was the product of extended research. Murphey made many trips to the small town, consulted various reference books and based the work on actual characters identified in these sources. As a young guitar player and aspiring songwriter who had recently left the notion of "books and research" behind, this was an important reminder that crafting quality songs was a multi-level exercise and a serious literary enterprise.

The Ballad of Calico was released on Reprise Records in 1972, it reached #118 on the *Billboard* Album Charts, and the album produced one single, "School Teacher," that topped out at #91 on the *Billboard* charts. By contemporary standards it was a moderate success at best. This singular double album was well produced, impeccably performed, and had lasting historical import. It featured 18 exceptional songs but slipped into the mass category of before-its-time, over-the-head-of-the-public art-based albums. The album is long out of print but is held in high esteem by various enlightened record collectors around the world. The fate of *The Ballad of Calico* could easily have been the subject of an insightful quip offered by Austin musician Travis Holland regarding success in the music business: "I don't believe that having talent and ability will necessarily prevent you from being successful, but it won't necessarily help, either . . . When you're dealing with large corporations, they will make decisions that are absurd [regarding your

³⁵³ Reports on the composition of "Wildfire" vary. Long-time Murphey sideman, Travis Holland, claims that Murphey wrote the song on a Murphey-Holland road trip to New York in 1969. (Holland, Travis. *Texas Genesis - A Wild Ride through Texas Progressive Country Music 1963 - 1978, with Digressions, as Seen through the Warped Mind of Travis Holland as told to Mike Williams*. (Austin: B. F. Deal Publishing, 1978), p. 28.) In the narrative above, Murphey mentions that he *began* writing "Wildfire" in his A-frame cabin in Wrightwood and in a previous account he mentioned that the song came to him one night in Los Angeles while staying with Larry Cansler when they were working on *The Ballad of Calico* project. The import of this "research" observation is that even though songs come from myriad inspirations, many enduring compositions are based on academically oriented research.

album]."³⁵⁴

Shortly after the release of the album, Murphey had relocated to Austin to begin a new phase in his songwriting career. Indeed, that new phase was already underway when he initially rolled into town. His first album, *Geronimo's Cadillac*, was also released in 1972 and it outperformed the Kenny Roger's release by reaching #160 on the album charts with the single of the same name reaching #37 on the singles charts. In Austin, Murphey was actively involved with Austin musician Gary P. Nunn and Bob Livingston, who had migrated home to Texas with Murphey. It was at this time that I returned from Colorado to rejoin Murphey and tour in support of *Geronimo's Cadillac* and prepare for the upcoming recording of Murphey's second album, *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenirs*, with Nunn, Livingston, and a new drummer, Michael McGeary. The band lived in a 1950s era motor court in north Austin with Murphey and Nunn in the main house, the band members and road crew in the adjoining bungalows, and a free-standing building behind the main residence that served as a rehearsal studio. One evening after a few hours in the studio running over potential tunes for the new album, we were gathered in the living room of the main house. We heard a car pull up, slide to an abrupt halt in the gravel outside; the doors slammed, and we heard the knock on the door. Nunn got up, opened the door and there was a tall dark-haired fellow with six-packs in hand and a lovely woman only slightly shorter carrying backup beverages. "Is Murphey here?" It was Jerry Jeff Walker and his lady-friend Murphy on their way from Key West to Los Angeles. Walker never made it to L.A. on that trip, and after almost 40 years, he still lives in Austin.

Jerry Jeff Walker

In the early 1970s Guy Clark wrote a song called "She Ain't Goin' Nowhere." The song describes a young woman leaving a relationship, determined to escape to anywhere beyond the "there" of her current situation. The initial verse and the chorus of this song might well have been written about a young man named Ronald Clyde Crosby who was similarly determined to escape to anywhere beyond the "there" of his current situation:

³⁵⁴ Holland, p. 85.

Standin' on the gone side of leavin'
She found a thumb and stuck it in the breeze.
She'll take anything that's goin' close to somewhere
She can lay it down and live it like she'd please.

She ain't goin' nowhere, she's just leavin'.
She ain't goin' nowhere she can't breathe in.
And she ain't goin' home, and that's for sure.³⁵⁵

Ronald Clyde Crosby was born on March 16, 1942 in Oneonta, a small town in central New York and like legions of other young men, he wanted to quit the familiar streets of his hometown and all the predetermined avenues to maturity that they implied.³⁵⁶ He wanted to escape his hometown and take it all in and explore wherever his thumb and the luck of the ride might take him. Crosby, who would later be known as Jerry Jeff Walker, had been "standin' on the gone side of leavin'" since his Grandma Jesse bought him a Harmony guitar for Christmas when he was in high school. "She Ain't Goin' Nowhere" features a female protagonist but with a simple gender switch, the song captures the sentiments of a young Ronald Clyde Crosby who needed to find new places that he could "breathe in," beyond the city limits of Oneonta.

In his 1999 autobiography, *Gypsy Songman*, Walker described a largely uneventful childhood and adolescence in the small New York town. He excelled as a forward on the high school basketball team, his "memories from those years [were] of basketball, music and girls," he engaged in the typical sparring with his parents and described himself as a "rascal."³⁵⁷ He described a particular affection for his Grandmother Jesse, an accomplished pianist who told a young Ron Crosby, "I never walk past the piano when I don't sit down for at least a moment and see what it says."³⁵⁸ He was also very close to his Grandfather Clyde who had a dairy farm not far from Oneonta. He often spent summers working for Clyde on the farm and recalled his final trip to the farm, "that one last summer" when "what was left of [his] childhood ended on a sultry

³⁵⁵ Guy Clark (ASCAP). Produced by Neil Wilburn/A Free Flow Production. From *Old No. 1*, AHL1-1303

³⁵⁶ Oneonta, New York is 130 miles NNW of New York City, has a current population of 14,000 people.

³⁵⁷ Walker, Jerry Jeff. *Gypsy Songman*. (Emeryville, California: Woodford Press, 1999), p. 8.

³⁵⁸ Walker, p. 8.

day when [he] was fifteen."³⁵⁹ Walker and his "running buddy," Mike Patton, had gone to work on Clyde's farm "putting away hay" and flowing with the summer chores of the small rural farm. One August evening the boys were on their "third and final load for the day," the sun was going down and it was time to store the feed in Clyde's barn:³⁶⁰

Mike Patton swung the last bale to the top of the wagon, climbed on the back. Clyde pulled the wagon with a tractor. I was going to follow in a Jeep. As I checked the gate, I glanced back to see Clyde and the tractor and the wagon chugging over the hill. So I never saw it happen. On the steep far side of the hill, with the weight of the hay wagon behind it, the tractor began to slide, brakes grabbing, wheels locking. I drove over the hill to find the tractor in a ditch, its right rear wheel still spinning. The hay wagon was jackknifed, Mike thrown a good twenty yards away but unhurt. Clyde was pinned beneath the tractor. He just lay there so still.³⁶¹

The two young farmhands "were frightened kids," they panicked, they cried and tried to pull Clyde to safety, but they couldn't lift the tractor. "But it didn't matter. Clyde had died almost instantly when his head hit a single large, flat rock that sat in the field."³⁶² After the ambulance left, Walker escaped to a high meadow that had always been his favorite place to spend time with his grandfather. As he sat there in the darkness with "salt tears stinging [his] eyes," he realized that "some things broken can't be mended . . . It's over. Just gone."³⁶³

With the death of Grandpa Clyde, Walker took a long step closer to "the gone side of leavin.'" He drifted though his remaining years of school: "I was popular, athletic, and I had lousy study habits."³⁶⁴ Walker did report however that he loved to read: "In class, when I wasn't staring out the window, I'd be paging through Thoreau, Camus, Emerson. Planting the seeds."³⁶⁵ Walker firmly believed that those seeds would be stifled in Oneonta. They had to be sewn elsewhere and he was determined to catch a ride to anyplace "that's goin' close to somewhere, where he could lay 'em down and plant 'em

³⁵⁹ Walker, pp. 9-10.

³⁶⁰ Walker, p. 10.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Walker, p. 9.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

where he pleased."³⁶⁶ To that end, he took a summer trip to Fort Lauderdale after high school. He had enlisted in the National Guard, completed basic training in New Jersey and was primed for that long-anticipated get away. He was able to knock down a few bucks singing popular songs on the beach—his first professional gig!—but when the young crowds left Fort Lauderdale, he made his way back to Oneonta more determined than ever to escape. He was a young man, just twenty years old, and as he mused in his autobiography,

Seemed like everybody around me was planning my life for me.
Everybody but me knew what I should be doing. I felt their expectations.
Grow up. Settle down. Face reality. Show some backbone.³⁶⁷

Walker didn't know what he wanted, but he realized "it wasn't the life everyone else wanted for me." He wanted "a chance" but was convinced that there were no real opportunities in his hometown. He was dreaming big, fishing for whales in a small pond in upstate New York and felt that he would sink and drown if he couldn't try his luck in a real fishing hole, or better yet, try his luck on the ocean of highways that stretched between the Atlantic and Pacific:

One afternoon, as I sat alone in [my] apartment, I took out the satchel, [the old leather bag that he'd received from his uncle filled with clothes and travel gear], and fell into a deep funk. I knew that I had to get out now if I was going to find what I was looking for in life.³⁶⁸

The stakes for his next adventure however were much higher. Leaving Oneonta this time meant going AWOL from the National Guard and being a fugitive. "It would be years—if ever—before I could see the people who meant the most to me."³⁶⁹ He realized that he "couldn't even say goodbye" because if his family knew what he was planning, they would "do everything to stop me." Walker reasoned he had to leave Oneonta. "Now."³⁷⁰

I picked up the satchel, tossed it out the door into the snow and stared at it there on the ground for the longest time. Then I stepped out the door and

³⁶⁶ Paraphrased from Guy Clark's song, "She Ain't Goin' Nowhere."

³⁶⁷ Walker, pp. 15-16.

³⁶⁸ Walker, p. 17.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

picked it up. Numbly, I walked down West End Avenue. Toward Route Seven south. I was trembling as I stuck my thumb out. Right away a car picked me up, took me ten or twelve miles south of town.³⁷¹

When his first ride dropped him off, he stood beside the highway, looked north to the glow of his hometown lights, then looked south and put that image in his rear-view mirror. Before he stuck his thumb out again, he pulled out his wallet.

I threw away all my identification except for the Jerry Ferris draft card [a fake I.D. he'd acquired during Army basic training]. Ron Crosby no longer existed. It was Jerry Ferris who climbed into the next car headed down highway. This was not a road trip. This was the road.³⁷²

Walker's new life began as Jerry Ferris that winter in 1963 and it would be almost a decade before he began sowing a new variety of seed in Austin and let the roots take hold. That decade yielded a road harvest that shaped the rest of his life. He initially hitched down the east coast and crossed over to Tampa, "but the Gulf Coast was still, grey and joyless" and he "knew there had to be laughter and music out there somewhere," so it was west to New Orleans.³⁷³ The Crescent City became his base of operations for almost five years. He learned how to survive as a street musician, he sat at the feet of the venerable southern songster Babe Stovall, and bathed in the Bohemian culture of the French Quarter. He made new friends, had new lovers, heard new stories, and wrote some songs. He took road trips to neighboring states scattering seeds as he traveled, visited the occasional drunk tank, made extended forays to Dallas, Austin and Houston where a band took shape. He left Houston with this eclectic assemblage of hippified, amplified rockers and traveled northeast to Greenwich Village. The band settled on the name, Circus Maximus, they secured a recording deal with Vanguard Records, and

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid. Regarding Walker's reference to "Jerry Ferris:" Walker joined the New York National Guard in the spring of 1961 and went to basic training at Fort Dix in New Jersey. "On leave," Walker reports, "the trainees would go off post to drink in those ever-present bars near the military bases. I was nineteen years old, but at the time New Jersey's drinking age was twenty-one." Walker informed his compadres that he was "not old enough to drink," and on the eve of a weekend adventure, one of his fellow soldiers searched his wallet, "came up with several pieces of identification, peeled off a draft card and handed it to me." Jerry Jeff Walker, then Ronald Clyde Crosby, became Jerry Ferris for the off-post festivities. "I kept the ID, and Jerry Ferris later became my first alias on the road." (Walker, pp. 12-13)

³⁷³ Walker, p. 19.

released an album released in 1967. Although the band didn't last, it during this period he befriended the New York City guitar player and acoustic instrument master, David Bromberg, and this newborn duo retreated to the listening rooms of Greenwich Village.

Late one night after an extended picking session in the Village, Bromberg suggested that they drop in on Bob Fass, the "midnight-till-dawn" disc jockey at KBAI, NYC's Pacifica "listener-supported communist" radio station. According to Walker, Fass' all-night program featured "live music, new music, poetry, Pacifica's 'lively left-of-left' political harangues'" and served as "the musical reference point for the entire city." Walker recalled that "David and I were pretty loose that night" and remembers carrying in a "big 7-Up bottle, half soft drink, probably a little more than half Seagram's 7:"³⁷⁴

David and I began to play for [Fass], live radio. We probably played from two in the morning until about five. Talked a lot with Bob, played some music, had a good time. David and I sat on the edge of cheap old chairs, leaning into the mikes. The room swelled with strings coaxing out a six-eight waltz. And I began to sing . . .

Knew a man, Bojangles and
He danced for you, in worn-out shoes . . . ³⁷⁵

Bob Fass recorded the radio show, and not surprisingly, he was quite impressed with Walker's new tune, "Mr. Bojangles." Walker had written the song some months before while playing at a small club in Austin. "Mr. Bojangles" told the story of a character Walker had met in jail, sitting out a holiday weekend at the First Precinct drunk tank on Rampart Street in New Orleans in 1966. In the days after the Walker-Bromberg visit, Fass began to play the song on his nightly program, people visited record stores wanting to buy a copy of a record that didn't exist, and in a matter of weeks, the song was a regional phenomenon. "Here was listener-supported, leftie-babble WBAI snatching a sound from the winds and playing it over and over to New York City, the nation's largest radio market."³⁷⁶ Within a year, "Mr. Bojangles" was well on its way to becoming one of the most popular American songs in the last half of the 20th century.

³⁷⁴ Walker, p. 83.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Walker, p. 84.

"Mr. Bojangles" was the epitome of Walker's road harvest. The song's success took him around the country, provided an enduring financial base, opened doors in the music industry, and was a direct product of his self-styled Gypsy Songman methodology. "Mr. Bojangles" and other titles of his post-Oneonta decade were adventure vignettes, road chronicles—certainly not an uncommon theme in songwriting circles then and now—but in Walker's case, they were not just *about* the road, they *were* the road. As Walker later wrote,

I've always felt that my years in New Orleans were the equivalent of a college education in life and the world. All those highway confessions were a Master's degree in human nature.³⁷⁷

This is a worthy analogy, and in Walker's case, his "coursework" and "thesis" were entirely experiential. He conducted his research on the streets, in the bars and back rooms in a consistently inconsistent fashion rather than in libraries and classrooms in keeping with a traditional degree plan. Just as the seminal ethnomusicologist and folklorist John Lomax took to the highways in 1933 with a cumbersome recording device in the trunk of his car to capture the songs, sounds, and stories of common Americans and their music, Walker traveled many of the same routes forty years later listening, learning, and interacting with his informants. Unlike Lomax's monumental body of work, Walker's research was not housed in the Library of Congress. His efforts generated a collection of autobiographical-ethnographic observations and field notes that he shaped into lyrical and melodic offerings that continue to maintain a presence in American popular culture of the 21st century.

The Southern Songster Tradition

Walker can be accurately placed in the "songster" tradition that dates back to the American South of the late 19th century. Songsters were wandering musicians who sought work at public functions, private gatherings and were often associated with medicine shows. Early practitioners were generally but not exclusively African American, and although they played a variety of music, they have been inaccurately identified as blues musicians. Nascent blues styles represented only part of a typical

³⁷⁷ Walker, p. 24.

songster's repertoire. By necessity, these itinerate musicians played many styles to accommodate audiences at dances, picnics, weddings, funerals, church services, and medicine shows. According to blues scholar Elijah Wald, seminal "blues" artist Big Joe Williams, for example, was "a hard-core Mississippi guitarist and singer, with a tough, fierce sound that [had] no trace of string-band lightness or versatility" and his records, "whether cut for the Race market of the 1930s" or the "revivalist scene of the 1960s," reflected a straight-ahead blues style.³⁷⁸ Thus, Williams is commonly considered a "pure" blues artist. "And yet, he started with minstrel and medicine shows, and his memories of that time carry no suggestion of his later musical taste."³⁷⁹ The author then quoted Williams describing his work during the "minstrel and medicine show" years:

They had dancing, cracking jokes, blackface comedians—we all used to do that. Take flour and soot to make you dark; we had wigs that we wore sometimes; we had them old high hats and them long coats and a walking cane and them button-type spats.³⁸⁰

Wald suggests that if the talent scouts had "happened on Williams a few years earlier, he would be remembered not as a bluesman but as a minstrel comedian."³⁸¹ His assessment of blues musicians and songsters stands in contrast to the views of established experts like John Hammond and Alan Lomax who have characteristically drawn a line between "blues singers" and "songsters." According to Wald, this distinction is an artificial one and the archetypal blues artists including Robert Johnson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Muddy Waters performed a wide variety of music in public. He maintains that these artists are now remembered "purely as blues players" because at the time they were recorded, their producers thought that their blues songs were original or innovative.³⁸²

Wald goes on to explain:

³⁷⁸ Wald, Elijah. *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*. (New York: Amistad - An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), p. 54.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Margaret McKee and Fred Chisenhall, *Beale Black and Blue: Life and Music on Black America's Main Street* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), p. 195 as quoted in Wald, p. 55.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Wald, p. 54.

Now, the normal way this subject is addressed in blues histories is to say that, on the one hand, some blues players could also play non-blues material, and on the other hand, there were also a lot of black guitarists and singers who were not bluesmen but "songsters"—Mississippi John Hurt, Henry "Ragtime Texas" Thomas, and Mance Lipscomb are typical examples—who performed a huge range of material including some blues. This distinction is utterly modern and artificial, and has no bearing on the way musicians thought of themselves in the 1920s or 1930s. Rural Southerners often said "songster" for "singer," as they said "musicianer" for "musician," but they used these terms equally for players who are mostly known for their blues work and for those who are not. Indeed, everything I have heard suggests that if [the contemporary record producers] had happened upon some classical records and liked them, they would have described Caruso and an expert songster and Segovia as a fine musicianer."³⁸³

I agree with Wald; not only through my research but through a discussion I had with Mance Lipscomb in Austin one night in 1973. Lipscomb was opening a show for Jerry Jeff Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band at Castle Creek and between sets I had the opportunity to visit with him. During the exchange he explained that he played many different places and performed many different styles depending on the engagement. He described specific dance numbers, schottisches and reels for example, waltzes, polkas, country songs and many styles that were new to me. I was amazed and inwardly embarrassed about my simple-minded notion that old black men only played the blues. I asked him why he was only playing blues songs that night, and he replied, "Cause that's what the young folks want to hear . . . That's what they're paying me for."³⁸⁴

I dwell on the subject of the songster tradition for several reasons. Walker, particularly during the initial decade of his career, handily fit the "songster" mold. He was a peripatetic performer earning his keep on the road from the time he left Oneonta until he began to establish roots in Austin in the early 1970s. The title of his 1999 autobiography, *Gypsy Songman*, strikes me as a synonym for "songster." One of his major inspirations in New Orleans was Babe Stovall, a venerable black songster and

³⁸³ Wald, Elijah, p. 55-56.

³⁸⁴ I recall asking Lipscomb if I could buy him a drink, which he declined, explaining that if he drank "whiskey" he would "get drunk all over again the next day" if he drank any water. I found that amusing; I couldn't decide whether that was a blessing or a curse! It would be years later before I realized my good fortune in having had an opportunity to chat with this exceptional player. Mance Lipscomb died in 1976.

French Quarter street musician.³⁸⁵ Babe Stovall, born in 1907, was a Mississippi-New Orleans rendition of the Texas songster, Mance Lipscomb (b. 1895 - d. 1976). Walker was a street-wise understudy of this old-school songster and cites Stovall in songs, narratives and reflections. Walker was similarly influenced by another songster-type entertainer who he spent a weekend with in a New Orleans drunk tank. The protagonist in Walker's earliest hit song, "Mr. Bojangles," was an elderly white gentleman from the earlier 20th-century songster-minstrel-show tradition who displayed the romantic characteristics of the itinerate southern performer of that earlier period. The ethos of the "songster" also threads through the developing styles of Fromholz and Murphey. These two young writers may not have "lived" the experience of playing with and learning from a New Orleans street musician like Babe Stovall, and they didn't spend a weekend locked up with a colorful street entertainer from an earlier generation, but they certainly referenced these romantic connections extemporaneously in their creative expressions.

All told, the traditions of the southern songster illustrate the power and influence of blues styles in countless strains of American music just as different strains of American music influence the assorted components of the blues. As Wald insightfully suggests above, enduring definitions of genres or styles often depend on *when* the analytical shutter is snapped along the timeline in the life of an evolving artist or in the progression of an evolving musical style. Music as a creative force tends to stay in motion that unfolds through the ongoing actions, reactions, and common influences inherent in its development. For every musical action, there is a like and equal musical

³⁸⁵ Jewell "Babe" Stovall was a southern-born songster whose style fell between the deep Delta sound of Tommy Johnson and the finger-picking technique of Mississippi John Hurt. Born in 1907 in Tylertown, Mississippi, he moved to Franklinton, Louisiana, playing locally and picking up whatever work he could as a farmhand. In 1964 he moved to New Orleans, where he was "discovered" working as a street singer in the French Quarter. He recorded an LP for *Verve* in 1964, simply titled *Babe Stovall* and made subsequent recordings through the later 1960s. Because he hadn't recorded in the 1920s and 1930s like his rediscovered contemporaries John Hurt, Skip James, and Son House, and was harder to package to the media, Stovall had a somewhat less lucrative time of it on the blues circuit, a situation that wasn't helped much by his legendary drinking exploits. Said by some to be the character inspiration for Jerry Jeff Walker's professional persona, Stovall died in 1974 in New Orleans. Adapted from an Internet article by Steve Leggett for AllMusic Guide: <http://www.answers.com/topic/jewell-babe-stovall>

reaction. All musics are interrelated. Or, as Townes Van Zandt famously quipped when a member of the audience asked him to play a blues song, "They're all blues!"³⁸⁶

Austin, Luckenbach & ;Viva Terlingua!

When Walker rolled into Austin in 1972 he brought his southern songster sensibilities, a recently negotiated recording contract with MCA Records and a collection of ideas as to how he wanted to proceed with his new album. He was looking for a band, or more accurately, he wanted to find some new "pickin' buddies" and make some music. Walker's story-style songs didn't require precise musical accompaniment, they required friends and fellow travelers. They required co-conspirators. He found that contingent pre-packaged as Michael Murphey's band and with Murphey's blessings he "borrowed" Gary P. Nunn (keyboards), Bob Livingston (bass), Michael McGearry (drums), and me on lead guitar to record his first album for MCA, *Jerry Jeff Walker*. The ensuing loose and lively recording sessions (discussed in Chapter 2), yielded a successful commercial recording. The sales of the new album satisfied the brass at MCA, the band toured extensively in support of the album, and by the summer of 1973, Walker turned his attention to the next recording project.

The term "ragged but right" was the operative phrase during the recording sessions for the *Jerry Jeff Walker* album. The playing didn't have to be perfect as long as the core emotions of the composition and ambiance of the live recording exchange were successfully captured on tape. In short, the tracks had to *feel* right. I find the use of the infinitive "to feel" in describing the way that a piece of recorded music impinges on the emotions or the mood of the listener can be trite and even mildly irritating. What does it mean to say a track "feels" good? Such a description seems like an exercise in meta-subjectivity. But then again, it *is* an exercise in subjectivity. And to further confuse the issue, as a veteran musician, I *feel* that I know what it means to say that a track *feels* good! Regardless of this semantic quandary and despite this etymological fishing expedition, the simple fact remains that the notion of how a song, a recording, or a performance *feels* is a ubiquitous expression in modern recording industry parlance. Further, I have no better term to offer. From what I can gather however, and in an

³⁸⁶ Like many of Van Zandt's classic quips, "They're all blues" appears in many interviews, accounts and biographies.

attempt to inject a hint of empiricism into this description, the *feel* of a track seems to evoke responses like the following:

- The listener is comfortable in listening to the piece; they sense an involvement in the recording process as if they're a stakeholder in the performance.
- The listening experience doesn't require excessive concentration—the message and mood are readily available.
- The track has a comfortable groove, which is to say it displays a steady cadence, not particularly fast or slow and although not necessarily rhythmically perfect, the track moves in sync with the listener's internal sense of timing.
- The track seems well organized, it progresses smoothly yet doesn't exhibit the semblance of a structured "plan."
- By and large, both listener and performer "know it when they hear it!" as Justice Potter Stewart knew pornography when he saw it.
- Most importantly, at least in my judgment, neither listener nor performer experiences any "subliminal speed bumps" in their audio perceptions.

A "subliminal speed bump" is a term that I've coined through the process of record production over the years. It refers to hearing or perceiving something in an audio track that makes the listener uneasy, something that causes a "subliminal anxiety" that subtly disrupts the relaxed continuity of an audio experience. These speed bumps are not glaring mistakes. A musical group might engage in a technical gaffe en masse without producing a noteworthy bump. Consider the rock classic by the Rolling Stones "Honky Tonk Woman." The track steadily accelerates from start to finish, and the concluding segments of the song are almost 20 percent faster than the initial tempo. Rock tracks are supposed to lay in a steady groove, follow that natural and steady heartbeat; stay in the "pocket." The overall effect however is hardly an impeachable offense because it unfolds in a natural flow of excitement—as the track builds, the entire ensemble gets excited as a unit—and thus avoids the subliminal anxiety of grating variations and/or "inner-band" tensions. This is a function of the organic essence of music making.

A great deal of modern American music from early jazz to contemporary rock 'n' roll is dance music associated with natural biological biorhythms. Heartbeats speed up

for countless common reasons, hence the no-harm-no-foul nature of "Honky Tonk Women." Erratic, uneven heartbeats however are danger signs and in a musical format they are sources of subliminal anxiety. From a tonal perspective, Western music is rooted in harmony rather than dissonance and through the centuries the Western ear has been conditioned to melodious frequency arrangements. Although dissonant notes and passages are often used for tactical audio effect in jazz settings or in experimental and modernist compositions like those of Charles Ives, Euro-American aural tastes gravitate toward tonal accord. Inadvertent audio passages caused by out-of-tune instruments, frequency discrepancies, or errant arrangements can be more off-putting and subliminally grating than blatant harmonic mistakes that almost certainly quickly alienate the listener.

A recording therefore could be loose, friendly, and engaging while avoiding subliminal speed bumps to coalesce into a positive feel. In short, it could be "ragged but right." This is the defining component that Walker insisted on bringing to the upcoming Luckenbach recording sessions . . . Ragged but right would be the *feel* for *Viva Terlingua!*, the most successful album of his career. This unique recording project was a convergence of many aspects of Walker's post-Oneonta "road decade" as a southern songster who found inspiration for his writings as a street ethnographer. The project also signified a convergence of themes at play in Austin's dynamic climate of creativity in the early 1970s. In essence, could a young songwriter buck the dominant trends in contemporary record production techniques and deliver a viable commercial product?

The marked success of the *Jerry Jeff Walker* album empowered Walker to continue with his ragged but right formula for his second MCA album. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Walker assembled the band, set up shop at his favorite watering hole, Luckenbach, approximately 70 miles west of Austin in the Texas Hill Country and called in a professional mobile recording company from the East Coast. The logistics of the process involved using the town's dance hall as a recording studio with the musicians positioned inside in a circle with bales of hay serving as sound baffles between the instruments. The Luckenbach Dance Hall was a typical 19th-century design with waist-high windows on three sides that swung open to create an open-air pavilion. The microphone lines ran out to the mobile recording truck parked next to the hall that served as the control room. The sessions ran daily for slightly more than a week and generally

began in the early afternoon and ran well into the night. The songs were recorded live, a point that warrants clarification. To describe the tracks as live does not mean that they were performed in front of a "live" audience. It simply means that the entire band assembled, the engineers punched "record" and the component parts were captured in a single pass. There was no "building" of rhythm tracks and no overdubs. Only two tracks on *¡Viva Terlingua!* were recorded in front of a live audience—"Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother" and "London Homesick Blues"—both products of the final night when the dance hall was opened to the public for what was billed as a "live concert recording session." The account of this colorful recording process is well documented in Walker's autobiography, *Gypsy Songman*, in contemporary journalistic accounts, and in an insightful and informative essay by scholar Travis D. Stimeling, "*¡Viva Terlingua!*: Jerry Jeff Walker, Live Recordings, and the Authenticity of Progressive Country Music."³⁸⁷

The issue at hand however is to consider the creative process in making the album, to ascertain what happened in terms of musical exchanges between the players, and to consider why the album is important in the evolution of the Austin and Texas music scene. The significance of the unconventional production format is rooted in three themes relevant to the making of *¡Viva Terlingua!*:

- Aesthetic Building Blocks: Walker's pocket full of songs and "proto-songs."
- The "Luckenbach Song Salon:" The free exchange and facilitation of ideas.
- "Gettin' By on Gettin' By:" The reification of the Gypsy Songman philosophy.

Like many successful musical adventures, a certain mythology has grown around the making of *¡Viva Terlingua!*. One of the popular stories suggests that all of the songs for the album were written on the spot. This certainly makes for entertaining journalistic copy and romantic folklore, but Walker had a pocketful of tunes he was interested in working into the Luckenbach sessions. Two of the initial selections he pulled out of his pocket were songs written by other songwriters. "I loved Guy Clark's 'Desperados Waiting for a Train,'" Walker recalled. "I thought it was the most solid song I had heard

³⁸⁷ Stimeling, Travis D. "*¡Viva Terlingua!*: Jerry Jeff Walker, Live Recordings, and the Authenticity of Progressive Country Music." Published in the *Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 8 [2008], Issue 1, p. 20.

in a long time, about a kid following his grandpa around, learning at this side how to be a 'big man.'"³⁸⁸ Walker was also fond of Michael Murphey's song "Backslider's Wine." "I felt I could sing this and mean it 'cause I had the reputation, which convinced people I was singing the truth." There were other cover songs that found their way onto the record. Late one afternoon during a beer break, Bob Livingston was clowning around with a song and chanting an odd sequence of lyrics: "Up against the wall, redneck mother; mother who has raised a son so well . . . He's thirty-four and drinkin' in a honky tonk, kickin' hippies' asses and raisin' hell." This immediately caught Walker's attention and he asked Livingston about the song. "It's some weird thing of [Ray Wylie] Hubbard's up in Red River," Livingston said, "but I don't know all of the words!" Walker recognized a gem of a party song when he heard one and coaxed Livingston to call Hubbard in New Mexico and get the rest of the lyrics. Within an hour, we were back in the dance hall working it up for the weekend concert. "Redneck Mother" was a big hit that Saturday night with the live audience particularly when Livingston spelled out the word "mother" in the middle of the song (Hubbard only had two verses to the song, and we decided it needed a little more "depth"). Spoken over the music of the chorus, Livingston began, "'M' is for the mud flaps on my pickup truck, 'O' is for the oil on my hair, 'T' is for 'Tammy,' 'H' is for 'Haggard,' 'E' is for enema, and 'R' is for *REDNECK!*" The audience joined in with a thunderous reinforcement of the word "redneck!" Thereafter, *Viva Terlingua!* had an official "redneck anthem," Hubbard had a song recorded on a hit album and although he welcomed the periodical royalty checks, he also inherited a curse by having to play the song at his gigs for over thirty-five years! The final cover song featured on the album was a selection written by Lost Gonzo Band member Gary P. Nunn. The song surfaced during an afternoon pickin' session on Friday before the concert. Walker liked it, we worked it up, and closed the Saturday-night show with "London Homesick Blues" ("I want to go home with the armadillos . . . ") with Nunn on lead vocals. The crowd loved it, it became one of the most requested cuts on the album, and several years later, *Austin City Limits* adopted "London Homesick Blues" as

³⁸⁸ Walker, p. 121. "Backslider's Wine," as the name implies, is a song about falling off the wagon and struggling to regain sobriety and emotional equilibrium. A verse sample might be helpful: "I took myself for a strong and loving soul, 'till I found my face on the barroom floor. Crying Jesus!, what will become of me? I cannot drink Backslider's Wine no more."

the program's theme song.

These four cover tunes, each in its singular fashion, became part of the *jViva Terlingua!* legacy. Indeed, "London Homesick Blues" became a weekly staple for *Austin City Limits* television viewers across the country for over twenty years and developed into a high-profile international brand. The cover recordings represent the power and utility of interpreting a song and "making it your own." In this tradition of song covers, Walker created his own high bar by writing "Mr. Bojangles," one of the most popular and most commonly covered songs of the late 20th century. "Mr. Bojangles" has been covered by Sammy Davis Jr., Bob Dylan, George Burns, Harry Belafonte Frank Sinatra, Chet Atkins, Elton John, Nina Simone, Neil Diamond, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and many others. The treatment of these four covers on *jViva Terlingua!* represented the malleability and potential of a first-rate composition in the hands of a talent group of stylists and illustrated Walker's ability to recognize and record quality material. Walker's efforts in recording the songs of his contemporaries—on both *Jerry Jeff Walker* and *jViva Terlingua!*—illustrated an extremely productive aspect of the Austin scene; the networking of songs within the scene and beyond to a trans-national market.

For a young Austin songwriter to have one of their songs covered by an established recording artist was an immeasurable boost. As the Austin scene developed and the recording environment expanded, the free exchange of songs came more and more into play. Beyond a doubt, the big three music industry centers, Los Angeles, Nashville and New York were the "song centers" of the period, but they were very tight markets and difficult for aspiring songwriters to penetrate. Austin, with its growing population of writers and its prolific live-music scene where new songs were heard and shared, was a rapidly expanding song source. Then and now, Nashville and the other song centers were cranking out the mega hits, and to have a song covered by a major recording star was a home run. But to have Walker or Willie Nelson record one of your titles was at least a ground-rule double and a series of well-timed and well-placed Texas-league hits help win games and undoubtedly build strong song catalogues. Walker, Nelson, B.W. Stevenson, Rusty Wier, and other Austin-based recording artists came to be known for their advocacy for regional songwriters and for contemporary new

songwriters.³⁸⁹ Their efforts coupled with the open-exchange ethos of the Austin scene led to a vibrant decade of song swapping and an ever-expanding respect for the creative efforts of others.

Additionally, the act of covering another writer's song can be a financial boon for the creator of the copyright and the publisher. Consider for example a song on *Viva Terlingua!*: The mechanical licensing rate at the time of the enactment of the new federal copyright laws in 1976 was approximately six-cents per song for each album sold. *Viva Terlingua!* sold in excess of 500,000, and would therefore yield a \$30,000 royalty due to the writer and the publisher. Further, there are performance royalties associated with the use of copyrights on radio, television and film that inure to the benefit of the songwriter and publisher. Landing a song on a gold- or platinum-selling album therefore could quickly morph into an appreciable paycheck.³⁹⁰ The growing music publishing market in Austin was a welcomed influx of funds from out-of-state sources and a significant boost to the national credibility of the city's nascent climate of creativity.

A brief example of the practical results of Walker's song advocacy might be Guy Clark's original recording contract with RCA Records. The song that opened this chapter, "She Ain't Goin' Nowhere," appeared on Guy Clark's first album, *Old No. 1*, released in 1975. In no small way, Clark's debut record release was linked to his relationship with Walker. Jerry Jeff and Guy had been friends for years before Walker

³⁸⁹ Various observers of the 1970s Austin scene have suggested that Walker turned to Guy Clark and other contemporaries because his song productivity waned after establishing roots in Austin. This is a plausible argument. Prior to the Austin move, the majority of his songs were road ethnographies and story songs created in his self-described Gypsy Songman mode. A study of the songs on the albums he made after *Jerry Jeff Walker* and *Viva Terlingua!*—seven albums between 1974 and 1979—included titles by Milton Carroll, Billy Callery, Guy Clark, Susanna Clark, Willie Nelson, Chuck Pyle, Billy Joe Shaver, Butch Hancock, Keith Sykes, Rusty Wier, Rodney Crowell, Charles John Quarto, Willis Alan Ramsey, Kris Kristofferson as well as band mates Gary P. Nunn, Bob Livingston, and John Inmon. All of these songwriters had viable connections to the Austin scene. Indeed, the songs on the seven albums during this period are predominantly covers at a ratio of roughly six to one. Nonetheless, I choose to defer on this argument and enter the plea, *hypotheses non fingo* ("I feign no hypotheses" as famously offered by Isaac Newton in the 1713 edition of the *Principia*). With respect to this study, Walker's post-*Viva* song selections illustrate his strong advocacy for the work of his peers. In my judgment and in my experience with Walker, he was and is very much a "frontline song guy."

³⁹⁰ The federal statute in question is US Code Title 17, Chapter 1, Section 115(a)(2), passed in 1975 and enacted in 1976. For more information on the efficacy of songs and copyrights, please refer to the previous chapter.

began recording Clark's songs on his albums ("L.A. Freeway" and "Old Time Feeling" on *Jerry Jeff Walker* and "Desperados Waiting for a Train" on *¡Viva Terlingua!*). These covers showcased Clark's exceptional songwriting talents to a national audience and provoked the interest of various record company executives. Walker's manager, Michael Brovsky, intervened on Clark's behalf and secured his initial recording contract with RCA Records. By the time that *Old No. 1* was released in 1975, many music aficionados and fans were aware of Guy Clark's handcrafted songs. Clark's songs played a vital role in Walker's "Austin phase"; "L.A. Freeway" and "Desperados" were two of the most popular titles on the early MCA releases, and cover songs played a vital role in the creation of *¡Viva Terlingua!*.

There were several more song slots to fill in the development of the album. Walker brought several of his own compositions to the Luckenbach sessions. "Little Bird" for example, a love song initially featured on his 1968 ATCO release, *Mr. Bojangles*, was edited for length and arranged in a crisp, accessible format; "Get It Out," a new upbeat composition about uninhibited emotional expression took shape through a series of afternoon jam sessions; and "Sangria Wine," a song Walker described as "a recipe for homemade sangria tied into a recipe for a party as you drink the wine" settled nicely into *¡Viva Terlingua!*. The arrangement of "Sangria Wine" provides an excellent opportunity to explore the efficacy of the "Luckenbach Song Salon." In his autobiography Walker described several salon-like environments that he frequented as he experienced the "exhilaration [of] the openness of New Orleans."³⁹¹

The best part [of my life during that period] was Ivan's Wine Discussion Group, Monday night gatherings in a smoky upstairs apartment where a couple of gay poets lived. You'd come in and put into the pot whatever money you could spare, and somebody'd go buy the wine. Usually gallon jugs of Gallo. Pass it around, pouring chap red into paper cups. We'd drink and talk about art, literature, our sex lives, anything that came to mind in an hours-long open house.³⁹²

Walker carried this salon sensibility with him on the road, he readily welcomed such get-togethers when he began settling into Austin, and he transposed the spirit if

³⁹¹ Walker, p. 39.

³⁹² Ibid.

"Ivan's Group" to the dance hall and shade trees of Luckenbach. The utility of the Song Salon—that notion of "whatcha' got? Let's give it a shot!"—was evidenced by the inclusion of the four cover songs, and that openness continued when the group addressed Walker's compositions. "Sangria Wine" is a particularly telling example of a spontaneous song arrangement. The song was a simple one-four-five format in the key of C and as we ran through the tune, it just seemed to sit there . . . There was no spark, no sparkle, and lyrics that described a recipe for sangria wine hardly qualified as epic poetry. At one point drummer Michael McGeary walked out from behind his kit and said, "Man, this is a reggae tune, fellas! . . . It's got Caribbean written all over it!" He suggested that I play some sort of defining figure on the guitar and then have the bass answer it as is common in reggae styles. I played a quick five-stroke staccato chord burst in C on the first beat, let second beat breathe, then let the Livingston answer the figure on the bass with a four-note figure for beat three, letting beat four breathe to complete the initial measure. We continued in this fashion moving through the one-four-five progression—C, F and G—exchanging these licks through the initial eight measures that rounded out the introduction. In the subsequent eight-measure verses, the other instruments would creep into the pattern until a bright little groove began to bubble and Walker began to sing. It popped, and the sangria party came to life!

Other arrangements came to life through similar exchanges and a notable part of the arrangement process unfolded as the songs were being recorded. The band treated the taping process like a live performance, which of course it was! Situated in a circle, we were looking at each other, communicating through body language and subtle signs we commonly used. Steel player Herb Steiner and I for example were comfortable trading guitar fills and were careful not to get in each other's way, and similar connections linked the entire band together in a type of melodic matrix. The process was comfortable, fun, and effective. The aforementioned *¡Viva Terlingua!* myth suggesting that the bulk of the material was written on site is not accurate, but it is accurate to say that all the songs were arranged on site in keeping with the non-binding ethereal guidelines of the Luckenbach Song Salon.

The spirit of the third theme of the Luckenbach sessions, the song "Gettin' By on Gettin' By," surfaced during the beginning of the Luckenbach sessions. The original

spirit of the phrase, however, dates back to a cold winter evening in Oneonta, New York when Ronald Clyde Crosby caught a ride on Route 7 South. The notion of "Gettin' By on Gettin' By," part romantic autobiographical narrative and (I believe) a stronger part reality, has been the prevailing current in the evolution of Walker's professional persona. The actual phrase "gettin' by on gettin' by" was one of the song segments that Walker pulled out of his pocket when it was time to roll the tapes in Luckenbach. After the mics were properly positioned, the instruments properly sectioned off in the dance hall, and the input levels checked, chief engineer Dale Ashby said through his talk-back microphone, "If you want to roll one, let's see what happens."³⁹³ In completing the set up that afternoon, we had run through the chord structure of a song Walker had in mind. He had the melody and the chords for the verses, a few lyrics in place, and a chorus that was largely complete. When we heard "We're rollin'" through the talk-back speakers, Mc Geary counted off the tune and Walker sang a message to the boys on the other end of the mic lines: "Hey, in the truck. It's Camp Walker time again. Going to try and slide one by you once more."³⁹⁴ And after a few more ad lib verse lines, the chorus kicked in and the band sang along,

Just gettin' by on gettin' by's my stock in trade
Livin' it day to day
Pickin' up the pieces wherever they fall.
Just lettin' it roll
Lettin' the high times carry the low
I'm livin' my life easy come, easy go.³⁹⁵

Walker then began to pull out other phrases and lyric segments from his song pocket and started to blend them together into coherent passages. He then "made up something about 'this wasn't a monster track,' [a] show biz term for a big, big seller, but [this] added verse did keep the record from being real short."³⁹⁶ And, as the last line of the last verse proclaims, "we've been down this road once or twice before." After listening to the playback of this initial pass, Walker felt that the song had "a real flippant feel, but fun." He changed the opening line to "Hi, Buckaroos, Scamp Walker time

³⁹³ Walker, p. 121.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Walker, p. 122.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

again," we polished up a few musical details, ran over the harmonies, cut it again and after the last notes rang out, Walker barked, "OK, we're off!"³⁹⁷ Walker may not have had all the material lined up for the session, at the onset there were obvious gaps in his song list, but he knew how to frame the challenge. He cleverly set out the mission and the methodology in the first song we recorded. This illustrates Walker's unique talents as a music-based storyteller, communicator and non-domineering bandleader. "Gettin' By on Gettin' By" sounded the opening bell and defined the project's direction. And we were! Walker didn't have his songs "finished" in the sense of "polished," but he had the guts and patience to let us join him in the work.

The *¡Viva Terlingua!* recording adventure ended on a very personal note for Jerry Jeff Walker. The Saturday night concert had gone well, we had two new songs with a great audience reaction, which brought the overall title count to eight. Considering the extended length of the live cuts, this was just enough material for an album. Sunday, Monday and Tuesday had been set aside "just in case we hadn't gotten everything we needed."³⁹⁸ We spent Sunday listening to the various tracks and on Monday when "all the boys met by the trees," Walker once again felt the muse of the Song Salon and mentioned that there was a song he had been thinking about that he had never played. The working title of the tune was "Rolling Wheels," it had been written for a movie project that never materialized, and song described "how we're rushed to the hospital in an ambulance at birth, the wheels carry us through life, then the hearse carries us to the grave." Walker described it as the way we "race through life:"³⁹⁹

I still had memories of my grandfather's death beneath the overturned tractor. I remembered pictures of my dad standing by a jeep in WWII. I rode motorcycles. I made up a brother who drives stock cars to an early grave. "Rollin' Wheels." I played it for the band they were spellbound. When I finished, Herb Steiner, the steel player, was crying. I looked around and everyone said, "We gotta cut it. Now."⁴⁰⁰

The song moved gently between major and minor keys. It developed with a relaxed

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Walker, p. 125.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

cadence that slowed down considerably at the end of each verse as it moved into the chorus, and the chorus spun in ever-relaxing orbits before it circled back into the narrative of the next verse. The song didn't operate in a defined groove. It was the antithesis of a strong "pocket rhythm" track. It was a cut that came together entirely on *feel*. After we recorded the song, Ashby played it back for us on the speaker stacks in the dance hall and Walker said, "It was just as I had imagined it." He described the track as "flowing, breathing, up and down like a tipped-over wagon with a bent wheel spinning lazily in the air." After listening, Walker reported that "the band smiled," and

Then they told me, they'd thought that this was an "off day," that they were only going to listen to the tapes of the week's work. So just before they got to Luckenbach that morning, they all gobbled some mescaline. And there they were, some of them grinning at me with scary vacancy, some with tear-streaked faces.⁴⁰¹

Walker had been genuinely touched by the band's reaction to this very personal song, which was ultimately titled "The Wheel." "All along," he'd thought that "these guys [were] really into this song." But "they were just stoned."⁴⁰² Indeed, "they" were, but as the self-designated straight man in this pack of "Gonzo Cosmonauts," I can report that their emotional investment in this special song far outlived the psychedelic nuances of the mescaline.⁴⁰³ With the recording of "The Wheel," *jViva Terlingua!* was in the can and moved to the mixing and mastering phase.

jViva Terlingua! was a point of convergence in Walker's career. The album

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ On that Monday morning I elected not to imbibe. It had been a rough personal week for me. Several days before the Luckenbach sessions my wife had run off with a bartender from Soap Creek Saloon. She had come to the concert on Saturday night with her new "friend"—the Luckenbach concert was, after all, the Austin scene's designated hot spot that weekend—and I was on shaky emotional footing. I remember riding down to Luckenbach with my bandmate and dear friend Herb Steiner in whom I confided; he was empathetic and extremely helpful. In addition to Herb's counsel, I found encouragement in something Murphey had shared with me earlier that year when we were playing in Los Angeles in support of the *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* album. I remember a conversation we had regarding the problems in our marriages, both of which were suffering from a demanding touring schedule, and I mentioned that it was difficult to concentrate on stage performances. I asked, "What do I do with all of these feelings?" Murphey's succinct reply has traveled with me ever since: "Use them!" Then, and in Luckenbach, I did my best.

signified the intersection of vectors imbedded in a decade of the peripatetic exploits of a young Gypsy Songman, a life-changing move to Austin, the creation of his first band, and an innovative approach to the shifting aesthetic environment of the 1970s. *¡Viva Terlingua!* illustrated the pragmatic utility of a song salon that planted the seeds of proto-songs in the imaginations of inventive support musicians. The album was convergence of a state-of-the-art recording studio with a state-of-the-art honky tonk dance hall in the Texas Hill Country. Further, *¡Viva Terlingua!* was a point of convergence in the evolution of the Austin music scene by demonstrating that "ragged but right" was a viable approach in making successful albums. Travis Stimeling has eloquently described this confluence:

By downplaying the mediating influence of the music industry, highlighting the humanity of the people who helped create the recordings, and situating the albums within specific geographical, social, and temporal contexts, Walker sought to achieve a balance between creative freedom and commercial vitality.⁴⁰⁴

In essence, the album's success was a vindication of Walker's unconventional and provocative approach to music making. *¡Viva Terlingua!* explored the cultural territory shared by the tradition of the southern songster and the modern music market. Finally, *¡Viva Terlingua!* signified the power of the song. At bottom, Walker is a student of and an advocate for the song. Even after writing one of the most popular and commonly covered songs of the last half of the 20th century, Walker has continually sought out the songs of friends and fellow travelers to compliment his compositions in a career that includes over thirty major album releases.

Comparisons, Comments and Conclusions - Fromholz, Murphey and Walker

All three of these songwriters share an enduring affection for words and the idiosyncratic nature of the English language. Fromholz, Murphey and Walker are examples of what Professor Craig Clifford at Tarleton State University calls "Ruthlessly

⁴⁰⁴ Stimeling, Travis D. "*¡Viva Terlingua!*: Jerry Jeff Walker, Live Recordings, and the Authenticity of Progressive Country Music." Published in the *Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 8 [2008], Issue 1, p. 20.

Poetic Songwriters."⁴⁰⁵ Although they express their romantic attachments to words and language in different ways, they are all resolute in their linguistic efforts yet maintain a keen awareness of their role as entertainers.

Fromholz - Root, Branch & Ether

In April, 2007 the Texas Legislature designated Fromholz Poet Laureate of Texas for a one-year term. In an interview later that year, he shared some thoughts on his curious relationship with the English language with independent Austin journalist Shermakaye Bass: "Here is a language where 'comb' and 'tomb' don't rhyme," he said. "What kinda' nonsense is that?" He went on to highlight the word *fly*: "It's a verb. It's an insect. It's also a part of men's trousers."⁴⁰⁶ So true! But as Fromholz might quip, "You gotta' love it," and Fromholz certainly does. Fromholz also loves his native turf, his experiences growing up in Texas, and in the same article, Bass quotes me regarding his sense of "rootedness:"

Perhaps tinted by his friendship and the fact that he is writing his dissertation on Fromholz, Hillis goes so far as to compare his old buddy to Mark Twain — "except that Steven's Mississippi is the Brazos." The river borders his beloved Bosque County, south of Fort Worth, where Fromholz and his brother spent many childhood hours visiting their maternal grandmother. And in a way, both the river and the land figure into almost every song Fromholz has written. Some would argue that he is that landscape — born of it, wedded to it, inseparable from it.⁴⁰⁷

Bass also blends the insights of fellow musician Lyle Lovett into her assessment of Fromholz's literary style. According to Lovett, "Fromholz captures every bit of the wit and wisdom you might get from talking to a rancher in Central Texas who's lived by his wits and made his own way, and by his sheer gumption has been able to scratch a living

⁴⁰⁵ Clifford, Craig: "Too Weird for Kerrville: The Darker Side of Texas Music." Originally published in *Langdon Review of the Arts in Texas*, Vol. 5 (2008-2009). Clifford mentions that this style of songwriting, strongly rooted in strong emotion undercurrents, "is ruthlessly poetic in a way that is almost frightening to popular and commercial sensibilities." ("Too Weird for Kerrville," p. 2).

⁴⁰⁶ From a 2007 interview by Shermakaye Bass that focused on Fromholz's career four years after he suffered a massive stroke in 2003. Bass, Shermakaye. "Songbird Uncaged: With Heart and Head Together." *Austin American Statesman*: Sunday, September 30, 2007.

⁴⁰⁷ Bass, Shermakaye. "Songbird Uncaged."

out of the earth."⁴⁰⁸ Lovett praises "the way he uses words and meter" and his "powerful imagery" as key reasons for his poet laureate appointment and comments on the universality of his work:

It's the Texas vocabulary, but it translates to a universal language — humanity and human nature in a way that's so insightful. "The Man with the Big Hat" or, of course, the "Texas Trilogy" — what masterful writing! Those are just literary masterpieces.⁴⁰⁹

These are kind and insightful words from one of the state's most popular and successful contemporary recording artists but, more important, they illustrate the rooted nature of Fromholz's work. His entrenched Texas roots distinguish him from the other writers in the triumvirate under study. Murphey is a native Texan and many of his songs feature regional characters and settings, and Walker's adopted Texan identity permeates his work. But neither writer has developed the cultural and historical significance of "Texanness" that Fromholz displays in his work. The significance of this observation is vested in the idea of representation. Nations, states, and communities need historians, ethnographers and advocates, and Fromholz—at least by the standards of the Texas Legislature—has provided a viable artistic voice for the essence of Texan culture.

Fromholz has drawn inspiration from his territorial roots, he has drawn on his experiences as a young man coming of age during the 1960s, and has spent considerable time establishing roots in an ethereal song lab where he experiments with subtle mixtures of language and life as he singularly perceives it. In trying to generate some insights into Fromholz's "singular perceptions" I asked him to write down some of his thoughts about his songwriting methodology and he supplied the following:

My songs, like my life, often take oblique turns. I agree with Warren Zevon when he said, 'When you come to a fork in the road take it.' Or, as Bud Shrake, Mad Dog Potentate, so simply said, 'That which is not a mystery is guesswork.' And that is how and why I write songs.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Adapted from an email from Fromholz to Hillis, July 15, 2011. Fromholz's reference to Shrake as a "Mad Dog Potentate" refers to the whimsical literary salon, "Mad Dogs Inc." that Shrake, Gary Cartwright, Larry L. King, Dan Jenkins, Peter Gent and others developed in the late 1960s running through the 1970s with the express mission of (again according to Shrake) providing "indefinable services to mankind." Not surprisingly, there was considerable interplay

Fromholz's methodological insights are as vague as they are characteristic of his uncanny approach to songs and his life as a songwriter. For almost forty-five years he's blended his empirical "rootedness" with his adventures in his ethereal song lab to create a catalogue of titles that range from autobiographical works like *Texas Trilogy* to songs plucked from the rarefied atmosphere that inform love songs like "I'd Have to Be Crazy" and metaphysical anthems like "Birds and Wolverines." At the end of the day, or at least at the end of an attempt to accurately describe the ethos and attitude that surround Fromholz's colorful collection of songs and esoteric styles is best left to his flippant assessment of his catalogue as "free-form country, rock, folk, bluegrass, science-fiction, gospel-gum music."⁴¹¹

Murphey - The Gospel of Songwriting

Murphey's approach to songwriting is both academic and inspirational. In considering the academic aspects, words like analytical, structured, disciplined, and brilliant come to mind. In considering the inspirational aspects words like motivational, provocative, enthusiastic, and passionate resonate. Murphey excelled as an undergraduate at North Texas State and U.C.L.A. and honed his disciplined approach to the song as a staff writer for Screen Gems. He's the musician in our triumvirate who maintained a resolute approach to high school and college, who immersed himself in his young church life, and who began to play music and write songs well before his future friends Fromholz and Walker. Fromholz says:

I met Michael Murphey in the fall of my first semester at North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 1963. I had joined the Folk Music Club, being a huge fan of Ian and Sylvia, Doc Watson, Buffy St. Marie, and many others. I played not but I sang like a bird! The club faculty sponsor was the great singer and guitar player from East Texas, Stan Alexander.

One night at a meeting well into the autumn, a friend of Stan's, one Segle Fry, came to the meeting with the young fair-haired, Michael

between this literary contingent and characters like Jerry Jeff Walker and Steven Fromholz. For an outstanding assessment of this cast of characters, see Steven L. Davis' *Texas Literary Outlaws*. (Fort Worth, TCU Press, 2004).

⁴¹¹ Fromholz has regularly rattled off this humorous description (or some equally entertaining rendition) since the early 1970s.

Murphey. Murphey pulled out his guitar and proceeded to blow my mind, singing and playing his own very good, albeit very young songs. I was impressed. He was enrolled in N.T.S.U. and he and I hit it off because I sang well and I was his fan.⁴¹²

In the fall of 1963 Murphey was producing good work—he'd been writing songs since his early days in high school—Fromholz had yet to pick up a guitar, and Walker had been in New Orleans since February of that year and had only recently traded in his baritone ukulele for a six-string guitar and was beginning to experiment with his own ideas for songs. By the time he signed on with Screen Gems in approximately 1968 he was a disciplined, productive songwriter.

Travis Holland, in the book *Texas Genesis*, his rambling account of his adventures as a guitar and bass player for these three young writers during the late 1960s, mentions a structuring technique that Murphey sometimes used in his songwriting:

Now, he had a songwriting method that was really ingenious. Some people are sort of offended by the fact that it's contrived, but he's turned out some good material with it. Which is, just going through the dictionary and picking out words he like that sounded good, and compiling them in a giant list dividing them up into nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, prepositions, whatever, of one syllable, two syllables, three syllables, four syllables . . . and then putting them on a giant board. And when he's writing a song and gets stuck for a three-syllable adjective, then there's this big board containing a section of three-syllable adjectives, and every one of them is a good word, [every one] sounds good, and it worked.⁴¹³

Holland's description is somewhat exaggerated.⁴¹⁴ Murphey's "cubicle" at Screen Gems wouldn't house a blackboard of sufficient size to accommodate such a collection of

⁴¹² From the email, Fromholz to Hillis, Wednesday, July 13, 2011.

⁴¹³ Holland, Travis. *Texas Genesis - A Wild Ride through Texas Progressive Country Music 1963 - 1978, with Digressions, as Seen through the Warped Mind of Travis Holland as told to Mike Williams*. (Austin: B. F. Deal Publishing, 1978), p. 27.

⁴¹⁴ Travis Holland (b. 1935 - d. 2008) was one of the most colorful and entertaining personalities of the sixties folk scene and the progressive country scene of the seventies. He was recognized as a solid and dependable bass and guitar accompanist and was revered for his outlandish stories and charming dry wit. I often described Holland's stories as a cross between the grounded country wisdom of Will Rogers and the psychedelic humors of Hunter S. Thompson. Although the reference to a "giant board" is probably an exaggeration, Murphey characteristically used many cross-referencing techniques in his songwriting efforts, and the spirit of Holland's account rings

modifiers and relevant words. Nonetheless, Murphey was not a stranger to rhyme dictionaries, thesauruses and tools of the commercial literary trade. Like journalists on tight deadlines, Murphey had the wherewithal to deliver high quality work under pressure, and unlike his contemporaries, he was extremely disciplined and driven to maintain a steady flow of creative works. By taking poetry, literature, and language classes in college and by maintaining a steady schedule at Screen Gems and working with other professional songwriters, Murphey was trained to write. He was an avid reader, he was philosophically curious and he rarely lingered in anticipation of the muse. He actively sought out provocative topics and motivational materials from academic sources, theoretical readings, or religious texts. In this fashion he secured both song subjects and source material to support his current theoretical position or opinion du jour. He reveled in the act of writing and genuinely enjoyed embracing that passion on stage and in the recording studio.

In my four-decade relationship with Murphey, I've witnessed a steady swing around a political and philosophical carousel that has taken him from his strict Southern Baptist upbringing through the liberal verve of the late sixties and early seventies and around to his current libertarian, conservative convictions. In discussing his early high-school years in Dallas with author Jan Reid in 1973, he claimed that he "swallowed the ['Anglo-Saxon Protestant thing'] hook, line and sinker," and went on to describe his special enthusiasm in taking the bait:⁴¹⁵

I swallowed it a little bit more than others. Instead of rebelling when I was a kid I went the other way. I became radically conservative, both in religion and politics. I was actually ordained to preach in the Baptist Church and did preach for a while. I was gonna become a minister, that was my goal in life, although I was playing a lot of music too. Church music primarily.⁴¹⁶

Murphey explained that his transformation to the left was spurred by his coursework and readings in college. Even though he was studying "classical Greek and Latin" and "translating the Bible in Greek," as a foundation for his religious studies, he described

true. Holland was a master of the tall tale delivered in a hilariously laid-back style that reflected an uncanny worldview that was firmly planted in out-of-body psychedelic reference points.

⁴¹⁵ Reid, 1974, p. 250.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

that his "Baptist trip began to fall apart." "As anyone can tell you," he said, "education is the death of any conservative religious trip, usually."⁴¹⁷ His college years were steeped in liberal enlightenment experiences and represented a reversal of the conservative values of his youth. He abandoned his teenaged Baptist pulpit in Dallas to argue less than a decade later that, "religion has been life-denying and life-negating, like the things of this world [that] we must reject."⁴¹⁸ Murphey's first major paradigm shift signified a philosophical flexibility that illuminated a wide arc on a journey back to the fundamentalist views of his youthful years in Dallas. This parabolic path was common in the evolving philosophies of many young thinkers who experienced the evocative tensions of American culture during the sixties and seventies. But with Murphey there was a dominant constant in his looping philosophical trajectory: He embraced each new focal point with unparalleled conviction and certitude. Each new position was a revealed truth free of doubt and free of question. This observation is underscored by Reid's comments regarding his 1973 interview with Murphey. As Reid reviewed the tapes from the extended exchange, he noted "Murphey had certainly proved the most talkative musician we had run across, but I harbored doubts that he would have much to say if I met him on the street the next day."⁴¹⁹ Reid was self-critical of his interviewing skills, labeling himself an "atrocious interviewer" noting that, "It must have been maddening for him to start to answer one question then get interrupted by another before he could finish."⁴²⁰ Ultimately Reid came away from the experience with a subliminal trepidation:

Still, something about Murphey troubled me. He addressed our questions like an academic, dissembling them into their intellectual parts, tying them into a neat bundle, dropping the bundle into the satchels of students who didn't interest him in the least. As far as I was concerned Murphey had many of the right answers, but he was too intense for my taste, too cerebral, too cocksure. Even when he was unsure he was sure of the reasons.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, p. 252.

⁴¹⁹ Reid, 1974, p. 261.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid. Regarding Reid's comments about "our" questions: Reid was accompanied on the Murphey interview by his collaborator, Melinda Wickman, photographer for *Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*.

In reviewing Reid's interview and his assessment of that interview over thirty-five years later, I must report that it captures the public persona of the man I knew during that period. Yes, Murphey was self-assured and imbued with conviction, but as Reid also pointed out, "there was a deep inner reserve in the man."⁴²² This "inner reserve" housed the intellectual and emotional power plant that fueled his perpetual songwriting efforts. His Ur-source was an internal ocean of crosscurrents, subsurface anxieties, questions and lurking revelations where new discoveries blended with his acquired literary skills to produce a vast inventory of songs. As a self-styled professional songwriter, Murphey felt no obligation to create a canon of compositions that developed as a coherent argument. There was no movement toward a unifying theory. The core principles shifted as Murphey drifted with his natural intellectual curiosities and discovered new philosophical veneers for his opinions and positions.

During one of our many long road trips during the early 1970s, I asked Murphey if he ever grew tired of playing certain songs night after night. I singled out "Boy from the Country," a song that was routinely requested at shows. He replied that he never felt any performance ennui by including these songs in his set and went on to mention, "Playing 'Boy from the Country' was like getting together with an old friend." This insight suggested that Murphey approached each new song as the beginning of a lasting friendship and he greeted each new friend with his characteristic conviction and enthusiasm. He would wrap his keen intellect and fundamentalist zeal around each new song and would staunchly defend his latest companion. Every thesis had its defense, every message had its mandate; every position had its logical platform, every passion had its place and this made for powerful stage presentations and for equally powerful recording performances. Still, Murphey did not exhibit his strong stands as aggressive traits. Murphey was an invigorated seeker, an exceptionally curious traveler whose strong convictions served as rules of debate rather than as weapons of engagement. Through the years Murphey has not propounded a coherent philosophical position; he has propounded philosophy. Accordingly, his menu for song subjects has involved a rainbow of opinions and disparate positions drawn from coordinates on an evolving roadmap of ideas. The young songwriter's certitude that Reid described as "too intense . . . too

⁴²² Ibid, p. 261.

cerebral, too cocksure," has actually served as an empowerment, particularly for a man who is completely at home on the stage, or more accurately, in Murphey's case, on the pulpit. This is best explained by the initial verse and chorus one of his popular songs of the early 1970s, a song called, "(I Just Want to) Say What I Feel:"

This is a simple song about feeling
You probably heard the story about the cog in the wheel
It's a little piecemeal but I wrote it in a Nashville motel
And you never can tell
When the feeling's gonna hit right smack in the belly
You write so fast you forget about the spellin'
When it's all in the tellin' you forget about the technical side
And here's the punch line

I wanna say what I feel
Just wanna find a woman that's real
Don't wanna play
Let's make a deal
Just wanna say what I feel.

Jerry Jeff Walker - Singin' 'Bout the Driftin' Way of Life

Walker's songwriting approach is personally poetic, imbued with ambling adventures, road stories, and street biographies. His song catalogue, particularly the songs of his post-Oneonta "rambling" decade, is a lyrical and melodic journal of his life, a diary in song, the ethnography of a white, middle-class proto-songster who went to school on the authentic and colorful characters he encountered along the way. Since the winter of 1962, he has welcomed the risks of a young peripatetic provocateur, he's rolled with the good times, and when necessary, he's taken the tough licks, dusted off the bumps and bruises and moved on to the next escapade. And, more often than not, he emerges with a story that will find its way into a song.

This is not an innovative methodology. Writers have drawn on experience and adventure—real and imagined—since Don Quixote initially polished his rusty armor and mapped out his fantasy realm. Contemporary songs are replete with experiential accounts. Fromholz's *Texas Trilogy* is a collection of childhood experiences and Murphey's "West Texas Highway," a top-twenty-five country hit for singer George Hamilton IV in 1971, recounts his experience in picking up a hitchhiker in his "big

Chevrolet" who was "going down to Haskell" with "a woman down in Abilene."⁴²³

Walker's "experiential" approach to the song however is unique in two ways.

First, Walker consciously creates his song settings and source materials. The road is his song lab and his stories are character studies of those he's met along the way. Every situation, every success, and every stumble is a potential song. From the time he hit the streets of New Orleans in 1963 through the recording his seventh album, *Walker's Collectibles* in 1974, he recorded sixty original titles and with very few exceptions each selection is an autobiographical vignette, a character study, an account of an adventure or some combination of these elements.⁴²⁴ Fromholz might reference his ethereal playground of imagination and humor, and Murphey might draw on philosophical texts or theoretical writings, Walker sought out his sources on the streets. A brief example of Walker's "street-smart" methodology is a song he wrote about an episode with his friend and mentor, Babe Stovall, in New Orleans.

Walker spent Thanksgiving of 1964 with Babe Stovall and his family. Stovall, the famed black songster who met Walker shortly after his arrival in New Orleans, drew him into his realm and within a year the two musicians had developed several steady engagements in the French Quarter. The day's festivities had been a marked success, Walker described it as "the most wonderful Thanksgiving I could imagine," and as the sun set on the late afternoon dinner, everyone wanted to keep the party going. Walker and Stovall had a gig that night so they took off to the Quarter with the entire family in tow. Despite the prevailing attitudes in the segregated south, Walker believed that he could arrange for an exception on this special day to allow Stovall's family into the bar.

⁴²³ "West Texas Highway," written by Michael Martin Murphey and Boomer Owens Castleman in 1970, was initially recorded by George Hamilton IV on his album titled *West Texas Highway* in 1971 and reached #23 on the Country Singles charts. The song was also recorded by Lyle Lovett on his 1998 album, *Step Inside this House*.

⁴²⁴ Walker actually recorded nine albums during this period, but the first two record albums—*Circus Maximus* (1967) and *Neverland Revisited* (1968)—were with the rock group Circus Maximus and were not representative of Walker the songwriter. "Circus Maximus" was, by and large, an experiment by the established folk-music label Vanguard to appeal to the young rock market of the late 1960s, and although Walker wrote approximately [[?]] the songs on these two releases, his career as "Jerry Jeff Walker" actually began with the overnight popularity of "Mr. Bojangles" as described in the text above. The seven albums referred to above are as follows: *Mr. Bojangles* (1968), *Driftin' Way of Life* (1969), *Five Years Gone* (1970), *Bein' Free* (1970), *Jerry Jeff Walker* (1972), *¡Viva Terlingua!* (1973), and *Walker's Collectibles* (1974).

When he approached the owner of Cosimo's, he explained that they had spent the day together and it would be nice if "Babe's family could sit over by the stage with us and watch out show." Walker said that "they'll be kind of like with the band, in our area." "No way," the owner said. "Just you and Babe, that's it." When Walker brought Stovall the news, he asked the old songster what he wanted to do. "Babe puffed up his chest, hiked up his pants with his thumbs," and said to Walker, "Jer' uh . . . I makes money. Money don't make me," and they took the party back to Stovall's house.⁴²⁵ Several days later Walker had a new song, "I Makes Money (Money Don't Make Me)," the chorus of which sums up the spirit of Stovall's statement:

I makes money, money don't make me
That's the way I am and it's plain to see.
Get right for yourself, they can't put you on a shelf.
Live and let live, you know it's plain enough.
There ain't a dollar in the world can make me change my stuff.

In "I Makes Money," Walker built on a clever declaration he heard on the sidewalk in front of a New Orleans bar to create a commonsense parable, a call to action to get up, get out, and get to it. In the verses he talks about hearing the dreams of people and how they were going to spend their first million, how they planned to "flatter all the women," and "live like kings" and "try everything." But Walker advised that "life is only doing, what you think is worth pursuing, instead of waiting all the time!" This anecdotal approach is a mainstay in Walker's approach to the song. He wasn't prone to dreaming about how it could be; he was interested in how things were unfolding around him. He wasn't inclined to sit back, read the texts and ponder their stories and lessons. He was interested in stepping across the threshold, creating his own texts and living in them. In this way he stood apart from many of his contemporary writers. But the defining trait in Walker's song craft rests in his ability to translate street experience into verse. This is the second aspect of what I'm calling Walker's "experiential" approach.

The self-designed lifestyle of this young singer-songwriter provided a healthy reserve of stories and song subjects. As he mentions in one of his early New Orleans compositions, "Gypsy Songman," he had "a stage on every corner," and a concert "hall

⁴²⁵ Walker, p. 47.

on every street." With this extensive selection of venues and performance opportunities, he was constantly expanding his inventory of song possibilities. The practical challenge he faced was transposing the storyboard of the street to the medium of melody and verse. I've touched on the aspects of melody and chord structure earlier in this chapter mentioning Walker's inclusion of a refreshing passing chord in "Mr. Bojangles" to illustrate his ability to create comfortable melodies with familiar chord underpinnings that sparkle with a touch of the unexpected. I now turn to Walker's extraordinary ability to shape his real-time adventures and character studies into effortless and accessible verse.

Walker has the ability to write in quantum bursts of straightforward reality, encapsulated revelations in plain-speak that economically relay the story at hand. He is unfettered in his facility to relay the anecdote with communicative simplicity. The prototypical example of this skill is exemplified in "Mr. Bojangles." In his early days in New Orleans, Walker was arrested for being drunk in public as he was expressing his affections for a young lady while standing on a table at the Café du Monde. Once he was booked into the old First Precinct jail, Walker described his perceptions once "the cell door shut" and "eyes viewed [him] warily from the dimness inside:"⁴²⁶

Over in a dark corner, sitting in a spot of light, was a little pile of clothes arranged around the frail body of a spindly old man. He patted the bench beside him. "Sit here kid. I won't bother you." His face was peaceful. His clear eyes sparkled with kindness. He smiled a little hesitant smile, dragged a gnarled hand through what little hair he had, which was a dirty yellow-white. "We're all gonna be here a while," he said. He seemed to be talking from experience.⁴²⁷

From this extended weekend in jail, based on his conversations with his elderly cellmate, Walker crafted the biography of this curious little man with the big story. "Bojangles" was a generic name commonly used to describe New Orleans street dancers and performers and was not a reference to Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, the famous black entertainer of stage and screen. Walker's "Bojangles" was a frail white man who made his living with his dance routines and one-man-show presentations in urban centers

⁴²⁶ Walker, p. 59.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

throughout the South. The beauty of Walker's song rests in its friendly yet unique chord structure and its authenticity in relaying the life and times of an old school vaudevillian struggling in a modern world that had passed him by.

I knew a man Bojangles and he'd dance for you
In worn out shoes.
With silver hair, a ragged shirt, and baggy pants
He did the old soft shoe.
He jumped so high, jumped so high
Then he'd lightly touch down.
Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, dance.

Walker sets up the story, describes the protagonist, and identifies his unique dexterity through his subtle dance moves. He was obviously old with his silver hair, and obviously not at the top of his game with "ragged shirt and baggy pants," but lightly touching down was a show of ongoing grace.

I met him in a cell in New Orleans.
I was down and out.
He looked to me to be the eyes of age,
And he spoke right out.
He talked of life, he talked of life.
He laughed and slapped his leg a step.

He said the name Bojangles
And he danced a lick 'cross the cell.
He grabbed his pants, a better stance,
Then he jumped so high.
He clicked his heels.
He let go a laugh, oh he let go a laugh.
Shook back his clothes all around.
Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, dance.

Walker briefly describes his role in the story in two succinct lines then turns his attention back to this venerable character who was more than willing to pass on his story to the younger man. The old dancer identifies himself by his street moniker, "Bojangles," and dances across the cell showing all concerned that he still has a few smooth steps in his bag of tricks and, most importantly, that he maintains his sense of humor and his positive attitude.

He danced for those at minstrel shows and

County fairs throughout the South.
He spoke with tears of fifteen years
How his dog and him traveled about.
His dog up and died, he up and died.
After twenty years he still grieves.

He said, "I dance now at every chance
In honky-tonks for drinks and tips.
But most o' the time I spend behind
These county bars, hell I drinks a bit."
He shook his head and as he shook his head
I heard someone ask him please

Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, dance.

In the final two verses, Walker reveals the history of this "spindly old man." He touches on his love for his special companion, his profound feeling of loss, his emotional retreat to a life of "drinks and tips," and his extended stays "behind country bars." Nonetheless, his companions in the jail cell ask him please . . . Mr. Bojangles, dance.

In studying the lyrics to "Mr. Bojangles," I find a beautiful economy of words, a story told close to the bone yet fleshed out with subtle detail. Walker recalls writing the song in Austin, late one night several months after meeting "Bojangles" in New Orleans: "And here it came, just sort of tumbling out, one straight shot down the length of that yellow pad." He described it as "a six-eight waltz about an old man and hope . . . a love song."⁴²⁸ And when he finished, he reviewed the words on the long yellow pad: "I thought, yeah, that's him."⁴²⁹

"Mr. Bojangles" is representative of Walker's approach to song crafting during his "rambling decade." The approach involved riding the contemporary current of activity and framing the experience in wonderfully economical and lucid verse. This songwriter's talent for diving into the fray and surfacing with a great American story is exceeded only by his talent for putting pen to paper and delicately telling that tale.

My affection for these three songwriters is apparent throughout this narrative. They were instrumental in my aspirations as a young musician trying to establish a role in a very large and competitive field. Their mentorship provided a singular opportunity and

⁴²⁸ Walker, p. 66.

⁴²⁹ Walker, p. 67.

I was very fortunate to be in Austin at the onset of the city's most innovative and prolific musical decade. Beyond any doubt, there were better guitar players in Austin, but as Fromholz said in one of his insightful lyrical phrases, "life is mostly attitude and timing."⁴³⁰ The larger Austin scene would also benefit from positive attitudes and fortuitous timing. In a few short years Austin welcomed a collection of first-rate writers and the scene seemed to move beyond a focus on the latest sounds and styles to include a reverence for the song. And with that affection for handcrafted original works came a nascent curiosity about the business of the song and the nuances of copyright and publishing.

In 1972 the Michael Murphey band was living in the motor court on Austin's North Lamar Boulevard with Murphey and Gary P. Nunn living in the large flagstone house with other band members situated in the small cabins scattered around the property. One afternoon Murphey and Nunn had been working on a co-writing project, "Song of the South Canadian," which we would later record on the *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* album, when their conversation turned to the music business and the efficacy of songwriting. Murphey recounted his experience of working at Screen Gems, a fact that Nunn found curious. The idea of getting up in the morning, fighting the traffic on the freeways and sitting in a small enclosed area writing songs all day flew in the face of the romantic notion that many of the young Austin musicians harbored regarding the act of songwriting—cosmic flashes of inspiration, deep insights regarding the human condition surfacing in a moment of quiet reflection . . . the typical twaddle associated with so-called "mind expanding" aspects of the counterculture.

Murphey invited Nunn back to his room to contemplate a large four-drawer filing cabinet. "Check this out," he said to Nunn, and they began sorting through the contents. Nunn went through file after file of song titles where he found histories of each composition—when it was written, the original publishing date, any co-writing credits, publishing and sub-publishing agreements, when the song was recorded by another artist, and the details of that artist and their record company. He studied publishing royalty

⁴³⁰ From Fromholz's "Dinosaur Blues" as recorded by Jerry Jeff Walker on his 1992 album, *Hill Country Rain* (Ryko, RCD 10241). The particular verse I reference is as follows: I've been blessed with a voice that can sing / And a faith in the future and what it may bring / And change is the very most natural of things / And life is mostly attitude and timing.

statements reflecting statutory licensing fees and the number of albums and singles sold, reports on national airplay, statements from performance rights organization, Broadcast Music Inc., and receipts from five-figure advances from BMI. He went through files with titles like "Boy from the Country" recorded by John Denver, "What Am I Doing Hangin' Round" recorded by the Monkees, "Ballad of Calico Project" featuring fifteen individual titles recorded by Kenny Rogers and the First Edition, and sorted through statements from various publishing companies and related information on hundreds of songs. Nunn realized that he was looking at a gold mine of intellectual property, and realized that he was well positioned to stake his own claim. The business of the song had arrived in Austin.

Chapter 7

CULTURAL LEGACY - CULTURAL PRODUCTS

In assessing a cultural scene, in trying to determine its impact on a social, economic, artistic or intellectual environment, or in trying to establish its historical significance and ongoing influence, it's helpful to consider the cultural products associated with that particular scene. And in considering the efficacy of a "cultural product," it's helpful to establish basic definitions for the two operative words in that phrase. Unpacking the term "culture"—which generally requires some etymological and analytical heavy lifting—has been the focus of countless academic studies since the mid-19th century. Trying to gather up and assemble all the complicated components related to this multi-dimensional concept of culture is like addressing a jigsaw puzzle. Each part of the puzzle plays a specific role; they depend on each other to complete a larger result, a result that would remain incomplete in the absence of a single piece. The individual pieces of a cultural puzzle represent components of day-to-day existence that a common group of people share—a history, a language, a race, an ethnicity, a belief system, a religion, a set of goals, symbols, or standards . . . The list is as exhaustive as the permutations and combinations inherent in the interaction of individuals and groups as they go about the challenges of living. This sociological-anthropological notion of culture is undoubtedly far more complicated than implied in the static jigsaw puzzle analogy because it is, at bottom, a manifestation of human behavior that unfolds on an ever-changing timeline.

The word "products" as it applies to the phrase "cultural products" is much more straightforward and connotes that which a culture creates. "Products" include a wide inventory of creations from political systems to works of art, technological innovations to culinary recipes, eloquent ideas and theories to the ad hoc jargon of an inner-city street scene, or from a "Declaration of Independence" to a Hula Hoop. Weighing the term "cultural products" therefore, at least as it applies to this study, casts "culture" as an intricate sociological-anthropological engine powered by interactive human behavior, and casts "products" as the output in the form of goods, services, ideas, trends, intellectual property, and artifacts generated by this complex anthropomorphic mechanism.

To further unpack the complicated concept of culture and by extension, the products a culture generates, I turn to the analysis of Robert Crunden and his insightful interpretation of the term in his 1994 book, *A Brief History of American Culture*.⁴³¹ According to Crunden, "*Culture* can be a fighting word."⁴³² Interpretations of this evocative word are as abundant as the complex range of environments, social or personal behaviors, and the ensuing civilizations, groups, and situations that it strives to describe. "For some," Crunden says, "it will always refer to the Victorian ideal of Matthew Arnold, of the best that has been thought and said in a given environment. More recent writers have rejected this view as literary and elitist and stressed a more anthropological notion of the complex behavior patterns of all people."⁴³³ Crunden mentions that he is "not comfortable with either view," and goes on to offer his encapsulated definition:

I define culture as creative achievements at any level: Classical music as well as commercial innovation, much-admired novels as well as intricate thrillers. A cultural history is thus a record of the conditions that produced all kinds of innovation and the behavior of individuals as they respond to these conditions."⁴³⁴

Crunden references "creative achievements" that traverse an aesthetic spectrum from the astute symphonic contributions of Aaron Copland to the down-and-dirty urban blues of Muddy Waters or from the 19th-century literary pinnacle of Herman Melville to the Beadle & Adam's *Beadle's Dime Novel* series. In other words, Crunden ignores "cultural hierarchy" just as Darwin ignored "biological hierarchy" in his paradigm-shifting argument for natural selection. Darwin argued that if it survives, for whatever reason, it thrives, just as Crunden argues that if it evokes a popular response with a contemporary public, if it pragmatically affects the trends, sensibilities, or behavior of an individual or a group, then it becomes a component of the ever-growing cultural lexicon.

I have incorporated Crunden's insights into the following treatment of the cultural products of the Austin scene. Although Crunden's analysis deals with culture on a grand scale by addressing the vast scope of American culture, the essential structures, functions,

⁴³¹ Crunden, Robert M. *A Brief History of American Culture*. (New York: Paragon House, 1994). Originally published by the Finnish Historical Society in Helsinki in 1990.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

and results that Crunden attaches to "culture" apply handily to a regional music scene. Throughout this study I've attempted to establish two basic themes that Crunden succinctly sums up by defining culture as "creative achievements at any level." First, scenes or "regional cultures" are complex entities with many moving interdependent components. I've compared them to engines, ecosystems and organisms and have suggested that they influence their participants and their respective environments. Second, scenes *do* things. By their very nature as "engines, ecosystems and organisms" they're busily engaged facilitating their existence, survival, and growth but beyond these essentials, scenes *create* things. As mentioned, they create practical results by fulfilling certain needs and aspirations in their constituents *and* they create tangible cultural products. This chapter addresses the output of the Austin scene by offering four examples of these "tangible cultural products." I begin with Moon Hill Management, a local artist management company created in the early 1970s that represented several of the top acts of the period and played a significant role in the Austin scene. The next subject is *Austin City Limits* and its genesis in the middle 1970s followed by the Kerrville Folk Festival, now, in 2011, celebrating its 40th anniversary. Finally I turn to a curious combination of Texan music and international diplomacy through the work of Austin musician Bob Livingston and his State Department sponsored cultural exchange program, "Cowboys and Indians." Livingston was a prominent contributor to the 1970s scene, an astute musician, and a student of Eastern philosophies who traveled extensively in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa at the behest of the United States State Department as an ad hoc cultural ambassador who advocated world peace through cultural exchange. I refer to the last three examples as "cultural legacy products" because they began in Austin during the 1970s and continue to influence the currents of Texan and national popular culture in the second decade of the 21st century. I refer to Moon Hill simply as a "cultural product" because it dissolved in 1979 and its lingering influence does not approach the "legacy" level of the other three products. Nonetheless, Moon Hill was one of the most productive business entities of the period. This small company of "young business colts" made profound contributions to the lives and careers of their artists and strongly influenced the aesthetic topography of the Austin landscape. All of these

cultural legacy products owe an aesthetic debt to Austin and its singular climate of creativity during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Moon Hill Management: An Austin Music Business Hybrid

Moon Hill was an artist management company that represented many of the popular Austin-based acts of the period. Moon Hill was a relatively small company averaging seven to ten employees in their prime, but they offered a list of services that rivaled the efforts of their counterparts in Los Angeles, Nashville, or New York. At Moon Hill, all of these services—artist management, booking, publishing and accounting—were under one roof whereas in the "music business centers" these various services were generally parceled out to independent entities. A popular artist of the period like Bob Dylan, for example, might have a personal manager in New York, a business manager in Los Angeles, a booking agency based in Northern California, a publishing house in Nashville, and an accounting firm from his home state of Minnesota. Austin during the early seventies didn't have a "Bob Dylan," although there are many contemporary artists and writers who would argue that there were various Texas-based songwriters that rivaled Dylan's exceptional creativity.⁴³⁵ Austin didn't have a resident assemblage of artists in need of professional representation that warranted an assortment professional-grade management companies with major recording company contacts, booking agencies with national wherewithal, or publishing companies with extensive, profitable song catalogues. Further there were countless long-established music business

⁴³⁵ For more on the exceptional depth of the Texas songwriting pool, there is a work in progress, *Pickers and Poets: the Ruthlessly Poetic Singer-Songwriters of Texas* by Craig Clifford and Craig D. Hillis, Eds. In the prospectus for this project scholar and songwriter Clifford makes the following comparison between Van Zandt and Dylan, noting that unlike Dylan, Van Zandt's work was "rooted:" "In the language of the times, these were 'folk singers.' Unlike Dylan, however, these were folk singers [Van Zandt and others] writing songs about their own people and their own origins and singing in their own vernacular to their own people rather than trying to imitate Woody Guthrie's Oklahoma accent and depression-era sensibilities for the art crowd of New York. This music, like most great poetry, is profoundly rooted." (Prospects, Clifford & Hillis 10-18-2010). In other words, Clifford perceives a rooted sincerity in many Texas songwriters unlike Dylan's contrived professional persona. Further, the burgeoning career of Willie Nelson would ultimately rival Dylan's commercial success in terms of album sales and international brand recognition, and various songwriters that touted the excellence and purity of Townes Van Zandt like Steve Earle who famously proclaimed that, "Townes Van Zandt is the best songwriter in the whole world and I'll stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table in my cowboy boots and say that." This statement is quoted in various sources on the Internet and in published accounts.

concerns in Los Angeles, Nashville and New York most of whom considered Austin a town brimming with talent that suffered from a music business infrastructure that was, at best, a work in progress.

Moon Hill might very well have been a work in progress, but its healthy and continuous learning curve was an asset rather than a liability and exhibited the youthful energy of many of the acts it represented. The inquisitive nature of the principals and their willingness to "do their homework" generated pragmatic results by making informed decisions. The young company readily adapted to a rapidly changing regional and national music business environment that was driven by popular tastes and trends during a dynamic period in American cultural history. Most important, however, Moon Hill generated an impressive inventory of practical results in the careers of their artists. In so doing, they contributed significantly to the Austin scene under study. Certain acts like B.W. Stevenson, Rusty Wier, and Steven Fromholz relied on Moon Hill for a complete representation package—management, booking, publishing and accounting—while other acts like Kenneth Threadgill, Willis Alan Ramsey, or Willie Nelson contracted specific services offered by the company on an ad hoc basis.

Like many homegrown Austin businesses of the era, Moon Hill began as a group of young go-getters who recognized a niche in a rapidly expanding entertainment market. Since the early 1960s Austin enjoyed a healthy demand for party bands from fraternities and sororities, University social organizations, popular nightclubs and dance halls, and from individuals planning private functions like weddings or parties. Talent agents like Charlie Hatchett met this demand. Hatchett was a UT alumnus and law school graduate who played guitar through his tenure at UT and continued to book his band, the Chevelles, after he graduated from law school in 1964. His company, Hatchett Talent, was the go-to booking agency for the premiere "copy bands" of 1960s and early 1970s, it was tremendously successful, and generated substantial revenue for the working musicians of Austin. Hatchett focused on the talent agency function: He found work for bands and didn't focus on the management responsibilities associated with securing recording contracts or strategic career planning and was not actively engaged in the music publishing business. Hatchett Talent is currently approaching its fifth continuous

decade and survives as Austin's longest-running talent agency.⁴³⁶ There are countless alumni of "Hatchett bands" that went on to play leading roles in Austin's seventies' scene and in the national and international recording industry.⁴³⁷

In addition to the copy band market, there was a vibrant commercial music scene in full swing in the late sixties comprised of groups determined to make their mark on the national charts. Several succeeded. The 13th Floor Elevators had a national hit with "You're Gonna Miss Me" in 1966, Shiva's Headband made a national stir with their 1969 album release, *Take Me to the Mountains*, on Capitol Records, and Bubble Puppy had a top-twenty national hit with "Hot Smoke and Sassafras" in 1969.⁴³⁸ Other Austin acts—the Sweetarts, Lavender Hill Express, and Conqueroo for example—released recordings that captured the regional market. Many of these acts like Lavender Hill Express and Shiva's Headband had active managers (local DJ and radio personality Mike Lucas and Vulcan Gas Company and later Armadillo World Headquarters entrepreneur, Eddie Wilson respectively), who played a significant role in their successes. The notion of local representation was successfully carried into the 1970s by a young college student, Larry Watkins.

Watkins introduction into the music business came through his experience as the talent buyer for his UT fraternity in the late 1960s. After his college experience of procuring bands, it was a seamless transition to representing them. With the strength of the Texas economy, the well-funded fraternity-sorority market, the general availability Baby Boomer disposable income, and scores of bands looking for work, Watkins made a reasonable living as a booking agent. In this capacity, he readily realized that certain

⁴³⁶ The day-to-day business is handled by Hatchett's son "Tad," while Charlie still plays regional gigs with his band, the Chevelles.

⁴³⁷ The Hatchett Talent Agency touched the careers of many of the musicians active in the middle sixties through the seventies. There are few in fact that didn't at some point, get a call from Hatchett with the assurance, "You're gonna love this little gig I got lined up for ya!" All of the copy bands I worked with during the sixties did business with Hatchett, Christopher Cross worked countless frat parties, private parties and various club dates that emanated from Hatchett's camp, as did Jimmie Vaughan with "Storm" and the "Chessmen," Stevie Ray Vaughan in various ensemble configuration, Paul Ray (now a venerable UT disc jockey) as well as many bands populated by Rusty Wier, Gary P. Nunn, Leonard Arnold, John Inmon, Layton DePenning, and others.

⁴³⁸ "You're Gonna Miss Me" backed with "Tried to Hide" reached its peak chart position in early 1966 on the Billboard pop-music charts at #55. Shiva's Headband, often spelled Shiva's Head Band, was one of Austin's first groups to secure a recording contract with a major label, Capitol.

Austin acts had the talent, tunes, and tenacity to make a splash in the national market and began a calculated segue from booking to management. Artist management entailed a strategic relationship with an artist, essentially a partnership that offered an enterprising manager a strategic stake in a long-term career. Moon Hill grew from this vision in 1972. Watkins soon secured management agreements with B.W. Stevenson, Rusty Wier and Steven Fromholz, he partnered with an adept businessman of means in Dallas, and assembled a group of associates that included a booking agent, a publisher, an accountant, and a receptionist-contract administrator.

Each department featured individuals who were well versed in their field and who understood the necessity of all departments working together in the best interests of the client. The management department, under the purview of Watkins, focused on strategic career planning, securing major-label recording contracts and capitalizing on the artist's window of popularity in an industry that was eager to replace yesterday's sensation with tomorrow's big new discovery. The key to success during that period was the record album. The commercial release of an album was the necessary right of passage and avenue to the big time and it was incumbent on the manager to secure a recording contract for their client. This was no small order. Before the advent of digital recording technology, analog recording was an extremely expensive proposition. A typical production budget for an album in 1975 might run from \$50,000.00 to \$150,000.00, which was a substantial investment on the part of the record company. Accordingly, courting a major label to sign an unknown act was a true challenge. Recording was a high-dollar proposition and should the manager find their artist a "label deal," he or she must either negotiate its terms or arrange for appropriate legal representation to that end. And should a deal be finalized, the manager must work with the artist and the label to determine the producer, studio, recording schedule and coordinate the logistical and financial aspects of this process. And should the album be recorded, mixed, mastered, the manager must coordinate the production team concerning the album artwork, the publication of the songs and the compulsory licenses if third-party copyrights have been used on the album before the recording is delivered for mass production. After fabrication and the release of the album, a new phase of managerial responsibilities

comes into play.⁴³⁹ The manager must then work with the record company to "break" the album in an extremely competitive market. He or she must make sure that reporting radio stations around the country have a copy of the designated single from the album to consider for airplay.⁴⁴⁰ A manager would commonly call a radio station to encourage the program director to play or "add" their artist's song, hire an independent promotion company to serve this role, or coax record company representatives to put their artist's release on the front burner. The manager must work with their affiliated booking agents or with a national talent agency to secure a concert tour to arrange a series of performances to bring their act to the public. An ideal scenario involved landing their artist an opening act slot on an established major tour. Watkins for example coupled Rusty Wier with the Marshall Tucker Band on several of their national tours. Given such a touring opportunity, the manager would study the upcoming markets and again work with the record label or with independent promotional contractors to facilitate radio and television interviews, arrange for appearances in local record stores, and invite local journalists to review the album or the act's live performance. If this phase is successful, if the single or the album made a strong showing on the national charts, gained public

⁴³⁹ Interestingly, many albums that reach this stage (which is to say after the recording process and before mass fabrication) never reach the market. There are countless master recordings that sit in the vaults of record companies or their ultimate assigns. At bottom, the record company calls the shots. They've made the investment in the recording process, they "own" the album and they have the option of releasing or not releasing the album in question. Although they don't own the copyrights to the songs that have been recorded (which indeed they sometimes do, if, during the negotiating process, they made copyright ownership or participation in copyright ownership a condition of signing an artist), they own the *sound recording rights* to the songs on the recording. Album releases are delayed or denied for myriad reasons: Another label for example may release an album with similar material that beats "our" product to the punch for a particular market share; "our" label might be bought out by another label that doesn't share "our" label's enthusiasm for a specific artist or type of music; "our" label folds; or the label determines it's more cost effective to put "our" product on ice rather than make the promotional investment in breaking a new product that they feel has a marginal chance of success. During Moon Hill's tenure in the seventies, there were several albums that were never released and that sit in the vaults of major labels to this day. Further, record labels often released an album to fulfill certain contractual responsibilities and let that album die on the vine because, for whatever reason, they elected not to invest in its promotion.

⁴⁴⁰ "Reporting" radio stations refers to those stations that report their play lists to the trade publications like Billboard, Cashbox or Record World that chart the various releases according to "spins" (the number of times a day it's played on the air), album sales, and the requests of listeners. Also, the "single" refers to the chosen song that, according to the collective judgment of the record label, the manager, the act and other interested parties, has the best chance for radio airplay and public acceptance.

recognition and sold well, then the manager, the label and the artist would consider their next move. This might involve pulling another single from the album to repeat the phase described above to drive more sales, it might involve a corporate sponsorship to underwrite a solo tour, or it might warrant going back into the studio to produce a second album to capitalize on the momentum established with the initial release. Regardless of the chosen path, a major success with the new release elevated the manager into another tier of responsibility that involved endorsements, television appearances, acting and film opportunities, and countless other opportunities that signify the long-term partnership between manager and artist.

The booking department at Moon Hill operated on two levels. It worked with the management department to secure dates for the acts in their stable. At the time I worked for the company, those acts included B.W. Stevenson, Rusty Wier, and Steven Fromholz. If, for example, Fromholz was touring in support of a recent record release, the booking department would coordinate with Watkins and the designated national booking agency to ensure that Fromholz and band covered the key commercial venues with a special focus on tour logistics, cost effectiveness and maximum exposure in the designated markets. On a second level, the booking department worked an extensive market of nightclubs and concert halls throughout Texas, Colorado and the Southwest to arrange play dates for its roster of acts. There were acts like Bill and Bonnie Hearne that had an exclusive booking arrangement with Moon Hill, other acts like Kenneth Threadgill were more loosely affiliated, while various national acts like Willie Nelson or David Allen Coe worked with the agency to line up supplemental dates on their tours as they passed through Moon Hill territory. Live music was in high demand during the mid-seventies. Between Austin, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Waco and various college towns across the state, there were scores of nightclubs, honky tonks, dance halls, folk music venues and small concert halls or ballrooms (500 to 1,500 seats) that regularly booked live entertainment. There was an extremely lucrative fraternity and sorority market on campuses throughout Texas and in adjoining states and although Charlie Hatchett was the primary beneficiary of the Greek entertainment budgets, Moon Hill enjoyed a fair share of that business and often worked with Hatchett on bookings. Also in the collegiate sphere, the National Entertainment Conference was a popular collection of colleges and

universities that banned together to "block book" acts in their individual coffee houses and entertainment facilities throughout their national network. This booking cooperative enabled an entertainer to play a series of lucrative dates in what amounted to a low-key national tour.⁴⁴¹ There were various seasonal employment opportunities in Rocky Mountain ski lodges for example, or in beach resorts along the Gulf Coast. In light of this extensive talent market and the popularity of several key Moon Hill bands, the booking department was a strong and steady source of income for the company.

The publishing department handled the artist's most important and enduring asset—their songs. Moon Hill's publisher, Tom "T" White, a Phi Beta Kappa English graduate from the University of Texas, secured and administrated the copyrights, pitched their writer's songs to other artists, record labels, record producers, and independent production companies and kept a watchful eye on the charts to determine which titles were on the move and why.⁴⁴² As significant as the history of the song copyright has been in American popular music history, the efficacy of "publishing" didn't surface as a topic of common conversation in the younger set of Austin musicians until the influx of singer-songwriters in the early 1970s. When the successful Austin bands of the sixties recorded and released albums, they adhered to the formalities of filling out the copyright forms and registering their songs with the Library of Congress, but the notion of "covers"—the practice of other singers or bands recording an independent songwriter's work—was not a familiar practice in the Austin scene at that time. Austin's popular

⁴⁴¹ The National Entertainment Conference (NEC) was chartered by a group of like-minded colleges and universities in 1968. As the collegiate talent buying profession continued to evolve, the Conference integrated educational programming into their formats and in 1976 the organization's name was changed to the National Entertainment and Campus Activities Association to reflect the broader constituency it served and the varied activities programs presented by campuses. Finally, in 1982, the organization's name was changed to the current National Association for Campus Activities, reflecting the broad-based student development and leadership philosophy of the organization in addition to the traditional role of providing entertainment to students.

⁴⁴² Tom White was approached by Watkins to head up the publishing department at Moon Hill in 1974. In an email exchange in early November, 2010, T. White explains the circumstances surrounding coming on board at Moon Hill: "After graduating from UT in 1973, my degree in English and a minor in playwriting, I spoke to Larry Watkins one day, and he asked me if I'd come to work for Moon Hill, and I said yes. He said he (and Jim Devlin [Larry Watkin's new-found partner who was a seasoned businessman in Dallas]) needed a music publishing division, and so I read everything I could get my hands on to learn what that was about . . . Books on music business, copyrights, stacks of contracts, etc."

musicians of the late 1960s would be perplexed by the idea of another singer or band covering Roky Erickson's "You're Gonna Miss Me," or Bubble Puppy's "Hot Smoke and Sassafras," a complicated arrangement with many twists, turns and intricate passages. The notion of a "lounge-version" or adult-contemporary rendition of "You're Gonna Miss Me" is a quantum leap for even the most chemically liberated sensibilities of a typical psychedelic or rock musician of the era. A similar treatment of Walker's "Mr. Bojangles" whereby other prominent acts covered the song was common fare in the world of the songwriter.⁴⁴³ As this study argues, the ascendance of the song in Austin as the gold standard of aesthetic exchange was a product of the early seventies scene and Moon Hill was the first music business company in Austin to offer a professional, methodical publishing enterprise to address the stewardship of the song.

The Moon Hill accounting department played several roles in the overall company mission. It provided Moon Hill's clients with state-of-the-art personal and professional accounting services, a necessity often overlooked by young and successful recording acts focused on writing, recording and performing. Additionally, it offered similar services to non-exclusive clients as an independent contractor. Very few accountants in Austin were versed in the nuances of the music business. It was rare for even an established Austin accounting firm to be familiar with the fine points of record album royalty accounting for example. Royalty accounting dealt with revenues that were

⁴⁴³ Regarding "Mr. Bojangles," the following information is drawn from the popular website, Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mr._Bojangles_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mr._Bojangles_(song)): "*Mr. Bojangles* [sic] is a popular country song originally written and recorded by artist Jerry Jeff Walker for his 1968 album of the same title. Since then, it has been covered by many other artists, including The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, whose version rose to number nine on the *Billboard* Hot 100 pop chart in 1971. Walker's song has been re-recorded by many popular artists, including Harry Chapin, Sammy Davis Jr., Chet Atkins, Rod McKuen, Whitney Houston, Billy Joel, Harry Nilsson, Bob Dylan, Don McLean, The Byrds, Harry Belafonte, Frank Sinatra, Bobby Cole, Elton John, Lulu, Arlo Guthrie, Nina Simone, Esther Phillips, John Denver, David Bromberg, Neil Diamond, Tom T. Hall, King Curtis, Radka Toneff, John Holt, Bermuda Triangle Band, Robbie Williams, David Campbell, Jamie Cullum, Ray Quinn, Edwyn Collins, Frankie Laine, Cornell Dupree, Jim Croce, Todd Snider, Jim Stafford, Michael Jackson, Andre "The Gypsy" Gerard, Jamie Walker, Jamie, Judy & Jim Egan and Cat Stevens. Furthermore, composer Philip Glass makes reference to "Mr. Bojangles" in his minimalist opera *Einstein on the Beach*. A French version of the song was recorded in 1984 by Hugues Aufray on his album *L'enfant Sauvage*." Even this seemingly exhaustive list doesn't cover the entire spectrum of covers. One that is not mentioned is the version was recorded by the iconic entertainer George Burns, which, in my mind, illustrates the power of an exceptional composition to cut across the staid lines of generations, genres, and cultural sensibilities.

payable to artists per the terms of a their recording contracts. Such payables were a product of complicated formulas based on a litany of variables: How many albums the recording company shipped to distributors, the number of unsold or damaged returns, the number of albums that were designated as promotional copies, the budget for the recording process, cash advances the company made to the artist upon signing, any expenses paid by the company for promotional considerations underwritten by the company for a concert tour designed to generate album sales, and various other "hidden" costs and charges that affected the net due to an artist for album sales. Robert Pharr, the Moon Hill accountant had several independent clients—members of the Willie Nelson band for example or several popular touring acts—who depended on his skills for their complicated accounting needs to insure their legitimacy with the Internal Revenue Service and state tax agencies and to provide the planning tools they needed for fiscal security. Outside revenues generated by Pharr in the accounting department, like revenues generated by the booking department, went into the general Moon Hill operating fund and played a key role in the financial success of the enterprise. Finally, and very significantly, the accounting department produced a first-class set of monthly and annual books for periodical board meetings that rivaled the accounting reports of large, sophisticated publicly traded corporations. This contribution was an essential of Moon Hill's success and longevity.

Moon Hill owed a significant debt to their co-founder, mentor and majority partner, Dallas businessman James K. Devlin. Devlin, a New York native and Harvard Law graduate, was a well-traveled renaissance man and an aesthete with a fondness for American music. He hailed from an established East Coast Roman Catholic family, earned his undergraduate degree in philosophy from Columbia before entering Harvard Law School, had a background in finance, and was no stranger to corporate boardrooms. Devlin married a lovely Jewish woman, they had four extremely bright children and shortly after the birth of their fourth child in the late 1960s, Jim and Laura moved to Dallas to raise their children in a safe, nurturing environment. In addition to his legal background, Devlin was well versed in communications technology and once situated in Dallas, he established a telecommunications company. This was a new era in business communications with products like fax machines, satellite broadcasts, and fiber optics

that redefined the market. Further, it was a time of significant shifts in federal regulations that governed new telecommunications systems and Devlin's company benefited significantly from specific FCC rulings. In addition to pressing forward with his successful business enterprise, Devlin's receptivity to aesthetics spurred a secondary mission in his personal business portfolio. He was interested in creating a productive venture that effectively merged solid business practices with the creative aspects of contemporary music to the mutual benefit of both artist and entrepreneur. As new Texans, Devlin and family quickly picked up on the energized Texas music scene. Jim and Laura enjoyed many of the popular acts that passed through the Dallas area, they were particularly impressed by the powerful performances of Dallas native B.W. Stephenson, and soon discovered that several of these traveling acts like Steven Fromholz and Rusty Wier had ties to a small company in Austin. Devlin looked into Moon Hill, approached them regarding his involvement, and soon came aboard bringing an entirely new level of business experience and strategic vision.

Devlin's involvement solidified and expanded the professional guidelines Watkins had developed in the startup phase of the company. Moon Hill was incorporated, accounting procedures, both operational and client-based, were fine tuned, Tom White was brought on board to establish a publishing department, and the Austin-based principals began a tradition that endured throughout the life of the company: Every month, Watkins, Pharr and White (and I after I joined the company in 1975) would make the 225-mile drive to Dallas and meet with Devlin for a board meeting. These sessions covered the standard requirements for a working corporation; we reviewed the performance of the management, booking, publishing and accounting departments with a special focus on the status of our artists. Reports for special projects underway were presented, financial statements were studied, and tactical and strategic goals were articulated with specific responsibilities assigned to departments and individuals as necessary. Status reports on each of the management acts were presented and weighed, and a general discussion ensued regarding the artist's goals and the company's role in those visions. These monthly meetings, coupled with state-of-the-art accounting systems, an eye for detail in administrative and contractual practices, a steady work ethic, and a sincere dedication to our clients exemplified the professional character of this small yet

exceptional company. Still, Moon Hill was a product of the cultural milieu of the 1970s. It was a curious hybrid of sound business practices, post-collegiate, young-professional panache, a splash of Texan bravado, and the liberal social fabric of the period. Jan Reid described the "professional" environment at Moon Hill during its early years:

Watkins and his associates seemed to enjoy their work. They were barely old enough to grow mustaches, but they went about their tasks with discipline enough and seemed pretty sure of themselves. Country-rock reeled off the stereo unit in the back room, nobody yelled or hurried, visiting dogs wandered in to snuff at the golden-haired Spaniel, Joe Cocker, who had the run of the place.⁴⁴⁴

In addition to the monthly meetings, the company held annual retreats to enable the company's principals, key employees, and family members to rest, recharge and get to know each other outside of the workplace. I recall three such retreats during my time with the company, one in New Orleans, one on the Texas Gulf Coast in Port Aransas, and one in the Texas Hill Country at the Lakeway Resorts. Beyond the practices commonly associated with company retreats, the Moon Hill outings made a special effort to address the aesthetic and/or personal goals of our associates in an attempt to integrate these personal projects into the overall company mission. Patti Ricker, our very lovely and capable contract administrator and secretary, was a talented folksinger, Tom White was a playwright, and I was working hard to advance my career as a record producer. Moon Hill helped all of us. The company secured performance dates for Patti, tried to land her high-visibility opening act slots, and worked with her on publishing issues. The company assisted in the production of three of Tom's plays, *Silo Stud* (1975), *Yes. No. And Yellow* (1976), and a special production of *Willie the Shake* starring Steven Fromholz in 1981. These were all quality theatrical performances that fared well with the local critics and one of White's plays, *Colonel Mustard*, was produced in New York off Broadway in 1978. The company provided a definite boost to my record production career.⁴⁴⁵ A

⁴⁴⁴ Reid, p. 76. *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, second edition, 2004, p. 74.

⁴⁴⁵ This is not the place to delve into this, but somewhere in this dissertation I need to touch on the nuts and bolts of what a record producer actually does. This is an important definition . . . Not only from a "definition" point of view, but from the angle that there were no degrees or licenses necessary for one to talk their way into the position of "record producer" (or manager, or booking agent for that matter . . . Given the connection between music publication and federal statute, however, there was definitely some actual knowledge for that task).

common practice during the 1960s and 1970s was the production of a demo tape. An aspiring artist looking for a recording contract or an established artist shopping for a new label or mapping out the songs and sounds for their next major release would book studio time and record a demo tape help facilitate these efforts. In this fashion I was able to produce sessions for B.W. Stevenson, Rusty Wier, Steven Fromholz, an exceptional singer-songwriter named Vince Bell who was affiliated with our publishing company, and Moon Hill's hot new rock band, Denim. These studio efforts not only yielded positive results for the artists involved, they also paved the path for me to produce records for some of these acts. My Moon Hill affiliation was instrumental in securing me production jobs in the production of Denim's second album on ABC Records and in the production of Bill and Bonnie Hearne's first single release.⁴⁴⁶ Moon Hill therefore, was not only dedicated to the success of their clients; Moon Hill was dedicated to the personal, creative success of their loyal associates.

For Devlin, Moon Hill was a cultural experiment, an art-oriented hobby he could enjoy with his wife and family, and a challenge that effectively merged his business background, his aesthetic tastes, and his mission to make a meaningful link between art and business. In these efforts, Devlin and the company succeeded. Moon Hill effectively blended the dreams and aspirations of a number of exceptional musicians of the era with specific avenues of commercial success in a highly competitive and often brutal national entertainment industry. Moon Hill either secured or coordinated a series of recording contracts for their artists—over twenty major releases on labels that included RCA, Warner Brothers, Columbia, Epic, ABC, Capitol, 20th Century Records, Polygram as well as other independent labels. These releases routinely involved national promotional tours that generated radio airplay and product sales, developed the brands of the various artists, strengthened the international buzz surrounding the productivity of the Austin music

⁴⁴⁶ As previously mentioned, audio recording during the 1970s was an expensive proposition and in the examples of demo recordings above, Moon Hill either paid for the sessions or arranged for the funding from third parties. In the case of the Steven Fromholz demo sessions, Moon Hill footed the bill, in the case of the B.W. Stevenson sessions, funds were allocated from Stevenson's existing recording budget with Warner Brothers, and in the case of Bill and Bonnie Hearne's single (a two-sided 45 RPM release), funds came from Darrell Royal, the head football coach at the University of Texas who was a friend and fan of Bill and Bonnie. Similar circumstances apply to the funding of Tom White's plays: Production funds for many of his early works either came from Moon Hill, were arranged by Moon Hill, or were underwritten by Jim Devlin.

scene in general, and provided work and opportunity for road crews, production companies, and the support bands of the recording acts. Moon Hill's activities were a boon to regional music-oriented enterprises—nightclubs, concert venues, retail music stores, sound, light and staging companies, record shops, and recording studios. The company supported the individual aesthetic ambitions of their principals and provided them an invaluable, "hands-on" tutorial for an unconventional industry that didn't offer degree plans.

In assessing Moon Hill's contributions to their clients, to the Austin community, and to the course of popular music, it's helpful to review the cultural products that they had a hand in creating. What follows is a survey of these products: It includes discographies of Moon Hill's management acts, career highlights of these artists that are germane to this study, and other aspects of the company's productive tenure.

B.W. Stevenson

Stevenson was born in Dallas, 1949, played in rock bands in high school, went to college but joined the United States Air Force before graduating. After his military service he returned to Texas and aggressively pursued a career as an entertainer. He adopted the stage persona, "Buckwheat" which was soon abbreviated "B.W." and was one of the early acts from Texas to break into the national scene with the release of his first album in 1972. His signature hit, a song he co-wrote with the successful West Coast songwriter Daniel Moore, was "My Maria," that topped out at #9 on the Billboard Top Singles charts in 1973. The album of the same name reached #45 on the Billboard Album charts. Stevenson's recording career took several curious turns—odd and unfortunate twists that derailed several of his genuinely exceptional recording performances, performances that exemplified his talent for recognizing (and of course writing) hit songs. Before the success of "My Maria," RCA records released Stevenson's version of "Shambala," a powerful pop tune written by Stevenson's friend and songwriting associate, Daniel Moore. The tune hit the Billboard charts on May 12, 1973. One week later, the hugely popular trio, Three Dog Night, released their version of the same song. It immediately charted and raced up to the number 3 position in the pop singles and adult contemporary categories. Stevenson's version peaked at #66.

Stevenson's efforts were trumped by the more popular rock group. RCA and Stevenson bounced back and released "My Maria" in August of that year which soon rose to top-ten chart position. Stevenson had a similar experience with the release of his version of, "Please Come to Boston," a song written by Nashville-based songwriter Dave Loggins. Both Stevenson and Loggins released the song in 1973: Stevenson released it on his *Calabasas* album and Loggins released it as a single in the last quarter of that year. Loggins version reached #5 on the Billboard pop charts and topped the Billboard Easy Listening charts in 1974. For whatever reasons, Stevenson's rendition was lost in the airplay shuffle. He did however place another song on the national charts from the *Calabasas* album, "A Little Bit of Understanding" and had one final charted song, "Down to the Station," from his 1977 *Lost Feeling* album on Warner Brothers Records.

Tragically, Stevenson died in 1988 during open-heart surgery at a VA Hospital in Tennessee at the age of 38. His singular creativity, however, lived to capture another moment in pop-culture history. His signature song, "My Maria," was re-released in 1996 by the popular country music duo, Books & Dunn and enjoyed three weeks at the #1 position on the Billboard Country Singles chart. I distinctly remember first hearing the Brooks & Dunn version on AM radio while in El Paso in 1996. I was immediately taken by song because it sounded so much like the original. Indeed, I thought it was a re-release of Stevenson's original, but on further listening, I noticed a steel guitar that I knew was not included the 1973 version and notice the delicate vocal deviation from Stevenson's original. In my judgment, the Brooks & Dunn rendition was a wonderful compliment to Stevenson, his original arrangement, the power of the songwriting team of Stevenson and Daniel Moore, and the power of an exceptional song.

B.W. Stevenson - "Moon-Hill" Discography:

B.W. Stevenson (RCA, 1972)

Lead Free (RCA, 1972)

My Maria (RCA, 1973)

Calabasas (RCA, 1974)

We Be Sailin' (Warner Brothers, 1975)

Lost Feeling (Warner Brothers, 1977)

The Best of B.W. Stevenson (RCA, 1977)

Other **B.W. Stevenson** Releases (beyond his tenure with Moon Hill):⁴⁴⁷

Lifeline (MCA - Songbird, 1980)

Rainbow Down the Road (Amazing Records, 1990)

Very Best of B.W. Stevenson (RCA - "Collectables," 2000)

Lead Free / B.W. Stevenson (RCA - "Collectables," 2003)

My Maria / Calabasas (RCA - "Collectables," 2003)

We Be Sailin' / Lost Feeling (RCA - "Collectables," 2005)

Rusty Wier

Rusty Wier is an anomaly in the Austin music scene. Unlike many of the other popular acts of the period, he has always called Austin home. Wier was born Russell Allen Weir in Corpus Christi, Texas in 1944 and his family moved to Austin within weeks of his birth. Rusty was a prominent player in the rock scene in Austin during the later 1960s; he was active as a singing drummer for several popular regional acts that released successful single recordings with Austin's unique Sonobeat record label. In the early 1970s he stepped out from behind the drums, donned an acoustic guitar and created a productive career as a singer-songwriter with several prominent artists—Jerry Jeff Walker, Todd Snider, Chris LeDoux, John Hiatt and Barbara Mandrell—covering his songs. His most successful cover came in 1980 when Bonnie Raitt recorded his tune "Don't It Make You Wanna' Dance?" for the soundtrack album for the film *Urban Cowboy* starring John Travolta and Debra Winger. The album peaked at #1 on the Billboard Top Country Albums chart and went "double platinum" certifying over two million album sales.

Rusty was a tireless performer and through the years he shared the stage with Charlie Daniels Band, Marshall Tucker Band, The Outlaws, Ozark Mountain Daredevils, Amazing Rhythm Aces, Atlantic Rhythm Section, Pure Prairie League, Gatemouth

⁴⁴⁷ These albums and the songs listed in this discography are products that were rooted in the time period of Stevenson's tenure with Moon Hill. Certain titles appear on later composite albums, but the originals date back to Stevenson's "Moon Hill" days. The only albums that didn't have "Moon Hill" roots were *Lifeline* (MCA - Songbird, 1980) and *Rainbow Down the Road* (Amazing Records, 1990).

Brown, Willie Nelson, Johnny Paycheck, B. W. Stevenson, Waylon Jennings, Asleep at the Wheel, Jerry Jeff Walker, Commander Cody, Doug Kershaw, Ray Charles, Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Allman Brothers and George Strait. Even though he generally appeared as an opening act, with his powerful stage presence, his ability to connect with the audience and his exceptional back-up band, Wier would often dominate the concert. He developed and maintained an extremely loyal following who supported him through his two-year battle with cancer until his death in 2009 at age 65.

Rusty Wier - "Moon-Hill" Discography:

Stoned, Slow, Rugged (ABC Records, 1974)

Rusty Wier (20th Century Records, 1975)

Don't It Make You Wanna' Dance (20th Century Records, 1975)

Black Hat Saloon (Columbia Records, 1976)

Stacked Deck (Columbia Records, 1977)

Other **Rusty Wier** Releases:

Kum Bak Bar & Grill (Black Hat Records, 1987)

Are We There Yet? (Berto Productions, 1997)

I Stood Up (Rusty Wier Records, 2003)

Rusty Wier - Live at Poor David's (PDRD, 2004)

Rusty & Son - Live at Poor David's (PDRD, 2004)

Under My Hat (Icehouse, 2005)

Rusty Wier - Live from the Texas Theater (Hat Creek Records, 2005)

Steven Fromholz

Fromholz was born in Temple, Texas in 1945, and although his family moved extensively throughout his youth, he spent considerable time with his mother's family in the small town of Kopperl, northwest of Waco. After a brief run at the North Texas State (now North Texas University) where he befriended fellow musicians Michael Martin Murphey, Travis Holland, John Vandiver, and others, Fromholz joined the United States Navy in the late 1960s. He was stationed at Treasure Island in San Francisco and spent his off-duty hours playing the folk clubs of the Bay Area. It was during this period that Fromholz wrote "Texas Trilogy," the three-song set—"Daybreak," "Trainride," and

"Bosque County Romance"—that depict his life growing up in Kopperl, a small Texas town.⁴⁴⁸ After he left the navy, Fromholz established a fruitful career as a performing songwriter and through the years, his songs have been recorded by Willie Nelson, John Denver, Lyle Lovett, Hoyt Axton, Jerry Jeff Walker, Michael Martin Murphey, Rusty Wier, Terri Hendrix, Pat Green, Cory Morrow and others. His most notable "cover" success came in 1976 when Willie Nelson recorded "I'd Have to Be Crazy" which reached #11 on the Billboard US Country Singles chart.

Beyond his accomplishments as a songwriter, Fromholz enjoyed notable success on the stage and screen. In regional productions, Fromholz played Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, Gus Gilbert in Larry L. King's *The Night Hank Williams Died*, Milton Perry in *The Immigrant*, and Woody Guthrie in *Woody Guthrie's American Song*. Fromholz and theatrical producer Don Toner developed "Texas Trilogy" into a stage play and enjoyed successful runs in Austin and in Fromholz's native Bosque County, Texas, its setting. In another important connection to Moon Hill, Fromholz's most critically acclaimed leading stage role came when he played Jack Barlow in Tom White's play, *Willie the Shake*, produced by Jim Devlin at the Trans/Act Theatre in Austin in 1981. The stage production represented a new challenge for Fromholz . . . The extensive rehearsal regimen, the intense commitment to nightly performances, and unlike the recording studio or the movie set, there were no second takes! *Willie the Shake* was extremely well received by audiences and critics and according to playwright Tom White, "In Steven's development as a professional stage actor, *Willie the Shake* was seminal."⁴⁴⁹

During his tenure with Moon Hill, Fromholz secured a significant part in a major motion picture, *Outlaw Blues* (1977), starring Peter Fonda, Susan Saint James and James T. Callahan.⁴⁵⁰ The movie was reasonably successful and Fromholz, who often ad-libbed lines and on-screen actions, was well received. *Outlaw Blues* is the story of a Texas prison parolee, Bobby Ogden (Fonda), and his adventures with his music-business-savvy

⁴⁴⁸ Fromholz's classic work "Texas Trilogy" is addressed in greater detail in the XYZ section of this dissertation.

⁴⁴⁹ Tom White in an email exchange with Hillis on 2-24-2011.

⁴⁵⁰ *Outlaw Blues* (1977) Directed by Richard T. Heffron, written by Bill L. Norton and distributed by Warner Brothers.

lover, Tina Waters (Saint James), in trying to reclaim the publishing rights to his song "Outlaw Blues." Ogden had performed the tune for the country music star, Garland Dupree (Callahan), when Dupree played a concert for the inmates. Dupree stole the song, claimed authorship, recorded it, and "Outlaw Blues" became a major country hit. After his parole, Ogden goes in search of his song and confronts Dupree. A scuffle ensues, Dupree pulls a gun which discharges and that leaves the gun-toting country star injured. Ogden goes on the run and takes up with one of Dupree's backup singers, Tina Waters. Waters is aware of the circumstances surrounding the song and is well aware of Dupree's nefarious antics. When Ogden and Waters join forces, they realize they can make a fortune by using Ogden's new status as "outlaw" to their advantage. Waters hatches a witty plan, Ogden records "Outlaw Blues" and when it begins climbing the charts, Ogden is perceived as a folk hero. Fromholz played the recording engineer in league with Ogden and Waters.

Outlaw Blues was at best a mildly entertaining B-grade motion picture. The song "Outlaw Blues," was a substandard songwriting attempt by actor Peter Fonda and his vocal performance in the recording process only accentuated the shortcomings of his composition. It's difficult to imagine this song as the focal point of a proprietary battle much less as a national hit, but such is the license of the Hollywood screenwriter. Still, the film *Outlaw Blues* was a highly visible cultural product of the period and highlighted specific aspects of Austin's creative environment during the late 1970s. The film's "on-location" production schedule made for an exciting time in Austin as film crews moved through the city shooting in popular nightspots and familiar outdoor settings. Many local musicians and music business types landed bit parts in the film and the production was a precursor to countless Texas-based films in subsequent decades. Most importantly, *Outlaw Blues* was as a composite of contemporary musical trends and tropes. The theme for the movie draws on the success of a noted country music outlaw, Johnny Cash. Ten years before the fictional Garland Dupree appeared at the Texas prison facility in Huntsville, Cash recorded a live album at Folsom Prison, California in 1968.⁴⁵¹

Prisons, crimes, and guns were long-standing symbols in the country music genre and they all transferred seamlessly to the *Outlaw Blues* storyline. In addition to these

⁴⁵¹ *At Folsom Prison* (1968), Columbia Records, produced by Bob Johnston.

tried and true tropes, musical copyright issues drove the plot. The asset at the heart of the heart of the adventure wasn't a priceless diamond, a vast sum of money, or a cache of highly prized state secrets. It was a simple country song. The story drew a romantic line between the street-wise songwriter who navigated the currents of common sensibilities and the stereotype of the glitzy, cookie-cutter Nashville star focused on career enhancement. The plot set the stage for a showdown between the folk hero and the rhinestone cowboy. It glorifies the song as a prize worth fighting for and as a rallying symbol that highlights common-sense frontier justice. This simple country tune serves as an alternative tool to reify fair play that percolates beneath the echelons of music industry boardrooms.

The plot glorifies the "Outlaw Music" fad of the late 1970s exemplified by Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson, and of course Cash and their defiant stand against the Nashville hierarchy. It's important to mention, however, that the authenticity of the so-called "Outlaw Music" fad, much like "progressive country" moniker was largely a label generated and embraced by contemporary journalists and music critics. Nonetheless, the trends and tropes highlighted in the film underscored the national significance of the Austin scene of the period.

Fromholz went on to appear in other movie productions like *Positive ID*, a 1987 action-drama in which he co-starred with Stephanie Rascoe.⁴⁵² He continued to perform, record new songs on his own label, Felicity Records, and appear in stage productions through the 1990s, but his career took a dark turn shortly after the turn of the century. According to Angela Blair, Fromholz's older sister, business associate and webmaster, "[On] April 18, 2003, at the age of 58, Fromholz suffered a massive stroke, leaving him unable to walk, talk and erasing from his mind all the music he'd written and the ability to play guitar." He was called totally disabled by the medical community, which said his career was over and there was little hope of improvement. Never giving up, Fromholz

⁴⁵² *Positive ID* (1987), starred Stephanie Rascoe, John S. Davies, Fromholz, and Laura Lane. Directed by Andy Anderson and distributed by Universal, the film fared well in the independent film market. It was labeled a "psycho-drama" with a clever plot dealing with a rape victim (Rascoe) who adopts an alternative identity and infiltrates the darker side of the Dallas bar scene in search of the perpetrator. The film was well reviewed in *Variety Magazine*, "A fine mystery . . . Stephanie Rascoe is fascinating in the lead role . . ." and the *Los Angeles Times*, "As an example of what an independent film maker can accomplish outside the system, it may be a model."

spent the next four years learning to walk, talk, play guitar and even wrote some new tunes. [On] April 18, 2007—four years to the day after the stroke—he stood in the Texas State Capitol and was named Poet Laureate of Texas."⁴⁵³ This was an exceptional and well-deserved mark of distinction for Fromholz, and only the second time since the Texas Legislature dignified the position of Texas Poet Laureate in 1933 that a musician earned such an honor.⁴⁵⁴

Steven Fromholz - "Moon-Hill" Discography:

A Rumor In My Own Time (Capitol Records, 1976)

Frolicking In The Myth (Capitol Records, 1977)

Jus' Playin' Along (Lone Star Records/Polygram, 1978)

Other **Steven Fromholz** Releases:

Frummox: From Here to There (abc Probe Records, 1969)

Fromholz Live (Felicity Records, 1980)

Frummox II (Felicity Records, 1982)

Love Songs (Felicity Records, 1986)

Everybody's Goin' on the Road (Felicity Records, 1991)

The Old Fart in the Mirror (Tried & True Music, 1995)

Guest in your Heart (Felicity Records, 2001)

The Anthology 1969 - 1991 (Raven Records, 2001)

Live at Anderson Fair (Felicity Records, 2001)

Cowjazz (Felicity Records, 2003)

Denim/Traveler:

Denim was a popular four-piece Texas rock band with exceptional songwriting, recording, and performance skills that signed a management deal with Moon Hill in 1976. The company negotiated a recording contract with a CBS affiliate, Epic Records, and situated the group with legendary producer John Boylan. Denim released their

⁴⁵³ From the Steven Fromholz website: <http://www.stevenfromholz.com/>.

⁴⁵⁴ Singer-Songwriter Red Steagall was designated Texas Poet Laureate in 2006.

eponymous first album in early 1977.⁴⁵⁵ Later that year they appeared on the PBS program *Austin City Limits* with the popular act Firefall and shortly thereafter secured a new recording contract with ABC records. The record company executives at ABC reasoned that the group's name, Denim, connoted a country-music ensemble which didn't accurately represent the hard-driving rock ambiance of their new album, *Lost in the Late, Late Show*. The label insisted on a new name, "Traveler." This proved to be an ill-advised move. The group's loyal following didn't connect with the group's new identity, ABC records folded in 1978, three months after the release of *Lost in the Late, Late Show*, and the album floundered in the market without any support from the label. Despite these set backs, Denim continued as a creative force in the Austin music community for years to come as evidenced by their extended discography below.

Denim/Traveler Discography:

Denim (Epic Records, 1977)

Lost in the Late, Late Show (as "Traveler" ABC Records, 1978)

Other **Denim** Releases:

Indian Paintbrush (Grump Records, 1995)

Evolution (Grump Records, 1999)

The Fifth Sun (Grump Records, 2003)

Cool Blue Flame (Grump Records, 2008)

Moon Hill closed their doors and liquidated their corporate assets in 1979. According to publisher and playwright Tom White, "The bottom line to me is that Devlin had always said he wanted to quit if [Moon Hill] didn't make at least \$1 profit. I assume the company became unprofitable, so he shut 'er down as the primary stockholder . . . He didn't want to go into debt to try to keep it going."⁴⁵⁶ In 1979 I was no longer involved with the company. I had taken a position as Michael Martin Murphey's manager and had moved to his base of operations in Colorado. In truth, the education and experience I gained through my association with Moon Hill played a significant role in preparing me

⁴⁵⁵ John Boylan's exceptional track record as a producer of hit acts has been addressed in the Introduction of this dissertation.

⁴⁵⁶ This from an email exchange between Hillis and White on 2-15-2011.

for this position of responsibility in working with Murphey and playing a role in his professional development. For that I am grateful, but I was only one of many lives touched by the contributions of this small yet efficient company that thrived during the heyday of the so-called "progressive-country" boom of the era. As evidenced by the analysis above, Moon Hill had a hand in facilitating a number of enduring cultural products and important contributions to the Austin scene and the course of American popular music. Moon Hill landed an impressive number of recording contracts with the country's top companies for their management acts. They created a productive booking agency that supplemented touring engagements for their management clients and provided employment for an extended roster of aspiring musicians in the regional market. They created two successful publishing companies that administered the copyrights for their clients, arranged for their songs to be covered by other recording artists, and provided their writers with valuable guidance regarding the strategic significance of their publishing rights and the relevance of these rights to their long-term careers.⁴⁵⁷ Moon Hill provided accounting services to the company, to their management acts, to independent performers, to sound & staging companies, and to private individuals working in the music industry.

Through the experience and guidance of Jim Devlin, the strong learning curves and talents of the Moon Hill team, a work ethic and dedication beyond their years, and a stable of first-class musicians, this small company was one of the most productive art-business entities born of the Austin scene of the 1970s. From record releases to radio airplay, tour arrangements to contract negotiations, or from band bookings to searching for the next country hit, Moon Hill delivered a professional and efficient collection of services to their clients and the music community for almost a decade. They also played a small, yet significant role in the development of the fledgling PBS television program *Austin City Limits*.

⁴⁵⁷ Regarding the creation of "two successful publishing companies," Moon Hill established two separate publishing entities to accommodate the necessary affiliations with the two major performing rights organizations of the period, specifically, BMI (Broadcast Music, Incorporated) and ASCAP (the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers). Moon Hill's Black Coffee Music was affiliated with BMI and their Prophecy Music was affiliated with ASCAP. When the company dissolved, the directors sold Black Coffee and Prophecy to the Los Angeles based international concern, Bug Music.

Austin City Limits

For over thirty-five years *Austin City Limits* has succeeded by embracing challenges and taking chances. The initial challenge came in 1974 when the Board of Directors at KLRN,⁴⁵⁸ Austin's Public Broadcasting Station, asked their program director, Bill Arhos, to create a national program that could compete with popular PBS mainstays like *Sesame Street* and *Nova*. This was no small order and posed an unprecedented challenge for a small station beyond the pale of the programming production centers in New York, Boston, and Los Angeles. Nonetheless, Arhos had several powerful components working in his favor. He was a Public Television veteran—he had joined KLRN in the early 1960s after completing his graduate work at Rice University in Houston—and he had an affinity for music that he hoped to shape into an innovative television program. In 1974, the KLRN studios had completed a major refurbishing facilitated through the tireless efforts of the station's president and general manager, Robert F. Schenkkan. Schenkkan was an unparalleled advocate for educational television and public broadcasting and it was his vision to create a state-of-the-art audio-visual facility at UT to create world-class programming. Consequently, the 6th-floor studio complex at the Communications Building on the UT Campus housed the technological wherewithal to compete with any television production facility in America. This gave *Austin City Limits* a leg up in its formative years. Arhos had two exceptionally capable colleagues, producer Paul Bosner, a veteran of CBS television in New York and Emmy Award winning cameraman for the popular 1950s drama series *Studio One*, and director Bruce Scafe, veteran of an ABC network station in Dallas and the director of the live

⁴⁵⁸ KLRN was the name of the Austin PBS affiliate until it changed its call letters to KLRU in 1979: KLRN is the current PBS affiliate in San Antonio that began broadcasting in 1962. When KLRN opened for business, it was a PBS anomaly because it serviced two markets, San Antonio and Austin, with their broadcast transmitter located between the two cities just north of New Braunfels. The main studios for KLRN however—the site for television productions and stations operations—were located in Austin on the University of Texas campus with a satellite studio in San Antonio. In 1979 a new station, KLRU, was brought on line, thus giving the Austin station its public autonomy. Then, in 1987, the Southwest Texas Public Broadcasting Council, the parent organization for both stations, officially severed the electronic umbilical cord between its two stations by activating a new KLRN broadcast tower in San Antonio. At that time the Broadcasting Council established two separate governing boards: Austin's KLRU maintained its affiliation with the Southwest Texas Public Broadcasting Council and San Antonio's KLRN began operating under the umbrella of the Alamo Public Telecommunications Council.

music broadcast *The Session*, produced by the public television station at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. Scafe also had strong credentials as a professional jazz trumpet player, having played with industry notables like Maynard Ferguson and Les Elgart. Both Bosner and Scafe shared Arhos' programming vision and had the experience and technical skills to shape a progressive concept into a broadcast reality.

The KLRN team also enjoyed a unique geographic and aesthetic advantage: The KLRN studios in Austin were located between the major entertainment production centers of New York, Nashville, and Los Angeles, which made routing considerations for the filming of national touring acts more manageable. Finally, and most significantly, KLRN was situated at the epicenter of one of the most vibrant and creative music scenes in America . . . And it was a voice from that scene, the voice of a popular local radio station personality, that framed the challenge that ultimately kick-started the *ACL* creative process.

In the early 1970s, Joe Gracey was the music director of Austin's KOKE-FM, a distinctive radio station that blended the contemporary sounds of Nashville, the country-rock of the West Coast, and the diverse, yet country-flavored styles of local artists. Austin was blessed by having both an innovative radio station supporting their music and a bright and dedicated advocate like Gracey who led the cultural charge to take the Austin scene national. When he heard rumors about a television show featuring Austin acts that was going to be filmed at Channel 13, the PBS affiliate in Dallas, he threw down the "Austin gauntlet." In the column that he wrote for the *Austin American-Statesman*, "Rock Beat," he said:

The Austin hippie-country bands (Greezy Wheels, Balcones Fault, and Freda and the Firedogs) will be on a Channel 13 PBS broadcast to be taped in Dallas. Thus, the good word spreads. Why didn't Austin's own public station do it first? Austin is rumbling with excitement, talent, and bands, and is about to inject some of its burgeoning culture into the national awareness . . . The local media should be the first, not the last to hear the news.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁹ As quoted in *Austin City Limits: The Story behind Television's Most Popular Country Music Program*, by Clifford Endres, p. 13. Endres, Clifford. *Austin City Limits: The Story behind Television's Most Popular Country Music Program*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

Gracey's article reached Arhos' desk and judging by the events that unfolded in the ensuing months, it made a considerable impression. Another voice from the Austin scene also had a distinct influence on Arhos' ultimate decision to move forward with a contemporary, regionally based musical production. During this period of consideration in 1974 as the KLRN team explored possibilities, Arhos read Jan Reid's recently published book, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*. In his 1987 book, *Austin City Limits*, Clifford Endres insightfully noted that, "Being described in print, of course, conferred a sort of legitimacy on Austin's hybrid musical issue." Endres then described Arhos' reaction to Reid's book:

"You get an idea of how far behind the scene I was when you realize that it existed long enough for a book to be written and published about it," [Arhos] said. "It was obvious. What was the most visible cultural product of Austin? It'd be like ignoring a rhinoceros in your bathtub."⁴⁶⁰

After considering the various programming ideas on the table, and after considering the home-town input of Gracey and Reid, Arhos and company settled on showcasing Austin talent in an interactive studio setting where the lines between musician and audience were intentionally blurred to encourage a cross-pollination between these two characteristically segregated groups. The studio environment that the production team envisioned essentially reflected the unique live-music scene on the streets and stages of Austin. Scafe and Bosner were the primary architects of the notion of a "musician-audience" synthesis with respect to filming and production techniques and set design. Scafe, with his background as a professional musician and his empathy for capturing the spark of the live performance—a seminal and essential ingredient of his successful PBS show, *The Session*—envisioned a what-you-see-and-hear-is-what-you-get filming methodology. Bosner shared this view. He was not an advocate of what he described as "glitzy" production tricks like "split screens," "tricky zoom" shots, and "freeze" frames, and in a memo to the production staff during the design stages of the program, he laid out his vision:⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶⁰ Endres, p. 15.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

Difficult though it may be the essence that is to be recorded on tape is that magic that floats back and forth between musician and audience, an energy that permeates the atmosphere. The set-design will encompass a sculptural concept, i.e., the audience and playing area will be one unit. Audience and musicians will be part of the same space. The set will contain several levels and surfaces on which audience will sit, recline, stand, move (dance). Musicians will play and sing to the audience and to each other. There will be no need to establish a visual point of view (reference) as to where the camera is — it will be everywhere seeking out relationships, audience to musicians, musicians to each other, musicians to audience. The camera will work 360 degrees around the space occupied by audience and musicians. It is in this manner that we intend to capture the meaning, pleasure, the identification of the audience to this music.⁴⁶²

The challenge from Gracey, the observations of Reid, and Arhos' decision to move forward, presented the KLRN team with their first big gamble. If they built the set, assembled an extended production team, and brought the entertainers, would the people come; and as importantly, would the national audience forego the highly scripted format of *Hee-Haw* or the slick production of *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert* in favor of some Austin hometown sounds? Arhos believed that there was a considerable audience to be captured and to that end he planned for two pilot shows in November 1974. The first featured Austin-based B.W. Stevenson whose 1973 national hit, "My Maria," was fresh in the public memory. Arhos hoped that B.W.'s fame would translate into a full house, but with no advertising budget and a limited staff, it was hard getting the word out. The crowd that night was small and the synergy of the band-audience relationship fell short of critical mass. But Arhos had an ace in the hole for the second pilot—a Central-Texas native who had returned home after an extended tour of duty in Nashville.

The night after B.W.'s performance, Willie Nelson showed up at Studio 6A with his extended musical family and several acres of loyal fans. The evening clicked all the way around. Arhos, Bosner, Scafe and their young production crew successfully captured the supercharged energy between Willie, his band, and the audience. Willie loved the show. For many years he had harbored reservations about television appearances as a medium for his music, but when he viewed the footage after the taping, he complimented the production team and pledged his support for "whatever happened next."

⁴⁶² Ibid, p. 16.

The new Willie Nelson pilot captured the common vision of the KLRN production team and they soon agreed on a name, *Austin City Limits*. The next major challenge was selling the program to the PBS Network. What unfolded was a multi-step process. First, Arhos took the one-hour show to a PBS programming conference where station executives decided which shows would be used in their 1975 national membership drive. Arhos successfully placed the pilot with thirty-four PBS affiliates and it proved to be one of the most popular and productive programs in the fundraiser. In the markets where the show aired, pledge calls were up, contributions were up, and Willie Nelson, *Austin City Limits*, and KLRN were now on the Public Broadcasting radar screen.

The next step required making a large splash with the Station Programming Cooperative. The SPC was an organization created for those PBS stations that wanted to feature programs produced by their fellow affiliates. Such in-house productions included PBS mainstays like *Sesame Street*, *Nova*, *Soundstage*, and *Bill Moyers' Journal*. To make a ripple in this established programming pool, Arhos realized that he would have to pull out all the stops. But before he reached full stride, he hit a bureaucratic speed bump. The SPC required that program presentations submitted for consideration by participating stations could be no longer than ten minutes. This was an obvious set back because the one-hour pilot was specifically designed to depict the continuity of a live Willie show and to illustrate the combustible contact between the entertainer and the audience in an unfettered live environment. Editing the pilot down to a ten-minute "demo" was aesthetic blasphemy for Arhos, Bosner and Scafe. But, as Gary P. Nunn points out in his "London Homesick Blues," the song that would become the *ACL* theme for years to come, "When a Texan fancies to take his chances, chances will be taken," and Arhos was prepared to make another gamble and draw to an inside straight.

Arhos knew that there were approximately sixty-six independent stations affiliated with the SPC, so instead of waiting for the upcoming conference where the ten-minute samplers would be presented, he took the initiative of producing twenty-two high-quality video copies of the entire Willie Nelson pilot. He then sent them out to twenty-two of his trusted colleagues in the SPC network and requested that they view them and send them to twenty-two more stations who would in turn send them out to the last group of twenty-two thus covering the sixty-six SPC participant list. Arhos included video

dubs, the forwarding addresses and even the postage and envelopes necessary to return the tapes to KLRN. Interestingly, not a single tape was returned.

The final step, having alerted the SPC affiliates to the unique Willie Nelson pilot, was selling the program to the SPC, but at their conference, Arhos' *ACL* proposal failed to get the votes needed to launch the new series. Despite the success of the Willie pilot, there seemed to be a certain "highbrow-lowbrow" dichotomy in the contemporary PBS mindset. Evidently, many station representatives didn't think that this raw rendition of country music was appropriate for prime-time public television. As the conference wound down however, PBS offered the independent program producers who had not received the necessary votes a "Hail-Mary" caveat: If a program could garner the support of five independent stations then the network would support it. Arhos went to work, lined up four stations and with only minutes left before the PBS deadline, he secured number five with the support of KQED-TV in San Francisco. For at least the first year, *Austin City Limits* would go into production and enjoy a presence, albeit limited, in the PBS family of stations.

In addition to lobbying Arhos and company regarding the efficacy of producing an Austin-based music program for the Public Television Service, Joe Gracey played a seminal role in creating the initial series of *Austin City Limits*. In 2004 I was the historical curator for an exhibition celebrating the 30-year anniversary of *ACL* for the New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music, a Smithsonian Affiliate, entitled, "Austin City Limits - Making Music - Making History." In that capacity, on November 23, 2004, I interviewed Joe Gracey regarding his role during the start-up phase of the program. What follows is Gracey's comments from the interview. The comments were included in the narrative section of the exhibition that I titled "Joe Gracey Throws Down the Gauntlet."⁴⁶³

My small contribution to *Austin City Limits* began when I was a disk jockey at the first Progressive Country/Americana radio station in the United States, KOKE-FM, here in Austin. I was also the Rock Music

⁴⁶³ In 1978 Gracey discovered he had throat cancer and had surgery to remove his larynx. Consequently he's been communicating in writing since his unfortunate illness and surgery. I emailed Joe with my questions, he sent back an extended response, which I edited into this current form.

Columnist for the *Austin American Statesman*, where John Bustin was my editor. Several Austin Progressive Country bands, Freda and the Firedogs, which was Marcia Ball's band, Greezy Wheels, and I believe Michael Murphey, had gone up to Dallas to appear on a music special that the PBS affiliate was doing up there. This lit a fire under me, which wasn't hard to do back in those days, and I wrote a column decrying the fact that the Austin Music Scene was getting more respect from a Dallas PBS station than it was from our own media outlets. I asked, "Why didn't KLRN do a show featuring the burgeoning Austin music scene?"

Bill Arhos was the program director at KLRN and I think he had been mulling over an idea for some sort of musical show already, so when I threw down this gauntlet in the *Statesman*, I believe it helped galvanize him into action. He approached Willie Nelson and they shot a pilot for the show that they then used to sell the concept at the PBS programming convention. They were successful and they gave Arhos the OK to produce a full 13-week season of hour-long musical shows featuring Austin and Texas music.

Arhos then realized that he might need some guidance on who to book on the show. I guess he decided that since I thought I was so damn smart, he'd just give me a call and see if I wanted to be his Talent Coordinator! I jumped all over this. First of all, my heart was in. I had long felt that I had a personal mission to preserve Texas culture before it was homogenized away in a wash of bad TV and radio. Also, it was nice money at the time. DJ's in those days made pitiful salaries, and this was a welcomed boost for a struggling "advocate of the arts!" I went out and bought a briefcase and strutted around town looking totally stupid, thinking about who I would book on the show. (It only took me about a week to throw the briefcase away. I felt much better and immediately began to think much more clearly.)

Arhos had several acts he wanted like Willie and Michael Murphey,⁴⁶⁴ all of whom I agreed with. I added Doug Sahm, which to me was a no-brainer and a complete necessity. Also, during that time, I had been writing features for a little rag called "Picking Up the Tempo," and I'd done a story about hooking up Flaco Jimenez with Ry Cooder to do Ry's next record, *Chicken Skin Music*. Booking them on the show was a natural. I had also written a story about Clifton Chenier, who was not only a really big act in Houston and the Golden Triangle area but also an icon of the Zydeco tradition, so I booked him. He kind of kicked about the performance fee, which was basically union scale, but I convinced him that the show would be a great career move for him, which proved to be

⁴⁶⁴ Although Willie Nelson made the pilot, he did not appear in the first ACL series. He appeared with Tracy Nelson in Season Two. Michael Murphey appeared in the kick-off show for Season Three. Because of scheduling conflicts, career choices, or a number of other logistical challenges, these acts that Joe mentions could not appear in the first season, but he got commitments for them to appear at a later date. It's not uncommon to book acts well in advance for a live performance or particularly a television appearance.

the case.

I really wanted to reunite Bob Wills' Texas Playboys, which I began work on, not realizing that Wills' widow had forbidden any Bob Wills band reunions. Being blissfully ignorant however, I pressed on with as many of the original Texas Playboys from the 30s through the 60s that I could find. The reunion band included Leon McCauliffe, Sleepy Johnson, Johnny Gimble, Jessie Ashlock, Leon Rausch, Smokey Dacus, Tommy Allsup, and several other Playboy veterans. The only way I could afford to get them all down to Austin for the television show was to promote a "commercial" gig for them at the Broken Spoke.⁴⁶⁵ Bobby Earl Smith⁴⁶⁶ along with the owner of the Spoke, James White, helped me put it all together. A well-known Austin graphic artist, Michael Priest, did a now-legendary concert poster for the show. James [White] agreed to donate every penny from the door receipts to the Playboys to beef-up their *ACL* fee and send the guys home with a little extra money in their pockets. I ended up holding the bag on a bunch of the expenses, but I honestly didn't care because I felt so proud of the reunion. I thought it was one of the most significant things I had ever done in the music business: With the help of Bobby Earl, James White, Bill Arhos, and the folks at *ACL*, I was able to bring together the Texas Playboys for a second career, a career where they received the national recognition they deserved, not only from the long-time fans of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, but from a whole new generation of fans who saw, first hand, what brilliant music they could make. Even Mrs. Wills gave her blessing to the project after she saw that it was done in a respectful and honest way.

There were a few acts that Paul Bosner, the show's first producer, insisted on booking that I disagreed with, but that came with the creative territory. I did the best I could to get what I considered to be the "roots" acts and the soulful acts on the show while I still had the power to do so. I still feel a great sense of accomplishment and pride in the acts I was able to feature. I feel strongly that those artists benefited from their exposure on the program and I know the program benefited as well. Those early tapes are now very valuable in terms of their historic and cultural importance, and chronicling the great music of Texas during that period was, after all, my original goal. Some of the artists that I'd lobbied hard for but didn't get, like Ernest Tubb, Lightnin' Hopkins, George Jones, and Waylon Jennings would eventually appear on the show, much to my joy.

The greatest reward for me came the day when I got to see my wife, singer-songwriter Kimmie Rhodes, and my son Gabe Rhodes, appear together on *Austin City Limits* many years later. It was like bathing in pure happiness to see the program that I had a small part in creating

⁴⁶⁵ Here a word about the Broken Spoke and its significance as *the* venerable country music venue in Austin and the scene of a number of Bob Wills performances in the past. Still today, the Broken Spoke is a nightclub that represents the confluence of cultures in Austin.

⁴⁶⁶ Here a word about Bobby Earl and his significance as a fine guitar player, an early icon in the Austin music scene with Freda and the Firedogs, and a valued friend and counselor.

playing host to the two people that I love and believe in above all others.
What could be better than that?

Joe Gracey's extremely humble assessment of his contributions to the creation of *Austin City Limits* highlights several aspects of the television program, the Austin music scene, and their interconnection that are essential to this study. According to Gracey, he "had a personal mission to preserve Texas musical culture before it was homogenized away in a wash of bad TV and radio." Gracey's mission coupled with his admirable knowledge of Texas music history helped define a "program ethos" that would strongly influence the talent selection and the aesthetic fabric of the broadcast for many years to come. Beyond the walls of a few liberal arts colleges in Texas and around the country that offered programs and/or courses tucked away in English and folklore departments, and beyond the efforts independent scholars and Texas roots-music practitioners, there were few academic-oriented programs that touted the cultural significance and ethnically diverse nature of Texas music history. Similarly, beyond the contributions of writers and researchers like John and Alan Lomax, Bill Malone, and Archie Green there was a scarcity of extant texts. There were no popular television series or syndicated radio programs that addressed the impact of Texas folk, blues and imported European music genres on the development of Texan or American popular musics. Gracey's 1974 "back-to-the-roots" vision for the new KLRN production and his work in arranging the talent for the first season was a noteworthy milestone. It was a milestone in the evolution of live music television broadcasting and operated as a tutorial for Texas music history by bringing high-quality, authentic audio-visual representations into the living rooms of countless Texans and PBS viewers nationwide. Obviously the format of program was not instructional—there was no attempt to lecture or inform the audience in a pedagogic sense. Still, the opportunity to experience the sights and sounds of these various genres and styles was in itself an extremely educational format. *Austin City Limits* was one of the most powerful international messengers for the power and scope of the Austin scene and sparked a demand for more sophisticated analysis and course study at the college

level. The talent schedules for the first two Seasons of *Austin City Limits* illustrate Gracey's cross-cultural vision and the diversity of Texas music in the mid-1970s:⁴⁶⁷

SEASON I - 1976

- 101 Asleep at the Wheel
The Texas Playboys
- 102 Rusty Wier
- 103 Clifton Chenier
Townes Van Zandt
- 104 Augie Meyers
Flaco Jimenez
- 105 Doug Sahm
- 106 Alvin Crow
- 107 Steve Fromholz
- 108 B.W. Stevenson
Bobby Bridger
- 109 Greezy Wheels
Wheatfield
- 110 Balcones Fault
- 111 Marcia Ball
- 112 The Charlie Daniels Band
- 113 Jerry Jeff Walker

SEASON 2 - 1977

- 201 Tracey Nelson
Willie Nelson
- 202 Gove
The Amazing Rhythm Aces
- 203 The Earl Scruggs Review
- 204 Rusty Wier
Jimmy Buffett
- 205 Delbert McClinton
Gatemouth Brown
- 206 Denim
Firefall
- 207 Steve Fromholz
Guy Clark
- 208 Kiwi
The Dirt Band
- 209 Alex Harvey
Larry Gatlin
- 210 Willis Alan Ramsey
Roy Buchanan

Eighteen acts appeared on Season 1. All of these performers, with the exception of Charlie Daniels who was based in Nashville, were Texas groups. The Texas Playboys came together for their reunion from different parts of the state, Clifton Chenier⁴⁶⁸ was located in the Golden Triangle area of southeast Texas, and Wheatfield was located Houston. The remaining acts were based in Austin. Of the nineteen performers booked for Season 2, eleven were Texas-based. The blend of in-state and out-of-state groups that began in Series 2 signified a trend that would continue through the years as the *ACL* team broadened their scope to attract high-visibility national acts to expand their share of the PBS viewing audience. Nonetheless, these first two seasons clearly illustrate a cross-

⁴⁶⁷ Although Joe Gracey only served as the talent coordinator for Season 1, several of the acts that he had worked to secure appeared on Season 2. I took over the booking responsibilities from Gracey for Season 2, and similarly, many of the acts that I secured appeared on later series.

⁴⁶⁸ Clifton Chenier (b. 1925 - d. 1987) was a Creole French-speaking native of Louisiana, but his music is strongly rooted in the Louisiana-Texas border region on the Gulf Coast. He had long ties to Austin: He was the first entertainer to play Antone's nightclub in 1975, he became a regular Austin visitor and his performance on Season 1 of *Austin City Limits* is credited as his "national breakout."

section of historic Texan genres, styles and multi-ethnic musical hybrids. The Texas Playboys, for example, were the quintessential western swing band generally credited with the creation of the genre in conjunction with bandleader, Bob Wills in the 1930s.⁴⁶⁹ Western swing is a unique Texas genre that essentially blends string-band orchestration—guitar, double bass, slide "lap steel" guitar and twin fiddles—with basic "big band" chord structures and melody lines. Asleep at the Wheel is the contemporary, nationally recognized, Austin-based band that has carried the western swing/Bob Wills torch since the early 1970s.

Another example of Gracey's "roots" approach is evidenced though his choice of Clifton Chenier and Flaco Jimenez. These two accordion virtuosos represent two distinct music strains unique to the Texas-Louisiana borderlands and the Texas Rio Grande Valley. Chenier was a zydeco artist who played the piano accordion as opposed to Flaco Jimenez, a conjunto artist who plays the button accordion. Zydeco is a derivative of French Creole music developed by rural blacks in southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas in the 19th century that featured the accordion and a washboard with a lively tempo and a lyrical focus on regional folk idioms. Conjunto is a derivative of the Texas-Mexico borderlands during the late 19th century strongly influenced by German and East European polkas featuring the button accordion, a bajo sexto—a lower register 12-string guitar with six double courses—bass and drums with a similar lyrical focus on regional folk idioms. Both entertainers are standard bearers for their respective ethnic genres and both play the accordion, an instrument developed in Europe. The accordion came to Chenier by way of the great port of New Orleans with its French, Spanish, and African-American ethnic influences and the Port of Houston with its flow of Central and Eastern European immigrants beginning in the middle 19th century. The accordion came to Jimenez through the European influx into Mexico that began in the early 16th-century via Veracruz and moved steadily north to the Rio Grande. This development was enhanced by the immigration of Czechs, Germans and other European immigrants north of the Rio

⁴⁶⁹ Although Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys are generally *credited* with the invention [[does "avant" mean this? I don't think so]] of Western Swing, most musicologists would agree that Milton Brown and his Musical Brownies are co-creators of the genre. Brown's presence in the public eye was compromised by his untimely death in 1936, but the group's musical contributions are undoubtedly on an equal footing with Wills and the Playboys.

Grande in Texas with their polkas and related musics during the 19th century. By featuring these two artists, Gracey illustrated the power that regional cultures have in shaping the ultimate musical product generated from similar instruments.

Another connection between the nascent *ACL* television program and the Austin music scene lies in the association of the city's live-performance venues and the video shoots for the series. As Gracey points out in his efforts to reunite the Texas Playboys for an appearance on *ACL*, "The only way I could afford to get them all down to Austin for the television show was to promote a 'commercial' gig for them at the Broken Spoke." Gracey needed additional financial support to entice the band to Austin because the pay scale offered by KLRN was well below the rates that many bands could command in the open market. The *ACL* team was operating on a small, fixed budget, and because the television program was broadcast to a national market, it was considered an interstate commercial enterprise whereby certain union regulations and related entertainment industry broadcast pay standards applied. The bottom line is that KLRN had to pay each incoming band union scale as it applied to national television broadcast appearances. For many young acts, union scale was a square deal, but for other more prominent national performers, it was well below their usual fees. Either way, it was a strain on an already meager production budget available to the developing program. In the case of Gracey "reuniting" the Texas Playboys, it was not only the challenge of offering the players a strong payday for a concert one night to offset the lower pay for the television shoot the next night; it was the challenge of pulling together senior musicians from all over the state that had not worked together as a group for years, *and*, as he soon discovered, winning the favor of Bob Wills' widow who owned the rights to the Texas Playboys' name. This implied travel expenses, rehearsals, cajoling, and related music-business and psychological legerdemain! This was no small task, but with the help of James White, owner of the Broken Spoke, who had hired Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys during the 1960s, and Bobby Earl Smith, an Austin attorney and established local musician well connected in the music scene, he pulled it off and quite literally made Texas music history. Further, the practice of arranging a lucrative commercial play date in conjunction with the union-scale film shoot was a "one-two" combination that served the program's talent roster well for years to come. This was a practice that, in all probability,

could not have happened anywhere else in the country. Austin's vibrant live-music market offered many opportunities for *ACL* acts to supplement their television union scale fees with a lucrative payday.

By 1974, when the *ACL* seed was initially planted, Austin was teeming with live-music venues and regional musical events. The Armadillo World Headquarters was in full swing as was Castle Creek (housed in the old Chequered Flag location), Soap Creek Saloon, the Broken Spoke, the Split Rail, several large "warehouse-style" country dance halls like the Silver Dollar on the city's outskirts, and a collection of venerable 19th- and early 20th-century dance halls and community social clubs within driving range of Austin that functioned on the weekend. The Kerrville Folk Festival and the Willie Nelson's 4th of July Picnics promised annual staying power, and independent concert promoters presented shows anywhere they could secure the necessary permits, square footage and electricity. Antone's opened in 1975 and throughout the period new clubs opened with the verve of a 21st-century Starbuck's rollout campaign. Many of the venues were ephemeral, but the volume of activity provided regional musicians with ample work opportunities. During the formative years of *ACL*, the live music scene was an essential component of Austin's aesthetic physiology. Consequently, the power of "place" played strongly into the success of *Austin City Limits* and the abundance of music venues served me well when I took over the booking for the second series of the program.

My involvement with *Austin City Limits* was a product of my association with Moon Hill Management. As mentioned previously, the initial pilot program featured B.W. Stevenson, who was an exclusive Moon Hill act. Although his performance was not used as the pilot—it was eclipsed by the strong and loyal following that Willie Nelson drew on the second night of filming—Stevenson was recognized at the time as a top national contender because of the success of his hit song, "My Maria." When Arhos and company wanted to expand their talent acquisitions for the second season, they contacted Moon Hill, which was one of the few hometown entities that operated with a track record in the national market. As the director of the booking department, the task came to me and I began working with Arhos and Howard Chalmers, the executive producer of the second series. Chalmers, who had previously been the director of development for KLRN was an experienced public relations professional and proved to

be extremely successful in generating positive publicity for the program and its prospects for a second season. It was Arhos' Spartan-like tenacity however in securing funding and support from the extended PBS family that ultimately insured the production of a second *Austin City Limits* series. Writer Clifford Endres has provided an overview of my involvement with the second series:

Craig Hillis of Moon Hill Management, the booking agency for many of Austin's progressive country musicians, served as talent consultant for the second season. A musician himself, Hillis was a charter member of the Austin Interchangeable Band. He did much to educate the *ACL* staff on the distinction between mainstream and "outlaw" country music. Although the line-up continued to emphasize the exciting brand of music occurring in Austin, management determined to reach out for "national" talent as well. To station executives, national meant Nashville. To Hillis, Nashville meant the emerging "new wave" of musicians, a younger generation who were beginning to respond to the innovations emanating from Austin with a leaner, cleaner sound and more realistic lyrics.⁴⁷⁰

Retrospectively, Season 2 proved to be a defining series in the strategic development of the program. My contributions regarding talent selection played a role in this evolution, but the larger momentum was rooted in the power of the Austin scene, in many of its key musicians and supporters, and in the combined wherewithal of the *ACL* production team. Arranging a talent roster for the second series presented a singular set of challenges. In booking Season 1, Gracey had tapped 20 Texas acts. Even though Austin and the larger Texas market enjoyed an unparalleled inventory of talent, the regional possibilities for the second season were somewhat diminished. Undoubtedly, there were many Texas-based acts not used the first year that were prime candidates for the upcoming series, but the nature of my mission, at least as I perceived it, required that I explore talent options beyond Austin's city limits.

The overriding concern for the new series was to maintain and appreciably expand the national viewing audience. It was my job to secure the acts that would draw viewers to the program or entice them to abandon the dominant broadcast networks in favor of PBS. This suggested seeking out "high-brand" talent and most of the chart-toppers of 1975 and 1976 weren't necessarily compatible with the emerging *ACL* format.

⁴⁷⁰ Endres. p. 30.

In the country market acts like Merle Haggard, Tammy Wynette, Conway Twitty, George Jones, Tanya Tucker, Willie Nelson, and Waylon Jennings held sway, and in the pop market, groups like Bruce Springsteen, KC & The Sunshine Band, Captain & Tennille, The Eagles, and British acts like Queen, Paul McCartney & Wings, and Elton John were commanding the top chart positions. Beyond Willie Nelson, his fellow "Outlaw," Waylon Jennings, and possibly Merle Haggard, it was extremely difficult to rationalize including acts like Wynette, Twitty, Jones, and Tucker, all strongly associated with the Nashville establishment, as proponents of the "progressive country," or "roots" format as defined by Gracey in the successful initial series. Gracey had created a powerful and aesthetically worthy format and his contributions deserved careful consideration in shaping the second series. Regarding the powerful pop acts of the period, Springsteen was a New Jersey rock band and although he had played several shows at the Armadillo World Headquarters in 1974 to promote his expanding career and the release of his first album, *Born to Run*, tying Springsteen to the evolution of Texas music was a stretch; Captain & Tennille was a Southern California pop duo and even though they recorded a Willis Alan Ramsey tune, "Muskrat Love" that was a top-ten hit in 1976, making an Austin connection was equally dubious; and the Eagles, another California act, had appreciable ties to Texas through their drummer and singing star, Don Henley, a Lone Star native, but this hugely successful ensemble was simply out of reach at the pinnacle of their popularity in the mid-1970s. Internationally popular groups like KC & The Sunshine Band and the British rockers sported public personas that were far removed from the Austin musical ethos. Certainly there were countless other top country and pop acts that might have contributed significantly to the early popularity of the Austin-based program, but the examples just mentioned speak for many. Further, even if certain "high-brand" acts considered a brief stop in their touring schedules for a video shoot in Austin, *ACL's* static pay scale was well below their compensation requirements. In weighing these variables, I felt that it would be quite a challenge to stay true to the aesthetic "Texas-based-roots-music" character of an embryonic television program boldly titled *Austin City Limits* while, at the same time, expanding the national viewing audience. It seemed that I needed to reconsider my perception of the show's talent guidelines.

After several meetings with Arhos and Chalmers, a booking plan began to take shape. Then, as now, I was a strong advocate for the Austin music scene. I felt that there was something very special percolating in the city's climate of creativity and I was determined to showcase as many quality Austin acts as possible. Still, I realized we needed new and additional firepower to expand the program's market share. To expand *ACL's* talent parameters, I developed the following rule of thumb to rationalize inviting entertainers who were not from Austin or from Texas: Prospective *ACL* acts must either have influenced the development of Austin music, been influenced by Austin music or the city's music scene, or have a viable connection with Austin, its music, and its musicians. I developed these ad hoc parameters to maintain a conduit to the local scene that was instrumental in the development of Season 1 while still allowing myself the elbow room to seek out new talent opportunities. The parameters allowed me to exercise my intuitions and opinions regarding new acts that were on their way up the charts or consider venerable performers who were trying expand their public persona by reaching out to a younger audience. An opportunity to test my "rule of thumb" surfaced with an opportunity to book the Earl Scruggs Review on *Austin City Limits*.

What did the foremost name in bluegrass banjo have to do with the *ACL* format? Bluegrass music was not particularly popular in Texas, and beyond the realm of loyal bluegrass fans, Scruggs was usually recognized nationally for his 1962 hit, "The Ballad of Jed Clampett," that was the theme song for *The Beverly Hillbillies* television program.⁴⁷¹ I reasoned that the Scruggs' connection to *ACL* was a product of his influential and innovative performance style for one of America's most treasured "homegrown" instruments. Scruggs perfected and popularized a three-finger picking technique for the five-string banjo that sampled blues, jazz and a collection of original riffs that came to be known as the "Scruggs style." Subsequent generations of banjo students went to school on Scruggs' classic instrumental, "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" with its fluid, syncopated delivery that stands as the gold standard for practitioners of the

⁴⁷¹ "The Ballad of Jed Clampett" was written by a CBS script and songwriter, Paul Henning and sung by "Country & Western" singer, Jerry Scoggins. The commercial verve and defining texture of the recording however, was provided by musicians Earl Scruggs and his partner, Lester Flatt. The song held the #1 spot on the country singles charts for three weeks in 1962 reached #44 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart that same year.

instrument. The rapidly evolving music milieu in Texas routinely embraced many different instruments not commonly identified with popular music recordings—piano accordions, button accordions, concertinas, mandolins, thirties and forties style lap steels or Hawaiian guitars, kalimbas (the African thumb piano), and related African percussion instruments—and the banjo was a popular component of this eclectic musical mix. Consequently, considering Scruggs' influence on the practical applications of the instrument, an influence that impacted countless Texas stringed-instrument players, I felt that an appearance by the Earl Scruggs Review would be a stylistic tutorial. Further, his inclusion would yield a documentary piece that captured the contributions of a true American musical innovator, a program that would appeal to a new *ACL* market, and make for an entertaining show. The *ACL* audio tracks recorded the 1976 filming were developed into an album, *Live from Austin City Limits*, that was released in 1977. The album, for which I wrote the liner notes, reached #49 on the Billboard Country Album charts that year and brought the *ACL* brand as well as the outstanding recording techniques of *ACL* audio engineer David Hough and his audio production team to a new national audience.

My rule of thumb also enabled me to exercise personal convictions and book bands that I believed were truly exceptional. These convictions may have been biased and steeped in favoritism, but looking back after thirty-five years, I'd like to think that the myopic views held by a young, often brash music-business "professional" were informed by more worthy sources, sources that had shaped my early professional sensibilities. Working with Murphey, Walker, Fromholz, and other exceptional songsmiths had tempered my early professional music tastes and shaped my indelible reverence for the song. When I surveyed the field of possibilities for future *ACL* bookings, I gravitated (either consciously or otherwise) to that which I knew—songwriters. I reasoned that presenting the author of a popular song could be as entertaining to a viewing audience as presenting the artist who had popularized that song. Throughout the twentieth century the listening public generally focused on the artist who performed the song rather than the songwriter. Such was the nature of the popular music business. In the rock 'n' roll world of the late 1960s for example, few Jimi Hendrix fans realized that his epic cut, "All Along the Watchtower," was actually his cover of a Bob Dylan song. In the early 1970s,

many Jerry Jeff Walker fans naturally equated songs like "L.A. Freeway," and "Desperados Waiting for a Train" with the revered composer of "Mr. Bojangles," when in fact they were Guy Clark compositions. And in a similar vein, few WWII era fans of Sammy Davis Jr. or George Burns realized that "Mr. Bojangles" was the creation of a hard-drinking, upstate New York kid who learned his craft in Greenwich Village, New Orleans and kicked around the country as a self-proclaimed "Gypsy Songman." *Austin City Limits*, with its live, intimate format that allowed performers to stretch out and present their music on their own terms was an unparalleled forum for the American songwriter. Consequently, given my learned "songwriter prejudices," Season 2 as well as residual bookings for Season 3 and future series featured songwriters who were often not as well known as the recording stars who popularized their material.⁴⁷² An example of this songwriter connection is Alex Harvey.

While working at Moon Hill during the mid-1970s, I befriended Harvey, a Nashville songwriter who periodically traveled through town to do shows, visit with local musicians, and spend time with friends Darrell and Edith Royal, both exceptional boosters for the Austin music scene and country-music songwriters. Harvey is best known for his songs "Delta Dawn," a defining hit for Tanya Tucker in 1972 and a number one hit by Helen Reddy in 1973, and "Rueben James," a popular release for Kenny Rogers, who recorded seventeen Alex Harvey songs.⁴⁷³ Our friendship took a predictably musical turn and I began accompanying him on solo appearances as well as joining him in jam sessions and "song-swaps," or as Coach Royal called them, "guitar pulls." Harvey invited me to Nashville to do some guitar work on an album he had in the works, and during that visit I met his manager, Don Light. Light was an established Nashville operative. He had been a drummer on the Grand Ole' Opry and the manager of *Billboard Magazine's* Nashville office before establishing Don Light Talent in 1965. In the early 1970s he branched into artist management and began working with Harvey, Jimmy Buffett, Delbert McClinton, and others. Shortly after meeting Light, I began

⁴⁷² Willie Nelson, a natural for Season 2, was already on board when I joined the *ACL* team, but other songwriters were added to the roster for Season 2 and for subsequent series like Jimmy Buffett, Guy Clark, Steven Fromholz, Michael Murphey, Steve Goodman, John Prine and John Hartford.

⁴⁷³ From the Alex Harvey Website: <http://www.deltadawn.org/?section=home>.

working with Arhos and Chalmers and Light became my main Nashville connection in seeking out talent possibilities for the second season and beyond. Light's help and guidance were invaluable assets in my efforts. He was not only an established Nashville figure, his focus on younger, breaking acts like Harvey, Buffett, and McClinton, all of whom had strong Texas ties, made for a talent selection that operated "outside-the-glitz & rhinestone-based box" generally associated with Nashville. I booked Alex Harvey on the strength of his songwriting and coupled him with Larry Gatlin, a Texas native and exceptional singer and songwriter, for a second series show. Gatlin's songs had been recorded by Dottie West, Elvis Presley, and other established recording stars, he had established a solo recording career in 1972 on Monument Records, and in 1976 his song "Broken Lady" topped the Country Singles Chart and earned him a Grammy Award. By the time the Larry Gatlin-Alex Harvey show aired in 1977, Gatlin was at the top of his game and the double-songwriter format proved to be fortuitous and enduring booking format for the program.

There are other *ACL* booking accounts that signify the convergence of the hometown and Texas scene with its amalgam of ethnic influences and the popular flow of the national entertainment industry beyond Austin's city limits. These examples deal with the coupling of national acts or acts that were breaking nationally with high-quality Austin acts that shared compatible musical styles. With the exception of the Earl Scruggs Review, all the Season 2 programs featured two acts. The PBS hierarchy sanctioned only ten shows rather than thirteen-shows as presented for Season 1. The budget was tight, and in an attempt to increase the viewing audience through talent diversity we elected to adopt a two-band format. To maintain an Austin spark in the bookings and to assist certain acts I felt strongly about, I tried to link aspiring Austin bands with acts of national consequence. This led to groupings like the Colorado-based Firefall riding the momentum of their 1976 charted single, "You are the Woman," with Austin-based Denim (admittedly one of my pet projects) who had recently released their debut album on Epic Records and who stylistically compatible with Firefall. Another double billing involved the Colorado-California genre-blending powerhouse, The Dirt Band, and an exceptional Austin trio, Kiwi, whose vocals and songwriting skills were superb and highly admired by their fellow musicians. I felt that The Dirt Band, more commonly known as the Nitty

Gritty Dirt Band, was an excellent addition to the roots-oriented *ACL* format in light of their 1970 top-ten cover of Jeff Jeff Walker's "Mr. Bojangles," (hence a strong connection to the Austin scene) and their landmark album, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, that presented a cross-section of quintessential American folk, traditional country and bluegrass idioms featuring special performances by Mother Maybelle Carter, Roy Acuff, Merle Travis, Jimmy Martin, and Earl Scruggs. The Dirt Band's unique release had reached the #4 slot on U.S. Country Album charts in 1972.

One of the greatest challenges during *ACL's* formative years was landing high-profile national acts. With respect to this challenge I'm not simply referring to entertainers who were enjoying strong chart positions, airplay success, and album sales; I'm referring to venerable figures in the industry who have been responsible for instigating noteworthy shifts in American popular music. In reviewing high-profile, "legacy acts," Chet Atkins stuck me as one of the most dynamic and influential figures on the stage, in the studio, on the nation's airwaves, and behind the desk at a major recording company. Atkins began his music career in the mid-1940s by accompanying fashionable singers and vocal groups on radio broadcasts. His finger-picking guitar style, initially patterned on Merle Travis' unique technique, displayed an unprecedented command of disparate genres ranging from the explosive "gypsy" musings of Django Reinhardt and the jazz masters of the earlier 20th century to the precise staccato styles of bluegrass players and the complex performances of classically trained guitarists. After extensive work with radio stations from the Rocky Mountains to the Eastern seaboard, he signed a solo recording contract with RCA in Nashville. He released several single recordings and although they were only marginally successful, his skills as a studio musician, arranger, and record producer came to be highly respected and in high demand. He took over the management of RCA's Nashville studios in the late 1950s, and in this capacity, he made an indelible mark on the evolution of country and pop music.

Atkin's early mark on this popular music revolution was linked to Elvis Presley's dramatic impact on the entertainment industry. Country music sales suffered in the new wave of rock 'n' roll and Atkins along with recording engineer Bob Ferguson and Decca record producer Owen Bradley responded by reconfiguring the methodology of recording in Nashville. These pioneers moved away from many of the stock country arrangements

reminiscent of hillbilly music. They dropped the mountain fiddle in favor of lush string arrangements, they added smooth background vocal groups like the Jordanaires that replaced the nasal twang of straight country vocalist, and the songs selected for recordings took a sophisticated turn moving toward Tin Pan Alley and away from Appalachia and the South. The record producer assumed a stronger position in the selection of material, in the arrangements, and in the choice of support players. As importantly, Atkins took to heart the advice of his recording engineer, Bill Porter, who introduced technological devices like advanced reverb effects, special microphones, and recording techniques that sought to capture the tonal integrity of individual instruments. Porter also placed a high priority on the acoustic authenticity of the instruments to accurately reflect their live sound and went to great lengths to "tune the room" through the use of sound baffles and instrument placement to enhance the studio's sonic purity. The result was a new strain of releases that appealed to a much larger traditional country audience as well as an expanded national audience as Nashville releases began crossing over to the pop music charts.

In 1968 Atkins became the vice president of RCA's country division and signed a new generation of artists including Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Bobby Bare, Dolly Parton, Connie Smith and John Hartford. Atkins' distinguished biography certainly qualified him under my rule of thumb as an artist that had "influenced the development of Austin music," and the decision to book him on the program was an effortless move. Coaxing Chet Atkins to Austin however, was much more difficult. I remember calling his office in Nashville . . . The initial response from his assistant was less than enthusiastic (to paraphrase), "You want Mr. Atkins to come to Austin, film an entire television program and pay him three-hundred bucks?" With only one series to our credit, a series that featured primarily regional talent, we had yet to sustain any "national media critical mass." I persisted, however, and once his Nashville team was able to research the series and the *ACL* team was able to accommodate certain requirements from the national musicians union, Chet Atkins agreed to participate. He appeared on Series 3 with his friend and mentor, fellow guitar virtuoso, Merle Travis. The efforts to book Chet Atkins were representative of other attempts to entice similar high-profile entertainers to appear on this promising, young program.

In a few short years, however, the trend reversed and a spot on *ACL* became a valuable opportunity for aspiring acts and a high-quality broadcast forum for established, world-class recording artists.

As Arhos and company continued to grapple in the bureaucratic trenches of PBS to sustain and expand *Austin City Limits* beyond the initial season, as they sought out alternative funding sources through corporate funding and grant opportunities, the Austin music scene helped shore up the burgeoning momentum of the program. After the airing of Season 2 in 1977, the series and the scene came together to create a synergistic media boost that moved *Austin City Limits* into a brighter national spotlight. Many of the artists identified with Austin or artists who had appeared on one of *ACL*'s first two seasons were making great strides in the national market. As Season 2 aired, the reunion of the original Texas Playboys had caught the attention of Western swing fans across the country and the group was ramping up for a second career. Jerry Jeff Walker's album *Viva Terlingua!* had been certified gold with sales in excess of 500,000 units and Firefall had another hit in 1977, "Just Remember I Love You," that spent two weeks at #1 on the pop charts. That same year Larry Gatlin's album *Love Is Just a Game* made it to #7 on the country charts, the Earl Scruggs Review's album *Live from Austin City Limits* had been released and with its success, *ACL*'s Studio 6A gained credibility as a credible sound stage for live recordings. Jimmy Buffet was on the verge of becoming one of the most popular brands in popular music. His 1974 single "Come Monday," from the album *Living & Dying in 3/4 Time*, had made a strong showing on the US Country and Pop Charts, but with the strength of his 1977 album release, *Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes*, that featured the hit single "Margaritaville," Buffett delivered the opening salvos of his multi-million-dollar international entertainment enterprise. One of the most noteworthy boosts to the Austin music scene and the television program, however, came from Willie Nelson, who was on the cusp of becoming a household name.

Season 2 began with a "Double Nelson" . . . Willie Nelson was joined by the powerful blues-rock singer Tracy Nelson.⁴⁷⁴ Willie and Tracy had recently collaborated

⁴⁷⁴ Wisconsin native Tracy Nelson made her initial mark in the music industry with her San Francisco band, "Mother Earth" and a hit song entitled "Down So Low." The original band included Austin natives John "Toad" Andrews and Powell St. John, both veteran's of the sixties Austin scene. Nelson spent considerable time in Austin, close to many of us during the

on a successful duet release, "After the Fire Is Gone," and shared sets for the first show of the new series. Rather than presenting their standard concert set, Willie and the band performed their recent album, *Red-Headed Stranger*. Beginning with the disc's opening song, "Time of the Preacher," they ran through the various titles uninterrupted as they were originally recorded. Although contemporary accounts touted this release as one of the most significant country albums of its day, it met with marked trepidation from Nelson's record label and the Nashville hierarchy. They were concerned that *Red-Headed Stranger* was a "concept" album—in this case an album of songs that told a story set in the Old West of lost love, revenge and redemption—and concept albums were untested territory in the country music industry. According to the industry "experts," these adventurous releases held little promise of generating hit singles. The Nashville establishment was also concerned that the album was recorded in a Dallas-area recording studio using Willie's band and not in Nashville with the comfortable compliment of session musicians, producers, and engineers. At bottom, they believe *Red-Headed Stranger* was an ill-advised effort with minimal chances for success. In hindsight, the conventional Nashville wisdom was wrong on all fronts. The album was a stunning success. It sold over two million units; it topped out at #1 on the US Country Album charts and reached #28 on the US Top (Popular) Album charts; it contained Willie's first #1 country hit, "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," and, in the opinion of many country music critics, it challenged the conventional notion of "country music" and suggested an alternative direction for the expanding genre.⁴⁷⁵ "Rolling Stone magazine," for example, "announced that the appearance of *The [sic] Red-Headed Stranger* called for a 'redefinition of the term country music.'"⁴⁷⁶

progressive country years. Her 1974 duet with Willie Nelson, "After the Fire Is Gone" was nominated for a Grammy Award. She went on to do record an album in 1990 with Austin singers Marcia Ball and Angela Strehli, *Dreams Come True*, and in 1998 she teamed up with Ball and blues singer Irma Thomas to record *Sing It*, which earned her a second Grammy Award nomination.

⁴⁷⁵ In 2002, *Red-Headed Stranger* was ranked #184 on *Rolling Stone's* list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. It was ranked #1 on CMT's *40 Greatest Albums in Country Music* in 2006. In 2010, the album was preserved into the National Recording Registry because the album was "culturally, historically, or aesthetically important, and/or informs or reflects life in the United States." From the website: (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Headed_Stranger#cite_note-0).

⁴⁷⁶ Endres, p. 30.

More relevant to this study, however, *Red-Headed Stranger* reified the convergence of tropes, styles, and attitudes that underscored the evolutionary ethos of the Austin music scene and its namesake television program. For the album, Willie created a cowboy protagonist set in a Western motif thus embracing a collection of symbols strongly associated with the Austin scene. He wrote a series of songs that provided the story line, and, as important, he sought out the songs of others, both young songwriters like Bill Callery ("Hands on the Wheel," written in 1974) and venerable songsmiths like Fred Rose ("Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," written in 1942). Willie fashioned an endearing tale of emotional challenge, betrayal, and resolution beyond the staid parameters of conventional mores into the gray shades of a romanticized underworld. The story casts the protagonist as the prevailing figure and as such, it echoed the theme of morality plays through the ages. The primary strength of the work lies not in the story but in the convincing methodology of the storyteller and his artful application of the emotional energy inherent in the songs. The format for *Red-Headed Stranger* also echoed the historical development of the art song with its enduring blend of poetry, message, and music. Willie essentially brought together a collection of country-flavored art songs into a cohesive audio storyboard. Once assembled, he recorded the songs live using his stage band moving briskly from one tune to the next without cumbersome overdubs or multiple takes making for an extremely efficient and time-effective final mix supervised by Willie and his players. This technique was in keeping with the fashionable vogue of authenticity embraced by Austin musicians and the production team at *Austin City Limits*. The net result was a quintessential period piece that reflected the aspirations and values of an entire music community and the modus operandi of a progressive television production that was breaking into the national market. *Red-Headed Stranger* as a record album and as a major event in the flow of American popular music exemplified the power of the song. The fortuitous timing of Willie taking the lead slot for Season 2 coupled with his meteoric ascension in national notoriety genuinely enhanced *ACL's* momentum. And as the new series aired in an expanded market, other contributing factors augmented the program's chances for sustained success.

Developments on the Austin home front also added to the growing impetus of the program. As previously mentioned, many of the acts who had appeared on Seasons 1 and

2 were making appreciable strides on the national stage. Locally, the filming sessions in Studio 6A were morphing into high-profile events. As regional viewers began to see the performers they had been following for years in Texas honky-tonks, clubs, and concert halls on television in a first-class presentation; as they saw these familiar acts appearing with nationally established performers; and as they began to see friends and acquaintances and sometimes themselves on the small silver screen, they took note. Maybe this local show wasn't so local after all . . . Maybe it had some staying power! This mystique and credibility was fortified by the appearance of Texas icons like Coach Darrel K. Royal and other high-profile personalities in the audience. It seemed like something big was bubbling, something embellished with an accessible music-business excitement and glitz as if some sort of international entertainment event horizon was unfolding on the northwest corner of the UT campus. The *ACL* tapings became "go-to-must-see" affairs. Students, professionals, musicians and multi-generational fans began lining up well in advance for ticket giveaways. Regional and national sponsors began to notice and KLRU began fielding calls from well-heeled potential underwriters inquiring about well-heeled access. Beer companies offered gratis refreshments, tickets became prized commodities, and filming sessions became high-energy, over-attended social soirees. *Austin City Limits* rapidly evolved into a singular sub-scene imbedded in the heart of the popular Austin music scene and the *ACL* team did their part by shaping the vibrant essence of Austin's creative climate with a cross-section of notable fellow travelers from other acclaimed music centers into an international live-music showcase. And so it has remained for another 34 years.

Season 2 was a success. The national audience had increased significantly, and *ACL* in its second year would garner the Chicago Film Festival Award for Best Television Network Series. The second show of Season 2 featured a young artist, Gove Scrivenor, who I booked on the advice of my Nashville associate, Don Light, and coupled with the Amazing Rhythm Aces, who I booked on the strength of their 1975 chart-climbing single, "Third Rate Romance." The show was nominated for an Emmy Award.

As the *ACL* team tucked away Season 2 and consider their third season there were seismic shifts in the management and staff at KLRN. As reported by *ACL* historian, Clifford Endres,

While the series held its ground nationally, complications arose in Austin, where KLRN-TV suddenly found itself in the midst of political unrest and shifting lines of power. Top brass departed the station, new faces entered and sharp differences of opinion ensued as to how the show should be handled. Matters grew more confused when a new interpretation of official state regulations required the station to dissolve its long-standing connection with the University of Texas. No longer, it was declared, could students participate in the "internships" at KLRN-TV in exchange for academic credit; the station would become simply a rent-paying tenant of the university. Among other things, this meant the end of a cheap labor supply for *ACL*.⁴⁷⁷

Much to the benefit of the program and its longevity, Arhos remained, even as other key players of the *ACL* production team departed. "Luckily for Arhos," Endres reported, "serving as both *ACL* executive producer and KLRN vice-president of programming, he had tenaciousness and a degree of political savvy in his system; he kept his job."⁴⁷⁸ As a hired consultant, I was not in the loop on these developments. In fact, by 1978, I was no longer living in Austin. I had moved to Colorado to manage my friend and former boss, Michael Murphey, and although I spent considerable time traveling back to Austin on lingering business, my primary responsibilities rested in Colorado. In discussions with Arhos, it was agreed that I could handle the booking responsibilities from my new office outside of Denver. I had already established certain talent bookings for Season 3 and laid the groundwork for subsequent bookings and I was eager to continue the effort. The new station manager however felt that the talent responsibilities could be handled in-house and even though I had a contract with the station and enjoyed Arhos' support, I wasn't inclined to do battle with the incoming executive contingent and went about my business in Colorado.

Obviously, *Austin City Limits* has survived in the ensuing years and as they began production on their 37th season in 2011, they look back on a legacy of documenting the evolution of 20th-century American music unparalleled in television broadcast history.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 34.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

Terry Lickona, who assumed the role of producer in 1978, along with Arhos and his seasoned crew, many of whom endure as vital players on the 2011 *ACL* production team, moved forward through the years to assemble a stunning cross-section of American popular music.⁴⁷⁹ In 2002, *Austin City Limits* moved into new territory by entering into an agreement with Capital Sports & Entertainment (CSE), a powerful Austin-based event and media company that describes itself as follows:

We build and manage experiences, personalities, businesses and brands. Whether it's in sports, entertainment, cause marketing, brand development, or the management of businesses and partnerships, we're doing it. We are a company of big thinkers, dreaming up big ideas, and making them happen.⁴⁸⁰

The arrangement involved *Austin City Limits* lending their brand to a large, annual outdoor concert in Austin, featuring world-class talent. CSE was good on their word. "The Austin City Limits Festival," which premiered in 2002, has become one of the world's most successful annual outdoor festival events that will mark its 10th anniversary in 2011.⁴⁸¹ A year after the debut of the *ACL* Festival in 2003, President George W. Bush awarded the National Medal of Arts to the production staff of *Austin City Limits*. *ACL* is the only television show that has been honored with this award.⁴⁸²

In the early months of 2011, the *ACL* team began their move to a new production facility in downtown Austin and on February 26 they taped their first show in an expansive new venue custom built for their needs. But before vacating Studio 6A, their home of 35 years, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame acknowledged their superlative contributions to American popular culture by inducting *ACL* and their original production studio into their Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, Ohio. In 2010 the Rock and

⁴⁷⁹ The exhaustive nature of this list is not only significant through the extensive number of acts who have performed on *ACL* but for the diversity of such acts that touch on the grand majority of genres, styles and trends in 20th-century American music.

⁴⁸⁰ From the CSE website: <http://www.planetcse.com/who.asp>

⁴⁸¹ CSE has since separated into two companies, CSE and C3, a talent, artist management, and concert production company headed by Austin booking agent Charles Attal.

⁴⁸² President George W. Bush publicly announced the ten winners of the National Medal of Arts as chosen by the National Endowment for the Arts on November 12, 2003 and a ceremony was held that afternoon at the White House. Bill Arhos, founder and driving force behind the program, refused to attend, I would assume for political reasons. Interestingly, two other 2003 recipients, Buddy Guy and George Strait, were *ACL* alumni.

Roll Hall of Fame Foundation placed a plaque near the entrance to Studio 6A on the University of Texas Campus that proclaimed "Austin City Limits" as the "longest running music show in the history of American Television." The program continues its public outreach by making accessible over three decades of American music through contemporary media technology. With more than 400 shows in the *ACL* archives, the program partnered with Austin-based New West Records in 2004 to create the "Live From Austin, TX DVD and CD Series." The product line features over "50 acclaimed titles and multiple Gold- and Platinum-certified releases," an extremely successful venture that, as so and so has said, "continues to grow as one of the best music series in the world."⁴⁸³

On August 16, 2010 Dale Roe, the television critic for the *Austin American Statesman*, published the article "'Austin City Limits' announces Season 36 Broadcast schedule."⁴⁸⁴ A review of the acts that Lickona and company secured for the season suggests a thematic connection between the booking policies of the early years and the new booking format in the 21st century:

"Austin City Limits," KLRU's venerable music-on-TV program, has announced the first eight episodes of Season 36, the last to be filmed in the historic Studio 6A. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum designated the studio as an historic rock and roll landmark. Next year, the show moves to a new full-time music venue and production facility in downtown Austin.

Missing from the line-up are Cheap Trick, Monsters of Folk, Band of Horses, Sonic Youth, The National and The Black Keys — additional episodes will be announced soon. Here's the current schedule:

October 2, 2010 Jimmy Cliff
October 9, 2010 Spoon
October 16, 2010 Patty Griffin & Friends
October 23, 2010 Alejandro Escovedo/Trombone Shorty
October 30, 2010 Robert Earl Keen/Hayes Carll
November 6, 2010 Steve Martin/Sarah Jarosz
November 13, 2010 Rosanne Cash/Brandi Carlile

⁴⁸³ From the Austin City Limits Website: <http://www.acl dvd.com/>

⁴⁸⁴ From the Austin American Statesman's website, Austin360.blogs: http://www.austin360.com/blogs/content/shared-gen/blogs/austin/tvblog/entries/2010/08/16/austin_city_limits_announces_season_36_broadcast_schedule.html

November 20, 2010 John Legend & The Roots

The lineup for Season 36, as ultra-eclectic as it appears, still echoes many of the seminal themes inherent in *ACL*'s initial decade. The Jamaican ska and reggae of Jimmy Cliff is a logical extension of the early booking policies of *ACL* that sought out ethnically diverse musicians like Clifton Chenier, Flaco Jimenez, Taj Mahal (Season 4) and 1970s-era experimental bands like Balcones Fault (Season 1) and Beto y Los Fairlanes (Season 5) who sampled strongly from reggae, Latin and Caribbean idioms. The performances of Steve Martin, an entertainment icon and accomplished five-string banjo player, along with Sarah Jarosz, a multi-instrument bluegrass virtuoso, carries forward the early influence of the Earl Scruggs Review and fellow bluegrass legend, Ralph Stanley with his Clinch Mountain Boys, who appeared on Season 5. The Nashville influence continues with country artist Rosanne Cash who reflect the early bookings of honky tonk hero Ernest Tubb & The Texas Troubadours (Season 3), and hot country acts like Hank Williams Jr., Johnny Paycheck, Moe Bandy, and Mel Tillis, all of whom appeared on Season 5. The 21st-century progressive rock 'n' roll acts like Spoon, originally formed in Austin, John Legend, a multi-Grammy winner best known for his contemporary pop-rock compositions, and Cheap Trick, a popular rock act that initially caught the attention of national audiences in the mid-1970s follow the early rock themes presented by rock progenitors Carl Perkins and Ray Charles, who both appeared on Season 5.

One of the longest and strongest threads weaving through *ACL*'s booking tapestry is the collective contribution of the Austin-based singer-songwriters. By and large, this talented group signified the rhinoceros in Arhos' bathtub.⁴⁸⁵ Arhos' rhinoceros was complimented by a second fundamental component that underscored the program's early success. Specifically, the "richly diverse ethnic heritage of the Lone Star State" exemplified by "a remarkable array of rhythms, instruments, and musical styles that have blended here in unique ways and, in turn, have helped shape the music of the nation and

⁴⁸⁵ As I have tried to argue in this study, the singer-songwriters initiated a critical mass in Austin's early seventies scene. There were many other acts that couldn't be technically classified as singer-songwriter groups like Asleep at the Wheel, Balcones Fault, or Greezy Wheels, but these acts benefited significantly from the national stir created by acts like Nelson, Walker, Murphey, Stevenson and others.

the world."⁴⁸⁶ This was the unique musical heritage that Joe Gracey artfully assembled for the initial *ACL* season. The presence of Texas singer-songwriters coupled with songwriters from different parts of the country has been a constant theme throughout the program's history. In addition to scores of shows that presented individual writers and their bands, there's been a litany of songwriter specials featuring Texas writers, West Texas writers, Nashville writers, folk-oriented writers, rock-based songwriters, and many similar "song-fests" for over thirty years.

The reification of this steady trend can be seen in the work of Lyle Lovett, often considered the shining star of the generation of writers who followed the songwriters of the 1970s. Only Lyle Lovett rivals Willie Nelson in *ACL* appearances. He initially appeared on the program in 1984 when he sang backup vocals for Nanci Griffith and has been a regular attraction ever since. Lovett has also been a strong and steady advocate for the seventies' generation of singer-songwriters. In 1998 he released a double CD, *Step Inside This House*, as a tribute to this generation that he touts as mentors. With the exception of two traditional songs and one song by his friend and contemporary Robert Earl Keen, every song on this twenty-one title double CD was written by the talent Texas writers who debuted on the national stage during the 1970s—Steven Fromholz, Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Michael Murphey, Eric Taylor, Vince Bell, Walter Hyatt, Willis Alan Ramsey, and David Rodriguez. The title track, "Step Inside This House," was the first song Clark ever wrote but curiously, until Lovett included it in this release, Clark had never recorded it.⁴⁸⁷

The album was hugely successful. It peaked at #9 on U.S. *Billboard* Top Country Albums chart and #55 on the U.S. *Billboard* Top 200 chart, an admirable accomplishment particularly for a double-CD release, a format that is characteristically difficult to market and promote because of its higher price. In early 2000, Lovett assembled the various songwriters in Austin for a special *ACL* filming with Lyle and his band performing select titles from the album and the contributing songwriters playing a

⁴⁸⁶ Hartman, Gary: From the narrative on the back cover of the paperback version. Hartman's *The History of Texas Music* is the best source available for the history of ethnic and stylistic diversity inherent in Texas music.

⁴⁸⁷ Lovett writes in the liner notes to the album, "Guy Clark says 'Step Inside This House' was the first song he ever wrote: it had never been recorded. I learned it from Eric Taylor."

selection from their respective song catalogues. The edited program aired on May 20, 2000 and was one of the most popular episodes of ACL's 25th Season.⁴⁸⁸ The album and the subsequent television production signified a generational continuum of Texas singer-songwriters as well as the enduring power of the song on the *ACL* stage and in the main current of American popular music. Many of the same seminal songwriters provided the aesthetic underpinnings for an outdoor music festival in the Texas Hill Country that began in 1972. Interestingly, the Kerrville Folk Festival is one of the rare contemporary Texas music institutions that predates *Austin City Limits*.

The Kerrville Folk Festival

The Kerrville Folk Festival was the product of a man and the Austin music and media scene. The man, Rod Kennedy, was born in Buffalo New York in 1930. He sampled a full menu of musical influences growing up in the urban northeast and bouncing around "five different high schools in four states," dabbling in broadcast radio, singing in bands, and absorbing musical influences from radio broadcasts and live-music venues on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line before joining the United States Marine Corps in 1951.⁴⁸⁹ A flurry of military-service-related activities ensued—basic training in San Diego, soirees to Hollywood and Las Vegas where he kept a finger on the pulse of the entertainment industry before his assignment to the Panmunjon sector in Korea in 1952. After his discharge, Kennedy made a new start in Austin as a UT undergraduate in 1954 and in 1957 he launched a radio career as a broadcaster for KHFI-FM. He continued with other prominent Austin radio stations, segued into television in the middle 1960s, and enjoyed productive affiliations with several Austin broadcast networks. Throughout this period he maintained an active role in civic organizations, he promoted a wide variety of live-music events, and served as a key operative in the annual Austin Aqua Festival. In 1967 he indulged his personal musical preferences and opened the Chequered Flag, arguably the most influential folk-music venue in Austin music history.

⁴⁸⁸ Two writers were unable to attend: David Rodriguez currently lives in Europe and couldn't make it and Willis Alan Ramsey was unavailable at the time. Townes Van Zandt, one of Lovett's greatest inspirations, died on January 1, 1997.

⁴⁸⁹ Kennedy, Rod. *Music from the Heart: The Fifty-Year Chronicle of his Life in Music (with a Few Sidetrips!)*. (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1998). p. 2.

The significance of Kennedy's music-business lineage rests in his extended experience as an event promoter. According to Kennedy's account of the Kerrville Folk Festival published in the "Texas State Historical Association Handbook Online,"

The festivals at Kerrville were a direct outgrowth of the Austin Zilker Park KHFI-FM Summer Music festivals (1964–68), the Chequered Flag folk-music club on Lavaca Street in Austin (1967–70), and the eight Longhorn Jazz festivals (1966–73), as well as the "live" and recorded programs of Austin folk artists produced on KHFI-AM-FM-TV during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. Performers included Allen Damron, Willis Alan Ramsey, Jerry Jeff Walker, Michael (Martin) Murphey, Townes Van Zandt, Kenneth Threadgill, Carolyn Hester, Frummox (Steven Fromholz and Dan McCrimmon), Rusty Wier, Three Faces West (including Ray Wylie Hubbard), Bill and Bonnie Hearne, Mance Lipscomb, Bill Neely, and others. Many of them emerged as national recording artists identified with the "Austin Sound."⁴⁹⁰

A decade before the first Kerrville Folk Festival, Rod Kennedy was promoting high-profile musical events in Austin. Early promotions date back to 1962 when Kennedy produced shows for popular folk artists like Carolyn Hester at the ACT Playhouse in downtown Austin and the musical menu expanded geometrically in the ramp up to the Kerrville Folk Festival in 1972. Consider for example the *variety* of entertainers that Kennedy brought to Austin stages between 1962 and 1972 on the eve of the first Folk Festival:

Leon Prima's New Orleans All-Stars with Jay Barry on Trumpet • The Austin Symphony Orchestra with Ezra Rachlin Conducting • Mance Lipscomb (in 1964, well before the popular "Blues Renaissance" of the later 1960s) • Nina Simone • The Alamo City Jazz Band • The Ed Gurlach Orchestra from Houston • John Lomax Jr. • Miles Davis • Tom Paxton • The Newport Jazz All-Stars featuring Ruby Braff (cornet), Don Jones (bass), and Bud Freeman (sax) • Cornetist Bobby Hackett with the Pete Fountain Quartet • B.B. King • Jerry Lee Lewis • Dizzy Gillespie • Thelonius Monk • Austin-born trumpet master Kenny Dorham • Gary Burton vibist from the Stan Getz Quartet • Gordon Lightfoot • Jimmy Driftwood • Harry James • Peter Nero • Carlos Montoya • The Vienna State Opera Ballet • Anita Bryant • Charlie Byrd • Herbie Mann and his Quintet • Hugh Masekela⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ Kennedy, Rod. "Kerrville Folk Festival." From: Texas State Historical Association (Handbook Online): <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/xfk01>

⁴⁹¹ As depicted in Rod Kennedy's *Music from the Heart*.

Rod Kennedy was a hyperactive concert promoter in the decade leading up to the first Kerrville Folk Festival in 1972. He was the most well-rounded and experienced event operator of the era, a fact that has been largely overlooked by contemporary chroniclers of the Austin scene of the 1960s and early 1970s. This lack of recognition was a product of his eclectic event menu which is why I italicized the word "variety" in the preceding paragraph. The acts listed above were not mainstream "top-40" entertainers; they didn't occupy a position on the hierarchy of the "culturally cool" of the day and generally appealed to a contingent of mature and more cosmopolitan music and art aficionados. Kennedy didn't necessarily focus on shows for the "teen-to-twenties" pop market in Austin. When a regional rock promoter might bring a chart-topping pop group like Steppenwolf to Austin's Municipal Auditorium, Kennedy might be finalizing arrangements for a concert featuring Flamenco guitar virtuoso Carlos Montoya at the same venue later in the month or planning for a theatrical production of "Hair" on a local Austin stage. In this fashion, Kennedy was acutely immersed in the Austin music and cultural scene by bringing world-class talent to local audiences and highlighting the exceptional folk music that coalesced in the Capital City during the 1960s. Kennedy routinely engaged in folk music productions that featured popular regional artists like Carolyn Hester, Allen Damron, Bill Moss, and national personalities like Tom Paxton, John Lomax, Jr., Gordon Lightfoot, Jerry Jeff Walker, and classic American songster Jimmy Driftwood.⁴⁹² Rod Kennedy was the quintessential and notably diverse concert promoter during this period in Austin's musical evolution.

With the exception of the young rock 'n' roll scene that included the lucrative fraternity and sorority market, Kennedy operated in all theaters of Austin's event production business. He was an old-school, show-biz impresario with appreciable skills in the analog world of mass media. Kennedy knew the "per-inch" print-ad rates at the *Austin American Statesman*; he had the inside details for the most cost- and time-effective broadcast buys on regional radio and television stations; and he knew the best

⁴⁹² Jimmy Driftwood, born James Corbitt Morris (June 20, 1907 - July 12, 1998) was a prolific American folk music songwriter and musician, most famous for his songs "The Battle of New Orleans" and "Tennessee Stud." Driftwood wrote more than 6,000 folk songs, of which more than 300 were recorded by various musicians. From the Internet Wikipedia page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Driftwood

place to fabricate an inventory of silk-screened T-shirts for an upcoming event or the go-to printer for a square deal on 10,000 concert fliers. He was a veteran of the machinations required in working with state, county, and local government agencies in arranging permits, licenses, short-term municipal property leases, and parking arrangements, and was well versed in all the extant avenues for public service announcements and complimentary event listings. Like a good Marine, Kennedy lined up his priorities and considered his contingencies. This background served him well when he fielded a "life-changing" telephone call in late 1971 from the Texas governor's office. Kennedy describes the nature of this exchange below:

Maury Coats, who was the executive director of the new Texas Commission on the Arts and Humanities, called me to say that the Texas Tourist Development Agency was to stage a new Texas State Arts and Crafts Fair the following June [1972] in the Hill Country resort community of Kerrville. He told me that since the state-funded Texas Folklife Festival would be starting at San Antonio the following year [1973], the Kerrville arts and crafts event would not have music and the Folklife event would not have any arts and crafts. The rationale was that legislators would not be voting on funding for two separate events that would duplicate each other. Then he asked if I would consider, as part of the private sector, doing some kind of Texas music in the evenings to complement the fair. I told him I would take a look and call him back.

I discovered that Kerrville had a 1,200-seat auditorium and that it was available for the arts and crafts weekend, June 1-3, 1972. I put a hold on it until I could drive the 100 miles to Kerrville and look it over."

Evidently the Texas Commission on the Arts and Humanities had an arts and crafts fair framed and funded by the state legislature, the Commission had the support of the Texas Tourist Development Agency and the support of the Kerrville Community. The Texas Tourist Development Agency and Kerrville's business leaders wanted patrons and participants to stay over in the Kerrville resort community rather than approach the Arts and Crafts Fair as a day trip. They reasoned that an evening entertainment package would round out the entire program and significantly increase attendance.⁴⁹³ All the principals involved acknowledged that Kennedy was the ideal choice for the assignment.

Kennedy checked out the facility after the new year and spent a day in Kerrville and on January 15, 1972 he received word from the City of Kerrville that they would be

⁴⁹³ Discussion with Kennedy at the New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music, June 18, 2005.

interested in further discussions about a three-day concert series at the city's auditorium in early June. He then contacted his long-time associate and partner at the Chequered Flag, folksinger Allen Damron, and asked him to open each of the three proposed shows. Damron "agreed with enthusiasm" and Kennedy "started to compile a list of other possible performers for the event" that included "Michael Murphey, John Lomax, Jr., Carolyn Hester, Mance Lipscomb" and a "good Texas fiddler."⁴⁹⁴ During the first quarter of 1972 as Kennedy considered different options for the Kerrville production, he continued at full speed with other event productions he had in the pipeline—the opening of the Waco Civic Center with Texas-based swing bands and orchestras, an Austin concert to celebrate the fifth anniversary of KMFA-FM featuring banjo great Earl Scruggs in an eclectic co-billing with Hollywood's popular conductor Frank DeVol, and a February concert for the Austin Jaycees featuring iconic bandleader Harry James.⁴⁹⁵ It was a busy period for "Rod Kennedy Presents" but despite his active schedule he moved ahead on the summer show in Kerrville by making frequent trips to the Hill Country, by getting to know the town and its people, and by engaging in an exhaustive program of due diligence. Kennedy realized that he had to win over the public to insure a successful weekend concert series. He realized that Kerrville was a very traditionalist town with a large Veteran's Administration presence, a large population of retirees, and a conservative municipal hierarchy. Kerrville was a Norman Rockwell community one-hundred miles southwest of Austin:

I liked everyone I met and thought that their hearts were in the right place. Once they met me and learned of my goals and intentions, they were considerably less edgy about my bringing "sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll" to Kerrville.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Kennedy, pp. 120-121.

⁴⁹⁵ The significance of listing Kennedy's activities during the first quarter of 1972 is to illustrate the diverse and fast-paced nature of his promotional agenda. Kennedy was all over the map in the event production game engaging musical styles from bluegrass-based Earl Scruggs to swing band greats like Harry James and working with a full spectrum of civic and private organizations while operating a bohemian folk-music club in downtown Austin. I believe that Kennedy's "meta-eclectic" approach to event production had a great influence on the multi-faceted development of the Kerrville Folk Festival.

⁴⁹⁶ Kennedy, p. 123.

During this due diligence stage Kennedy "met with Bill Cozier, publisher of the *Kerrville Daily Times*, Tom Joyner, manager of KERV radio station, and Naomi Ingram, owner of the Del Norte Restaurant and the leader of Kerrville's newly organized 'Company's a-Comin' committee."⁴⁹⁷ He began building a "Kerrville Folk Festival contingent" one ally at a time and successfully "confirmed an agreement that Sears stores would sell our tickets state-wide."⁴⁹⁸ By the time of his ultimate meeting with the executive director of the Kerrville Chamber of Commerce, a representative from the Hill Country Arts Foundation, and officials from the City of Kerrville in mid-March, Kennedy was ready. As an added flourish for the meeting, Kennedy brought along Allen Damron who did a brief musical presentation at the meeting. Kennedy's due diligence coupled with Damron's "All-American" performance won over all concerned and the Kerrville Folk Festival went from the drawing board to the front page of the *Kerrville Daily Times*.

After his fateful and foundational meeting with his new-found Kerrville stakeholders in March, Kennedy continued with other concert productions he had in the works. One of these productions involved a concert series in four Texas cities over a five-day period, May 5 through May 9, with folk artist Peter Yarrow. Yarrow was making his solo debut after his long and successful career with Peter, Paul and Mary. Kennedy and Yarrow traveled together during the tour, they developed a strong friendship, and Yarrow expressed an interest in the Kerrville production that was just around the corner in June. In discussing the upcoming event, the famous folk singer suggested an idea that would develop into one of the festival's most productive and enduring programs. It was a concept patterned after a popular tradition at the Newport Folk Festival called the New Folk concert. During their Texas travels, Kennedy noticed a curious post-concert development. "Many nights after the concerts," Kennedy observed, "there were young songwriters waiting for us to listen to their songs, and Peter always took the time to listen."⁴⁹⁹ Kennedy went on to explain:

Following the third night of these impromptu listening sessions, Peter asked me if we had any system built into the Kerrville event for unknown songwriters. I responded that over half of the booked songwriters at

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 125.

Kerrville were only regional artists. Honing in more clearly, he said, "No, I mean unknown writers who have no advocates, who have no one to connect them to a larger audience." I told him we didn't.⁵⁰⁰

Kennedy was intrigued and excited about the New Folk concept. He immediately recognized the potential. The concept could enable him to create a home for many of the young artists who wanted to be involved in the festival yet didn't have the drawing power to warrant a spot on the main stage. The requests from such aspirants would rise in direct proportion to the expanded success of festival in the years to come and the New Folk format would inure to the benefit of all concerned. It would set up a valuable conduit between the established songwriters who judged the New Folk contests and the striving writers who were eager to present their work to an informed audience. New Folk would serve as a valuable talent incubator by developing potential new headliners and it would generate a steady stream of new songs that would enrich the humors that coursed the festival's circulatory system and insure a healthy and steady aesthetic growth curve.

When Kennedy returned to his office after the Peter Yarrow tour in May, he had one of the most prominent names in folk music as a headliner for upcoming festival as well as the format for the New Folk concert series. Because the New Folk format would be presented on the grounds of the Arts and Crafts Fair, he submitted the concept to their governing body. The organization readily welcomed the idea and Kennedy began arrangements for a daytime New Folk concert series on the Schreiner Institute campus in Kerrville that served as the Texas State Arts and Crafts Fair "fairgrounds." The practical utility of the New Folk series as a career opportunity point is addressed below in the discussion of cultural products generated through the Kerrville experience.

What began with what Kennedy called "a life-changing phone call" from the Texas governor's office in late 1971, opened on Thursday night June 1, 1972 in the Kerrville Municipal Auditorium to 800 expectant fans. All three evenings proceeded according to plan, they were well attended, and the opening concert featured several special guests when ex-President Lyndon Baines Johnson and Lady Bird accompanied by Darrell and Edith Royal arrived to enjoy the music. The following afternoon Peter Yarrow hosted "nearly two-dozen unknown writer-performers who had arrived on the

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

scene in response to [the festival's] well-publicized invitation to play the New Folk concerts."⁵⁰¹ In fact, several of the New Folk acts were not so "unknown" and included Bobby Bridger (who had just released his first album on RCA Records and who went on to be an integral contributor to the Kerrville Folk Festival by writing their enduring anthem "Heal in the Wisdom" adopted in 1979), Kurt Van Sickle, a popular protégé of southern songster Mance Lipscomb, and the Flatlanders—Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and Butch Hancock—who had appeared on Thursday night but returned for the New Folk show on Friday afternoon.

Thus began the Kerrville Folk Festival.⁵⁰² Kennedy brought the festival back to the downtown auditorium in 1973 with an expanded schedule of five concerts in three nights with new additions like Willie Nelson, B.W. Stevenson, and Jerry Jeff Walker. The success of the second year sparked a search for larger quarters and in December 1973 Kennedy closed on a sixty-acre parcel nine miles south of Kerrville on State Highway 16. The third annual festival debuted on the new "Quiet Valley Ranch" outdoor stage on May 23, 1974 with an expanded four-night format, extensive camping accommodations and an expanded talent roster. The Kerrville Folk Festival celebrated their 40th Anniversary on May 26 through June 12, 2011.

The Kerrville Folk Festival can be accurately depicted as an extension of Kennedy's production skills and his familiarity with the extensive inventory of Austin's aesthetic assets of the late 1950s through the 1960s. The acts and activities that Kennedy itemized in describing the aesthetic foundations of the folk festival—the Zilker Park Summer Music festivals (1964–68), the Chequered Flag (1967–70), eight Longhorn Jazz

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, p.130.

⁵⁰² The first three concerts, June 1, 2, and 3 at the Kerrville Municipal Auditorium featured Peter Yarrow, Allen Damron, Carolyn Hester, John Lomax, Jr., Old Time Fiddling Champion Dick Barrett, Michael Murphey, Bill & Bonnie Hearne, Steven Fromholz, Texas Fever (formerly Three Faces West) featuring Wayne Kidd, Rick Fowler and Ray Wylie Hubbard, Kenneth Threadgill, Segle Fry, The Flatlanders featuring Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, and Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Mance Lipscomb, Pianist Robert Shaw and prominent support musicians Travis Holland, and Dick Goodwin, professor of music at the University of Texas. The Saturday afternoon New Folk concert was a blues workshop with Mance Lipscomb, Robert Shaw and Carolyn Hester and the final function of the festival was a "folk song service based on the 'Rejoice' Folk Mass of the Episcopal Church" early on Sunday afternoon (Kennedy, p. 134). This non-denominational "Folk Mass" originally led by Reverend Charles Summers, Jr. who, not surprisingly was also a musician, has become a mainstay in the long line of Kerrville traditions.

festivals (1966–73), and the series of radio and television presentations on KHFI–AM–FM–TV during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s—were either Austin-based or intertwined in the aesthetic fabric of the Austin cultural scene. What began as a modest three-day schedule of weekend concerts in early June 1972 at Kerrville's 1,200-seat Municipal Auditorium has evolved into an eighteen-day festival that attracts over 30,000 annual patrons. The Kerrville Folk Festival reigns as one of the most noteworthy cultural scenes in America.

Every year the festival welcomes back scores dedicated staff volunteers and legions of perennial regulars who routinely arrange their "day-job" vacation schedules to insure their ability to attend.⁵⁰³ For these dedicated advocates commonly known as "Kerrverts," the festival is an annual pilgrimage to the Texas Hill Country to relax and reconnect with their particular festival clique to experience top-of-the-line singer songwriters on one of the festival's main stage, to play music around the campfires and swap songs with aspiring singer-songwriters and instrumentalists, and to network with music enthusiasts from around the world. For thousands of American music fans, musicians, and artisans it's the cultural highlight of the year. The annual Kerrville Folk Festival is an prototypical model of a music scene as described in Chapter 2, complete with ephemeral Bohemian identities, a unique jargon, a shared set of "scene mores," and a subset of cultural products. Doctors, lawyers, and state employees for example, periodically set aside stethoscopes, brief cases and nine-to-five schedules, dusted off their acoustic guitars and enjoyed extended weekends as reinvented music practitioners and aficionados at the Quite Valley Ranch. They adopted a unique jargon that identifies first-time attendees as "kerrvirgins" or designated hard-core fans who tough-out the entire

⁵⁰³ My perception regarding the significance of the Kerrville Folk Festival in the lives of festival regulars took an enlightening turn during a conversation with an old friend and fellow musician, Davis Ethridge. Ethridge is a carpenter by trade and one evening as he related his excitement about landing a new job with a high-end home remodeling company he said, "Yeah, I told [the new boss] about my Kerrville requirement and he was cool with that and even said that I might see him there!" Evidently, Kerrverts are very serious about their annual commitments to the festival. (From a casual conversation with Davis Ethridge on October 31, 1998 at our annual "Hot Dog, Chili, Kids & Costume Halloween Party" at our home in Austin.) Ethridge has a special mini-Airstream-style motor home that he hauls to the festival each year; he parks it at the same campsite he's maintained for several decades; and is common site around the evening campfires with his mandolin and his ornately decorated, rhinestone-studded, high-peaked plastic crown as the reigning "Korn-Dog King of Kerrville," a title he's maintained since shortly after the turn of the 21st-century.

two-plus-week festival as “kerrvivors.” “Kerrverts” adhere to unwritten procedures regarding the logistics of camping on the festival grounds—schedules for the campground showers, procedures to acquire fresh water, and courtesies relating to the territorial integrity of individual campsites—and are mindful of the customary protocols associated with song sharing and customs for back-up instrumentalists at the post-concert pickin' sessions around the night-time campfires. Cultural products include the merchandise and mementos from the designated performers—T-shirts, CDs, songbooks, photographs—and artifacts from the various vendors from hand-made musical instruments to collectable art treasures. Most significantly though, in terms of the grand aspects of the Texan and national music scene, the festival has provided a first-class showcase for new talent and new songs.

According to Kennedy, “by the twenty-second season of the folk festival in 1993 more than two dozen of its early ‘unknown’ performers had earned national recording contracts, including Lyle Lovett, Nanci Griffith, Hal Ketchum, David Wilcox, John Gorka, Tish Hinojosa, Darden Smith, Lucinda Williams, James McMurtry, Steve Earle, Robert Earl Keen Jr., Jon Ims, and the Flatlanders (including Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, and Jimmie Dale Gilmore).”⁵⁰⁴ The Kerrville imprimatur hardly guarantees a recording contract, but acts that have excelled in the New Folk category have usually fared well in their ongoing careers. A “win” at Kerrville demonstrates to an informed record company executive that this particular performing songwriter has successfully past the scrutiny of a credible group of judges and won over a seasoned audience. New Folk winners have essentially earned graduate degrees in songwriting. And the search for new talent continues. In 2011, Kerrville presented thirty-two new songwriters from all points of the American compass and various international outposts culled from over 800 entries in their “Grassy Hill New Folk Songwriting Contest.”⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ Kennedy, Rod. From his essay, “Kerrville Folk Festival” in *The Handbook of Texas Music*. Barkley, Roy; Barnett, Douglas E.; Bringham Cathy; Hartman, Gary; Monahan, Casey; Oliphant, Dave; Ward, George B. Eds. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), p. p.174.

⁵⁰⁵ According to the Festival's Website (<http://www.kerrville-music.com/newfolk.htm>) the details of this competition are as follows: The 2011 Grassy Hill Kerrville New Folk Competition will be held during the 40th Annual Kerrville Folk Festival on Saturday and Sunday, May 28 & 29, 2011. Out of 800 entries, thirty-two writer-performers will be invited to share their original songs. Six New Folk Winners will be selected from the thirty-two and will return on Sunday, June 5 to perform 20 minutes of their original songs and receive a \$250 Award from the Texas Folk Music

Through its forty-year history, Kerrville has focused on the song and the songwriter. In 1975 the principals of the festival created the Texas Folk Music Foundation that sponsors educational workshops, a songwriter's school, the Professional Development Program for Teachers, a harmonica workshop, a summer songwriting camp for teenagers and programs designed to preserve traditional art forms like country yodeling, mandolin playing, and bluegrass music. As Kennedy explains on the festival's website, "The festival places a strong emphasis on songwriting" and on promoting "emerging artists while giving [the] audience exposure to both new and recognized, seasoned talent."⁵⁰⁶

By all accounts and definitions, the annual Kerrville Folk Festival is a meta-music scene that has made enduring contributions to the evolution of Texas music and to the careers of countless aspiring musicians and songwriters. "Kerrville" began by harnessing the power of the song and the songwriter, by tapping the vision and skill of a talented production team, and by embracing the collective wisdom of an engaged and energetic Texas music community. Since its inception in 1972 the festival struggled through a childhood of financial insecurity, an adolescence of logistical challenges, identity crises, and an onslaught of literal and figurative storm clouds to ultimately emerge as a self-perpetuating critical mass of aesthetic energy and opportunity for new generations of creative musicians.

Bob Livingston's Cowboys and Indians

One of the most unique and far-reaching cultural products associated with the Austin music scene of the 1970s is Bob Livingston's stage production, "Cowboys and Indians." Livingston is an accomplished Austin musician and songwriter who shaped his professional experiences during the progressive-country era into a one-of-a-kind music-based program designed as a tool of international diplomacy. Since 1986 Livingston has toured extensively in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa as an emissary of the United States Department of State presenting "Cowboys and Indians." Although he

Foundation plus up to \$400 additional prize money. Other prizes may be also be added at a later date. In addition, each of the 32 finalists will be eligible for a scholarship to the 2011 Southwest Regional Folk Alliance Conference (October, 2011) in Austin.

⁵⁰⁶ <http://www.kerrville-music.com/>

playfully describes his work as an attempt "to achieve world peace through cowboy songs and yodeling,"⁵⁰⁷ his ambitious cultural exchange program has touched the lives of countless foreign nationals around the world by offering a refreshing aesthetic blend that highlights the commonalities of our music and our values with theirs. What follows is an analysis of Livingston's musical program, how it began and grew, and how it draws from many of the themes associated with the Austin scene of the 1970s. "Cowboys and Indians" is a testament to the practical and positive contribution that American music can offer to a deeply troubled world.

"Cowboys and Indians" is a unique construct for a number of reasons, many of which unfold in the narrative below, but it's important to first mention several seminal considerations about the program. The "Cowboys" in the title refers to the mythical American cowboy and its utility as a symbol of fair play, justice and compassion for both friends and adversaries. The "Indians" in Livingston's title refers to the "East Indians" of South Asia, the citizens of India and surrounding nation states. The program is "far-reaching" because Livingston has presented various renditions of "Cowboys and Indians" throughout India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, the Middle East and Africa. Through this eclectic collection of venues, Livingston has been successful in taking his message to outposts around the world that often fall beyond the pale of popular radio, television, and similar broadcast media. Finally, Livingston's program is strongly influenced by the themes and musical styles of the Austin scene during the 1970s, a scene that he played an important role in shaping. Livingston effectively blended his experience as a singer, songwriter, and performer with his international adventures as a multi-cultural participant observer to create a pragmatic component of international diplomacy.

There are countless cultural innovations and popular products recognized around the world as uniquely American. The United States has continually astounded and, from time to time, confounded the world with a disparate inventory of cultural products and innovations like the blues, the Big Mac, tailfins on Cadillacs, or the legacy of space travel. Things American are everywhere—at least everywhere a radio wave can reach a receiver or a satellite signal can find a television set—and one of the most ubiquitous Yankee exports is the mythical American cowboy. This romantic, rough and tumble

⁵⁰⁷ Livingston interview, April 10, 2001.

character embodies the perceived virtues and strengths of an entire society. Although historians generally agree that a significant segment of the cowboys working the great cattle drives of the late 1800s were Hispanic, African American, Asian, and even Native American, it's the English-speaking, square-jawed, white cowboy of the Marlboro cigarette commercials that typifies the mythical cowboy. The life and times of the cowboy have provided the templates for countless forms of popular entertainment: books, magazines, movies, and music in both the United States and abroad. Since the late 1800s popular cowboy culture has dominated American iconography and at the turn of the 21st century, the way of the American West remains popular worldwide. There are “cowboy clubs” all over Europe where wannabe cowpunchers get together for quick-draw contests and barbeque;⁵⁰⁸ Lucky Luke,⁵⁰⁹ a cartoon cowboy figure, is one of France’s most popular comic book characters; and country line dancing is all the rage in Japan.⁵¹⁰ American presidents have incorporated the cowboy image into their political identities: Ronald Reagan’s presidency was, to many historians, an extension of his role as a western hero, and Theodore Roosevelt’s presidential persona borrowed heavily from his experience as a Dakota cattle rancher.⁵¹¹ The cowboy image has become part of the lexicon of American foreign diplomacy. From Theodore Roosevelt’s foreign policy dictum, “walk softly and carry a big stick,” to John F. Kennedy’s “New Frontier,” from the derogatory campaign launched by eastern-block communists that dubbed President-elect Ronald Reagan as a “reckless cowboy” to the Texas “ranch” retreat of President George W. Bush, the cowboy trope has been a regular on the international stage for over a century. Foreign political initiatives have co-opted the cowboy image: In 1986, Polish

⁵⁰⁸ Krc interview, March 15, 2001. Fred Krc is a country performer based in Austin, Texas, who has traveled extensively in Europe with his musical group, "Freddie Steady and the Shakin' Apostles." Krc reports that a number of English, German, and Italian music venues have pattern themselves after the romantic saloon of the Wild West. See also, the "Willkommen in der Welt von Karl May" website. Karl May (1842 -1912) was a German writer of Wild West fiction who has had a profound effect on 20th century German popular culture. May, for all practical purposes, was to the late 19th and early 20th century European market what Beadle and Adams were to the American market during the same period with their famous "Dime Novels."

⁵⁰⁹ "Lucky Luke," a website: www.geocities.com/SouthBeach/Shores/5270/lucky-luke.htm.

⁵¹⁰ "Happy Country Dancin' . . . Country Dance in Japan," a website: www.country-dance.com/. Also of interest, "Macaroni Westerns . . . Spaghetti Westerns in Japan:" www.pscweb.com/macaroni/.

⁵¹¹ Roosevelt, Theodore, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966 p. 24.

artist, Tomasz Sarnecki, used Gary Cooper's image from the movie *High Noon* to symbolize the tenacity of the Solidarity movement and to mobilize the vote against the Communist government.⁵¹² Walter Prescott Webb exaggerated only slightly when he described the cowboy as, "the most unique and distinctive institution that America has produced."⁵¹³ A brief sketch of the historical cowboy however, reveals that America's "most unique and distinctive institution" is largely the progeny of the Lone Star State.

Like many things considered "uniquely American" or "uniquely Texan," the historical cowboy was the product of dissimilar cultures grinding together in the New World. The Spanish and the Moors herded cattle for centuries before the Conquistadors landed the longhorn steer in Vera Cruz, Mexico in the 1520s. These first longhorns were a scrawny-looking lot with wide, sinuous horns waving over thin bodies supported by long, bony legs. Despite appearances however, longhorns were a sturdy breed that adapted well to the arid plains of Mexico. Over the years the herds drifted north to the Rio Grande Valley where, in the early 19th century, Mexican ranchers bred them with the beefier bovines from the United States. The result was the hardier Texas longhorn commonly known today. After Texas gained independence in 1836, the Mexicans retreated south beyond the Rio Grande leaving millions of cattle in the vast Nueces Valley of South Texas. Those that were unbranded, the "mavericks," were considered public property, and, in this rustler's paradise, the great Texas cattle herds and the Texas cowboy were born.

The success of the cattle business depended on the rancher's ability to transport large herds to national markets or to railroad shipping destinations. Cattle worth three to four dollars a head in South Texas brought thirty to forty dollars a head in St. Louis and even more in Chicago and other booming urban centers in the north and northeast. Estimates in the mid-1860s put the number of cattle in the Nueces Valley at over four million.⁵¹⁴ To insure that supply met demand, vast herds had to be mobilized and that

⁵¹²Mulroy, Kevin ed., *Western Amerykanski Polish Poster Art & the Western*. Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999, p. 73.

⁵¹³ Webb, Walter Prescott, *The Great Plains*. Boston, Ginn and Company, 1931, p. 244.

⁵¹⁴ Franz, Joe B. and Choate, Julian Ernest Jr., *The American Cowboy the Myth & the Reality*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955, p. 27.

called for an army of cowboys. As these early drovers struck out from South Texas to points north, a "unique and distinctive" era of American history took root.⁵¹⁵

The life of the cowboy on the trail was by and large a Hobbsian existence: "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."⁵¹⁶ Cattle drives encountered the natural and man-made dangers commonly associated with the trans Mississippi frontier—windstorms, prairie fires, floods, droughts, Indian attacks, outlaws—yet despite the enduring legacy of the cowboy, his heyday as the steward of the cattle drive was incredibly short. It lasted little more than twenty years. Less than a decade after the first cattle drives of the mid-1860s conditions developed that all but guaranteed the end of the drover and the trails he rode. Ranchers and farmers began stringing the barbed wire that sectioned off the open range, railroad lines extended south offering ranchers access to northern markets, and governments, both state and local, began drawing legal lines across the range that denied easements to the great herds. Still, even as the sun set on the trail drives and the historical Texas cowboy, writers, photographers and artists of every ilk drew on the images from those dusty years to shape the mythological cowboy that would pique the public imagination for many years to come.

Since the 1930s, the evolution of country music has been intertwined with cowboy lore and the imagery of the American West. Only in the last twenty-five years has the term "country" overshadowed the older "country & western" moniker. Like so many American music genres, country music is an ever-evolving amalgam of influences. Transplanted folk music from the British Isles became America's hillbilly and bluegrass music; the Swiss yodel became the trademark of America's "first country singing star," Jimmy Rodgers;⁵¹⁷ African-American blues influenced the young country genre, and the big band sound provided the harmonic structure for western swing. Our concern here however, is the vastly popular singing cowboy whose songs told, and when necessary, reinvented the story of the great American West.

⁵¹⁵ Webb, *The Great Plains*, p. 244.

⁵¹⁶ Doyle, John P., *Lexicon Universal Encyclopedia*. New York: Lexicon Publications, Inc., 1983, p. 192.

⁵¹⁷ Malone, Bill C., *Country Music, U.S.A.* University of Texas Press, 1968, from the table of contents, the title to Malone's third chapter: "The First Country Singing Star: Jimmie Rodgers."

Unlike the rough and tumble, gun-toting cowboy, the singing cowboy pulled out his guitar rather than his hog-leg forty-four. This brand of Western hero, first made popular by native Texan Gene Autry and later by Tex Ritter and Roy Rogers, brought a gentler form of justice to an otherwise violent western hero genre.⁵¹⁸ The singing cowboy knew the ways of the Wild West; he could ride and rope with the best of them, but when the time came for a showdown, this brand of hero chose diplomacy, reason, and even humor to save the day. This is the cowboy of Bob Livingston's imagination; a cowboy more in the image of Will Rogers than Clint Eastwood; a romantic cowboy that makes positive contributions to people's lives . . . A cowboy ambassador of goodwill, or in the case of Livingston's early State Department travels in India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in a Stetson.

Livingston's "cowboy ambassadorship" began to take shape in Austin during the middle 1970s when he met his wife, Iris. Bob and Iris met in 1974 after a show at the Armadillo World Headquarters where he was playing a double bill with Michael Martin Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker. Since their early days together they have shared the same spiritual path and had have followed the teachings of an East Indian guru. Their common path has taken them back and forth between America and India numerous times through the years. On a 1986 trip to visit Iris and their two boys at an ashram in southern India, Livingston had an interesting encounter with a fellow American, Frank Block, a Fulbright Scholar and professor from Vanderbilt University. Block was affiliated with the United States Information Service (USIS), the arm of the State Department that's responsible for disseminating information about America and American interests abroad. As Livingston recalls, "Block explained to me that if you could convince the USIS that you were an expert in any field, whether that be hydroponics, or country music, they might have a gig for you."⁵¹⁹ On this particular trek to India Livingston was accompanied by a fellow pilgrim, fellow Austin musician John Inmon. Livingston and Inmon had been working together in different bands for more than twelve years and the

⁵¹⁸ Two out of three of these cowboy icons were native Texans: Orvon (Gene) Autry was born on September 29, 1907 in Tioga, Texas; Woodward Maurice (Tex) Ritter was born on January 12, 1905 in Murvaul, Panola County Texas; and Roy Rogers, the lone non-Texas native, was born Leonard Franklin Slye on November 5, 1911 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁵¹⁹ Bob Livingston, interview number one, 04-10-2001.

possibility of a series of shows in south Asia was an exciting concept. Acting on the information provided by Block, Livingston sent a telex to the American Consulate in Madras explaining that he and Inmon were professional musicians from Texas and would like to come and audition in hopes of securing a position as American entertainers in India. Livingston soon heard back from vice consul Tim Moore who told them to come ahead to Madras. Livingston recalled their journey:

John and I took an all-night train to Madras for our audition. On the way, I was trying to figure out how we should present ourselves to Tim Moore. Are we just going to get up and play songs? Are we supposed to be sending some sort of cultural message? Then, as I'm looking out from the train at the Indian landscape sliding by, I had this feeling that you could be anywhere. It was about 5:30 in the morning, we were a hundred miles west of Madras, the sun's just peeking over the horizon, and there's scrub brush and gullies rolling by and you could swear that you're in the middle of West Texas. I realized that our two countries not only had a lot in common geographically, but that our people have a tremendous amount in common as well. We all have the same emotions. We all love, we all have frustrations and fears, we all want the best for our families, there are "bad guys" to look out for and there are heroes. I realized that the best way for me to bring out those common themes was through the image of the cowboy.⁵²⁰

Livingston and Inmon arrived in Madras later that day and met Tim Moore at the American Center. The American Center is an auditorium with a theatrical stage, sound system and lights located on the grounds of the American consulate. Tim Moore took a seat in the audience and said "OK fellas, what'cha got?"⁵²¹

John and I tuned up, took the stage and let 'er rip. I did some old Cowboy classics like "Don't Bury Me on the Lone Prairie," songs like that. After we'd done about a half dozen tunes Tim Moore piped up and asked us, "Hey guys, do you mind?" He reached down, pulled out a banjo case, opened it up, pulled out his banjo and said, "I've been dying to play with somebody! So we played "Fox on the Run" and a few bluegrass things, and he said, "You guys got the job, but only if I can play with you every once in a while!"⁵²²

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Ibid.

Tim Moore asked Livingston and Inmon to return to India in nine months to do a series of shows. They discussed the nature of their proposed performances and their mission abroad as representatives of the United States. Moore explained that India was the world's largest democracy, a nuclear power and strategic partner of the United States, and that the American Embassy in New Delhi was one of the largest State Department facilities in the world. He described the wide-ranging network of State Department Consulates, programs and personnel throughout the country, and went on to explain the significance of winning the "hearts and minds" of Indian nationals in the larger picture of international relations. All agreed that their program would be rooted in the efficacy of the American cowboy as an advocate for peace, compassion and cultural exchange. Once back in the United States, Livingston did his homework. He read books about the American West and worked up an extensive cowboy song repertoire. He studied up on Woody Guthrie and Jimmy Rodgers; he studied the collections of Alan and John Lomax, and even learned some cowboy jokes. In essence, Bob undertook a crash course in cowboy mythology and musicology that would underscore the program he anticipated presenting in India. He reasoned that his background as a singer-songwriter and country musician coupled with his command of cowboy folklore and a healthy cache of songs would enable him to draw his audience into his performance.

To this end, Livingston had another invaluable asset, his spirituality. As he prepared for his first USIS tour he realized that to be effective in communicating the kind of message he wanted to send, he would have to draw on the teachings of his guru. "When you're at the ashram in the presence of the guru," Livingston explained, "your direction is clear and you know what needs to be done. It's really an incredible experience. But when you take those teachings out into the world, you have to work very hard to keep on track."⁵²³ Livingston wanted to carry the essence of the ashram into his musical program. If he could weave the threads of spiritual enlightenment into his cowboy message of goodwill, he felt that he could successfully draw his Indian audience into a frontier of the imagination: a frontier where similarities between people transcended their differences, where cultural barriers faded in the light of compassion and

⁵²³ Telephone conversation with Livingston, February 5, 2002.

understanding, and where world peace was not an abstract dream but a work in progress. To be sure, this was quite an undertaking for a cowboy ambassador from Austin, but with his determination, his musical background, and his spiritual resolve, he was uniquely qualified to build some cultural bridges between East and West. As the following story illustrates, Livingston was on the right track:

When John and I returned to India, the first show we did was in a small southern Indian town called Cochin in the state of Kerala. When we arrived we mentioned that we would love to play with any local musicians that might be available. For us, playing with Indian musicians was part of the cultural exchange. So we hooked up with a tabla player and another musician who was a really good drummer. He had a trap set and played in a rock band. We had a chance to get together before the show and run down some songs, and when we brought them up about three-quarters through our show, the audience just loved it. They loved to see some of their local boys up on stage with these cowboys from Texas!

We started out kind of slow and easy, singing a few songs and telling the folks a few stories. I remember telling the audience, [in an exaggerated Texas accent] "We're from Texas and we come here to play songs about Texas and beautiful women and ugly men. We're here to tell ya' stories about cowboys and Indians." John and I were really decked out: We're both wearing big 'ole cowboy hats, vests, bandannas around our necks, with pants tucked into our boots, the whole bit. And the folks were really eating it up! Because if there's anything in India, or for that matter, all over the world, that people want to know about, it's cowboys and Indians! That may seem amazing, but it's true! The Wild West is a part of American culture that seems to translate in other cultures as something pure and honest. It's something that the people in India can relate to because just as we have our Wild West in America, Indians have their "Wild East!" They have heroes, bandits, and stories about their own culture, stories that talk about adventure and how the good guys win out over the bad guys. Also, when I refer to our presentation as "Cowboys and Indians," I'm not just talking about the Sioux or Pawnee; I'm talking about the East Indians. Plus, we'd explain to the folks that there are cowboys everywhere, especially in India. As I say in one of my songs, "All it takes is a cow and boy!"

One of the first tunes I did was "Don't Bury Me on the Lone Prairie," and before I'd start the song, I set it up with a story. I told the audience about the train trip we made to Madras when I looked out on the "Indian Prairie," and how the "Wild East" was very much like the "Wild West." Then I said, "Imagine that you're a young cowboy on this big desert, either west of the Pecos or west of Madras, riding along with your buddies on your horse, or your camel, when all of a sudden a cobra jumps out from behind a bush and bites you right between the eyes." Then I'd

say, "You lie down in the dirt and your compadres light a fire to keep you warm but you know that your life is slowly oozing away; and what's the last thing you're thinking of? You don't want to be buried out there all alone!" Then I'd go ahead and sing the song.

Backstage after the show, the wife of the Supreme Court Justice from Kerala came up and said to me:

"Oh, I very much enjoyed your program. It was so wonderful. And that song you did about that poor young cowboy. You had to leave his body on the prairie? It's so sad and so touching! But tell me, is there no way you could go back and bring his body back so he could be buried as he wished? It was not right to leave his body on that prairie. He did not want to be left there!"

I was amazed! She had taken the story seriously. She took it at face value. But I was trying to draw them into the show, so evidently I had succeeded.⁵²⁴

This example not only illustrates Livingston's ability to turn a good tale, it suggests certain dynamics between his program and his Indian audience. The Indian woman's acceptance of Livingston's story at face value suggests her acceptance of Livingston as a credible spokesman for cowboy culture and by extension, for American culture. Her perception not only underscores the influence Livingston wields as a cultural interpreter, it places a distinct responsibility on him as a representative of the United States. The woman's disappointment with the fictitious cowboy's decision to leave their companion's body on the prairie shows that she expects cowboys to take the high moral road and go the extra mile to honor their commitments to others. If cowboys were going to be exemplar of American society, if they were going to be the conduit between American and Indian culture, then their iconic aura must not be tarnished. Livingston took the woman's critique to heart and in an attempt to exonerate the cowboys and leave his audience with a sense of closure he wrote another closing verse to the song:

When the sun went down
So far from home,
We had no choice
But to go on alone.
So we dug his grave
Underneath that White Oak Tree,
And we buried him,
Out on the lone prairie.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁴ Livingston interview number 1.

After the first few shows, Livingston fell into the routine of the performances and the extracurricular duties of a cowboy ambassador. He explained that many of his appearances were co-sponsored by local book clubs, academic societies, or other cultural organizations and went on to describe the logistics and activities surrounding a typical show:

When I began doing the shows, I had an Indian liaison officer to help me along the way. I also had close contact with an American vice consul. What the vice consul did was not only set up the details of our gig, but he'd set up dinners with the mayors and members of the town councils, and if there was a University involved, with members of the student government. Sometimes we'd go to the Rotary Club, which had a large membership in India, and we'd have lunch, and then they'd give me a little present and I'd give a little speech and the Mayor or the appropriate dignitary would also give a little speech.

When the USIS found out that I liked to do this sort of thing, mixing with the audience and rubbing elbows with the local muck-id-dee-mucks, they took full advantage of it. They worked my rear end off! Most people that go over there to do entertainment programs, they wanted to play their gig and go back and rest because they were massively jet-lagged. They hadn't been living there like I had been. I would go to a student association meeting, then they'd take me to the Rotary Club for lunch, and then off to a tea with the Mayor in his office. After all of that I'd rally the musicians and we'd go do the sound check, come back to the hotel and get a little nap, and then go play the gig. After the gig, they would take us out to a late dinner. They eat their final meal of the day very late in India. At ten-thirty, eleven o'clock, they're stuffing themselves! They claim that it makes them sleep! It just made me fat!⁵²⁶

Judging by Livingston's reports of these shows, it appeared that the USIS and the co-sponsor invited primarily middle and upper-middle class people to the events. The audience at his first presentation in Cochin, Kerala, for example, was an exceptionally bright and educated group. "Kerala," Livingston said, "is a state in southwestern India that is one of the most literate states in the world. Cochin, I believe, is in the Guinness Book of World Records as being 100% literate. Taxi drivers there have Master's degrees! The state of Kerala is where a lot of India's computer programmers come from."⁵²⁷ Bob

⁵²⁵ Discussion with Livingston, February 8, 2002.

⁵²⁶ Livingston interview number 2, 05-01-2001.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

described these audiences as “the people that the USIS wanted to reach the hearts and minds of.”⁵²⁸

We were engaged in propaganda in the correct sense of the word. We were spreading a positive image of America and getting a group of people there to share it with. And the places we played would be packed. We might have a thousand, fifteen hundred people! The USIS would have a co-sponsor, like the Kerala Fine Arts Society or a local book club and the co-sponsor contacted everybody on their mailing list asking them to please come to the show. They would tell them about our program and give them invitations. The ladies would come out dressed in their finest saris and men would wear their finest clothes, and they'd bring the family and the kids. You could almost sense their anticipation: “What is this going to be like? American country and folk music? There are going to be cowboys here singing!”⁵²⁹

The audience and the events surrounding these performances begs two important questions about the role of the State Department in Livingston's program: First, was the target audience confined to only upper and middle-class Indians and second, did the State Department influence the structure and content of his program? In addressing the first question it's helpful to look at an analysis of an earlier series of State Department programs. Penny M. Von Eschen argues in her essay about the government's “Goodwill Tours” in the 1950s and 1960s, “Satchmo Blows Up the World,” that the entertainment venues were tightly controlled to complement American economic interests abroad.⁵³⁰ The Jazz acts that the State Department sent to Africa for example, would generally tour areas rich in oil, diamonds, or uranium. Such economic determinism naturally affected the nature of the audiences in Africa, strongly favoring the well to do while virtually ignoring the common people. An example of such obvious audience bias was the early 1960s Dizzy Gillespie concert tour of Asia. Gillespie recalled that, “the tour skipped India because that country was nonaligned,” and the band “played instead in Karachi, Pakistan, where the United States was supplying arms.” There, Gillespie refused to play

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ “Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz, Race, and Empire during the Cold War” by Penny M. Von Eschen in Wagnleitner, Reinhold and May, Elaine Tyler, eds., *Here, There and Everywhere The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*. Hanover and London, University Press of New England, 2000, p. 163.

until promoters agreed to open the gates to the “ragamuffin” children. He complained that, “they priced the tickets so high the people [who] we were trying to gain friendship with couldn’t make it.”⁵³¹ I asked Livingston about the nature of his audiences while playing abroad for the State Department. Were his shows in any way a remake of the State Department shows of the 1950s and 1960s? Bob had this to say:

Many of the shows we played were for a higher, educated class of people, no doubt about it. But as time went on and I became a little more comfortable with the lay of the land, we also played a number of children’s schools, universities, hospitals, and quite a few refugee camps. The USIS was open to suggestions that I would make. No, all the shows we did weren’t just for the rich and famous, particularly as I gained my footing in India. Through the years we’ve played for all classes of people.

One of my favorite ways to communicate with the common folks was through traveling. India is a very large place, and I spent a tremendous amount of time in train and bus stations. After a few tours, I got so good at getting around the country that the USIS no longer sent a liaison with me, they knew that I could get to where I needed to go. I remember so many times when I’d be standing there at a train station by myself: I’d have my Cowboy hat on, I felt really self-conscious, I didn’t necessarily want to wear it, but with my guitar in one hand and my bags in the other, I really didn’t have any other place for it except on my head. You must understand that people in India will stare at you unabashedly, especially a big redheaded guy with freckles like me. They thought I was from the dark side of the moon! Pretty soon there are eighty or a hundred people standing around checking me out. So sometimes I’d just pull my guitar out and start playing for them and the place would go bonkers! They would laugh, and just have a great time. They usually couldn’t understand a word I was saying, but the message was clear: "Let’s be friends!"⁵³²

Livingston travels with a video camera and has been able to record a number of his foreign adventures on videotape. I was able to see one of these railroad station exchanges that he described. It’s an incredible spectacle; the dark iron roof structure growing out of the dirty concrete of the train platform, a large antique locomotive puffing away in the background, the sky gray and overcast, and you sense the humidity that you can almost see in the air. There’s Livingston, big wide straw cowboy hat, scarf around his neck, and a colorful western shirt, towering over his wide-eyed audience, his head

⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 170.

⁵³² Livingston interview number 2.

thrown back yodeling at full volume to a sun no one can see . . . An amazing picture. The scene changes and shows Livingston slightly bent over to meet the gaze of the young Indian woman that he's accompanying . . . She is singing and Livingston is strumming away on his guitar. Livingston is listening intently, nodding his head in encouragement and grinning like a mighty happy rascal. The young lady, sari and scarves swinging, is letting loose on an intricate Indian melody, no reservations, bobbing gently up and down on the balls of her feet, moving through the quarter-tones in the hypnotic language of a song obviously dear to her heart. The audience smiles and claps along. This is a touching scene and an excellent example of cowboy diplomacy in the Indian hinterlands.

I asked Livingston if the State Department made any attempts to shape or censure his program. He maintains that "Cowboys and Indians" is his own creation and that the government had nothing to do with its form or content. Indeed, when he signed on with the USIS he expected some sort of guidance or direction and was pleasantly surprised when that didn't happen. He assured me that he was left to his own devices in developing and delivering his program. Livingston did bring up one interesting episode that's worth mentioning:

At one point, the State Department did have something to say about my program, but I wouldn't necessarily call it censure. It was more of an advisement. I started doing this thing about yodeling for world peace. At that time, early 1991, the Russians were still in Afghanistan and there were hundreds of thousands of refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan. Also, the Gulf War was in full swing. So I had this idea to teach my audiences how to yodel, and once I got them yodeling and having fun, I told them that it's impossible to feel bad and yodel at the same time! As a matter of fact, I'd say, can you imagine if George [H.W.] Bush would call Mikhail Gorbachev every morning about 6:30 and say, "Mikhail, Yodel-aaaa-hee-hoooo!" And Mikhail would yodel back to George, "Yodel-aaaa-dee-hoo-too!" What a great way to start another day of international relations! Then I'd say, can you imagine Bush and Gorbachev calling up Saddam Hussein, yodeling to him and getting him to yodel back, because, I'd tell the audience, that it's impossible to invade a country and yodel at the same time! I told them that if Saddam Hussein had had just spent more time yodeling, he would never have invaded Kuwait! I thought this was all light-hearted, and funny stuff, but a couple of times people would walk up to me after the show and say something like, "I really like your program, but let me tell you one thing. Don't you make fun of Saddam

Hussein. Even you must admit, even though you are American, he's very bold and very much for his people."

And I would say, "Ah yes, very bold, very good for his people, yes, you're right!" These people, I'm telling you, they mean business. This was a time when there was some very serious international issues going down and we were over there representing the American government. So what the State Department did, they sent a fax to the appropriate Vice Consul that said, "Advise Livingston on the sanity of using Saddam Hussein in a disparaging way or in a light-hearted manner." That's the only time the government ever said anything about my program.⁵³³

Bob's first personal trek into India was in 1981, he played his first USIS show in 1986, and after twenty-five years he's still touring India, Nepal, Bangladesh, the Middle East, and different countries Africa. After the initial tour in 1986, his band mate, John Inmon, went back to the states, but Bob stayed in India and continued to play. He went back every year from 1987 through 1992. In 1992 he played in sixty different cities in India. Throughout the 1990s Bob returned on a regular basis and in 1998 began to take his son, Tucker, to accompany him on guitar and vocals. After twenty-five years of visiting and performing in India and its surrounding nations, Bob has seen tremendous cultural changes in the region; some of which have been brought about by the infusion of American popular culture:

Back before television and radio expanded go greatly in South Asia, I remember playing a date in Nepal. I believe it was 1987 or 1988. After the show a young man came up to me and said, "I like your program, but tell me, do you know Michael Jackson?" And I said, "Well, no." Then he asked me, "Do you like his music?" And I said, "Sure, I like his music. I don't know him but, yeah, I like his music." He thought about that for a second and said, "Hummm, OK, well, then tell me, what other famous American singers are there? You, Michael Jackson and who else?" And I said, "That's about it!" I got a pretty good laugh out of that, but at that time, their exposure to American music was very limited. Their main connection to pop music was through posters and the occasional cassette tape. That was all about to change though.⁵³⁴

⁵³³ Ibid. I asked Livingston how his comments about Saddam Hussein got back to the State Department. He said that there was always a representative from the State Department at every one of his shows and that they write a report about each event. This report was then passed up the chain of command.

⁵³⁴ Livingston interview number 1.

When I went back over in 1990, India had just gotten the Star Television satellite system out of Singapore. There were five television channels on the system, MTV, CNN, BBC, and two other independent channels. I knew their culture was in trouble when I walked into the house of some Indian friends of mine in Madras. The man's name is Arvis Schwiswan, he plays a sentur, which is like an Appalachian hammer dulcimer, and he's one of the foremost players in the world. His wife, whose name is Chitra, is a Banakian dancer who is very famous in India. These are very talented and well-educated people. Both her parents and his parents live in the house. That's another great thing about India. They take care of their parents. There are no old folks homes. When I walked in they're all sitting around a television set watching "Santa Barbara!" There they are in India watching this soap opera so I asked them where it was coming from? They explained about Star TV and the satellite. I didn't see a satellite dish and I asked them what was up, and they said, "We're connected with a friend of ours." Evidently, some guy in the neighborhood had a dish, and for fifty rupees a month he would allow you to run a line and connect it to his set-up! There were lines running down all the alleys and it looked like some sort of spaghetti convention! I realized then that India was in for some changes.⁵³⁵

The growth of transnational media in India, largely influenced by American mass culture, suggests several important questions: How do the Indian people perceive Americans? Do they distinguish between the American citizens in their country and the American exports they find in their stores and on their airwaves? How was Bob treated in India? I discussed these questions with Bob and he offered the following:

One thing I was asked again and again as an American in India was, how could the United States support the oppressive government of Pakistan when India, a US ally, is the biggest democracy in the world? Actually I agree with them, but I couldn't really tell them that US arms manufacturers were making a bundle selling their goods to Pakistan. For the most part though, as an individual, I was treated great and I never felt threatened. There's a very large network of State Department representatives throughout the country and the Indian people have a very positive view of musicians. Musicians in India are treated with great respect.⁵³⁶

When I'd travel with my family, people would get up on the bus or on a train and let my kids sit down. Sometimes an old man would motion to one of the kids and have him sit in his lap. I didn't know if this was a carry-over from British colonial times, but they were very kind to us. I

⁵³⁵ Livingston interview number 2.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

think a great number of Indians perceived America as a great nation, and the kids of India saw us as a source of a new culture that was going to take the place of their old culture.

When the media came to India, it came in a big way. MTV is all over India these days. Now the kids are not only able to hear Michael Jackson or see him on a poster, they were able to see him perform on MTV, and you can imagine what a difference that makes. The older people would complain about MTV in India. It was Asian MTV, and it was toned down a little, but it was still MTV. There were pictures of women in bikinis, and similar images that were offensive to the older generations of Indians. "Why do we want to ape the West?" This is something I heard quite a bit. "We're aping the West and it's not good!"

This is where I believe my program makes a positive impact. I don't have girls in bikinis on stage with me; I have local musicians. I like to think of my program as the opposite of MTV, more of an "organic" affair rather than a synthetic-electronic presentation. And, as I've mentioned, we would regularly entertain families and lots of kids. I tried to accent the things our respective cultures had in common, and I did that by presenting the "cowboy way" as an honest and decent way of carrying on. You've got to ask yourself the question, "What would Roy Rogers do?" [Bob laughs] I'm sure our audiences in India perceived a real difference between Michael Jackson's MTV specials and my "Cowboys and Indians" program.⁵³⁷

In Livingston's travels to the neighboring countries of Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, he found his audiences and the public equally charming, but the political environment was sometimes volatile and dangerous. "The State Department sent me into some hellacious areas," he said. "I remember one time they had to smuggle me out of the American Center in Dhaka, Bangladesh in an ambulance."⁵³⁸ Livingston was at the American Center for a press conference when a riot broke out between laborers on strike and government forces. The strikers burned cars, vandalized buildings, and when the violence spread to the American Center, the staff called for an ambulance claiming that Livingston, who they described as a visiting professor of musicology from the University of Texas, was having heart palpitations. The ruse worked. Livingston and six staff members made it to safety in the ambulance.

In Pakistan, Livingston encountered another politically charged environment that had a profound effect on a treasured musical tradition.

⁵³⁷ Livingston interview number 2.

⁵³⁸ Livingston interview number 1.

In 1989 I was in Peshawar, Pakistan, just east of the Khyber Pass. I was up there to play for the Afghan refugees and they were everywhere. The Russians were in Afghanistan. At the local University I met an instructor who was a sitar player and I invited him to join me for the show. We agreed to meet in my hotel room that afternoon to rehearse.

[It's important to realize that] Pakistan used to be part of India. When the partition happened in 1948, all the Muslims went to Pakistan and all the Hindus went to India. Even though they relocated, the Muslims left a great deal of their culture behind in India, and the Hindus left a great deal of their culture behind in Pakistan; their musical instruments, customs, and their epic stories for example. In Pakistan there were still many people who liked the classic Indian stories, especially the older people. They loved to hear the stories, and many Pakistanis still loved to hear Indian music.

When I met the sitar player at the hotel, he said, "I'm the last sitar player in Pakistan." He explained that the Pakistani government had systematically erased any marks of Indian culture left in his country. "The government doesn't encourage anything Indian," he explained. "I am still teaching," he said, "but now the young students don't want to go through the discipleship of twelve years of practicing, bringing water, chopping wood, and working with the teacher." We talked about Ravi Shankar, the famous sitar player, how he had a guru that was his music teacher. Shankar had to practice scales for twelve years before he was ever allowed to play a song much less go on stage. "That musical tradition of master and student," he told me, "is dying in Pakistan."⁵³⁹

Livingston empathized with the loss of such a great tradition and pointed out that Western music also faced challenges in maintaining its heritage. Fortunately in the United States there are extensive efforts underway to save traditional American music genres from obscurity. Museums, universities, private collectors, and certain institutions like the Library of Congress and the Center for Texas Music History at Texas State University are all engaged in preservation projects. Livingston also explained that contemporary music in the United States was market driven—The United States government did not dictate musical formats. This was an aspect of American culture admired by many of the people Livingston met in his travels, but he realizes that the free market can have toxic side effects on both American and foreign cultures. The "star

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

making machinery behind the popular song"⁵⁴⁰ is the same cultural juggernaut that produces the endless stream of aesthetic simulacra that sends shivers through the ranks of concerned parents and traditionalists worldwide. To those Indian families concerned about their children "aping America" Livingston explains that there's much more to American culture than Madonna with her sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll message and that many American families share their concern. He intentionally steers away from pop references in his program and prefers to stay the course of the benevolent and heroic cowboy, an image he describes as "one of the purest things that foreigners know about America."⁵⁴¹

In his own way, Livingston has carried on the Indian musical tradition of master and student. As mentioned, Livingston enlisted his son Tucker to accompany him on guitar and vocals. Tucker is not only an extremely talented musician, his presence on stage brings a new dimension to "Cowboys and Indians." The essence of family is one of the few cultural institutions revered internationally and when Livingston and Tucker team up, the audience sees a father and son traveling the world, working together, reaching for a shared altruistic goal. The combination significantly expands the outreach potential of the program. According to Livingston,

The fact that Tucker and me, father and son, were up there playing together really spoke to them. I must have had a thousand people come up to me and say, "It's just wonderful to see a father and son up there on stage. When we look at America, it doesn't seem like families matter very much. We don't get a good picture of America and how they treat their families. But to see father and son relating so well and being so close is really wonderful. It's one of the best lessons you have in your program."⁵⁴²

Bringing Tucker on board is consistent with Livingston's effort to include other musicians in his program. Since his first show in Cochin in 1986 when a local drummer and tabla player joined him on stage, Livingston has aggressively recruited indigenous musicians.

⁵⁴⁰ This phrase from, "Free Man in Paris," a song by Joni Mitchell from her album *Court and Spark*, © 1974 Electra/Asylum Records.

⁵⁴¹ Livingston interview number 2.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

Rounding up local musicians for the shows is an important part of our cultural exchange, and I believe that it makes a real difference in what we do. Music is a universal language and when the audience sees their own musicians on stage playing with a couple of cowboys, the message of friendship and unity really hits home. Plus, the musical blend was something that none of us had ever heard before.⁵⁴³

Livingston's "cultural exchange" is a real-time exchange that enables an audience to witness the harmonious product of music forms from different countries that might be considered incompatible. This musical confluence illustrates the ability of seemingly disparate cultures to come together aesthetically and to lay the foundation for a greater cooperation economics, politics, and human rights. As Livingston says, "If we can get along musically, we should be able to get along in other ways as well."⁵⁴⁴ When Livingston and Tucker perform with local musicians they create an indelible cultural link between Livingston's family and the families in the audience, between the eclectic mix of musicians on stage, and between the people of America and the people of India.

Incorporating local musicians into his program is not without its challenges. Many of the players Livingston approached argued that Eastern and Western idioms were incompatible. Time signatures, tone intervals, and countless other technicalities clouded the issue, but, as seen in the following example, Livingston effectively set such differences aside to propagate a successful musical synthesis:

In 1999, Tucker and I were in Oman. We were scheduled to play with a group called the Royal Omani Orchestra. The Sultan of Oman was a music nut and supported a number of different musical groups. One of his groups was the Royal Omani Orchestra. They had two or three Oods, which is like a lute, they had a quanoon, which is similar to a hammer dulcimer but it's played with little finger thimbles, darndest thing you ever heard, and they also had violins and dumbats, which are a very interesting kind of Arabic drum.

The leader of the orchestra was from Britain. He was hired by the Sultan to put together the group and direct it. We were all there at the concert site that afternoon, doing our [respective] rehearsals and I suggested that we do something together. The British bandleader wasn't too crazy about the idea and came up to me and said, [here Livingston imitates a highbrow English accent], "You know, this Anglo-American

⁵⁴³ Livingston interview number 1.

⁵⁴⁴ Telephone conversation with Livingston, February 5, 2002.

thing, this cowboy thing, we don't care about that! Why don't you just play your program and we'll play ours, and everything will be fine. Because, really, Arabic music simply does not go with American western music!" And I said, "I'm tellin' ya, it'll work."

Well, about this time the orchestra was playing a drum beat that sounded like a cross between American Indian war drums and Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away." So I pick up my guitar and start singing, "Kaw-Liga was a wooden Indian standing by the door," the Hank Williams classic, and the Arabic players just loved it! The British band director acquiesced and we learned Kaw-Liga!

That night when we played, there were two American generals and their wives in the audience. One was the head of the Central Command, General Zinni, he's the guy that took over from Schwartzkopf, and the other was General Jones, the Commandant of the Marine Corps. The rest of the crowd were Arabs who had been educated in the United States. They were the elite that ran the country of Oman. Everybody showed great appreciation for our program and for the Arab music, but when we got together with the orchestra and played Kaw-Liga, they just went crazy.⁵⁴⁵

After the show, one of the Arabic gentlemen in the audience came up and said to Livingston, "I never understood country music until now." The gentleman, who happened to be the Cultural Minister of Bahrain, explained that he had gone to college in Alabama and one of his favorite pastimes was to rent a car and travel around the South listening to country music on the radio. "I loved that music," the minister said, "but I never really understood country music until I heard your program. Through your narration, the stories you tell with the songs, you've explained what I've been listening to and loving all along!"⁵⁴⁶ Bob went on to explain the scene backstage:

After I finished talking to the cultural minister, the two generals and their wives came backstage and said to Tucker and me, "You guys are doing more good for public relations and morale in this area than an aircraft carrier out in the Persian Gulf! We want to give you some medals." And they gave us these special medals that were for civilians that did great things for America and told us things like, "You did a great job for me today soldier," that kind of thing. Tucker and I were eating it up. We thought we were in a John Wayne movie! And then they said, "We want you to go with us! We think you guys could just tear the troops up!" So the next day we went to Bahrain with them, to a huge naval base,

⁵⁴⁵ Livingston interview number 2.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

and ended up on an aircraft carrier doing several shows for a pack of beer-drinking sailors and marines. We had a great time.⁵⁴⁷

The State Department remained enthusiastic about Livingston's program and expanded it considerably.⁵⁴⁸ In 1998 and 1999 Livingston and Tucker returned to India, Nepal, and Pakistan. In 2000 they arranged for Livingston and son to present a series of shows in the Middle East which included the aforementioned performance in Oman and the special excursion to the Navy base in Bahrain. I spoke with Livingston in May of 2001 when he had recently returned from a tour in Morocco. He spoke highly of the State Department's officers and diplomats in the consulates and embassies where he's traveled: "The State Department people I've dealt with for the most part are just as sharp as tacks. We can feel comfortable knowing that our national interests are being well served in the world."⁵⁴⁹ Four months after this particular discussion in September 2001, al Qaeda attacked the United States. Prior to the attacks, the information arm of the State Department had its hands full making new friends, maintaining relationships with old friends and refurbishing an ailing American image overseas. Cultural exchange programs like Livingston's "Cowboys and Indians" played a notable role in these efforts by softening America's international persona and by injecting a human element into the diplomatic mix by moving the discussion away from the formal conference table to the stages and streets of countries around the world. After September 11, 2001 and the ensuing developments and armed conflicts, the Department of State faced a sweeping realignment of national priorities which placed the effectiveness and practicality of cultural exchange programs under close scrutiny. In the immediate aftermath of the tragedies, there was a sharp focus global intelligence and military efforts coupled with a reassessment of the logistical challenges inherent in maintaining the safety of American citizens and representatives in foreign settings. Nonetheless, State Department operatives realized the strategic utility of ongoing cultural diplomacy. Many foreign policy experts

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ The United States Information Service and its bureaucratic sibling the United States Information Agency (USIA) are no longer autonomous agencies within the State Department. During the 1990s the USIS and the USIA were absorbed into the State Department. Livingston assures me however that the core mission of these agencies is alive and well and that he continues to work with Cultural Affairs Officers at the State Department. He sites budget considerations and reductions in personnel as the main reasons for the change.

⁵⁴⁹ Livingston interview number 1.

argued that the need for America to reach out and win the hearts and minds of disparate international groups in this new and unsettling transnational environment had assumed an invigorated priority not experienced in recent history. In Livingston, the State Department had an experienced musical envoy with over sixteen years of experience in the field and he continued on their behalf. In the post-911 world he and Tucker revisited Morocco and other countries they had previously played as well as Tunisia, Angola, Vietnam, Thailand and other areas as designated by the State Department. In 2009 Livingston experienced a paradigm shift in his role as a musical diplomat; a shift that would complete an extended circle of twenty-four years by bringing him back to the Ur source of his global adventures, Austin's singular music scene.

From Cowboys & Indians to Developing Live Music Capitals in Africa and Beyond

In 2009 Livingston invited fellow Austin musician Richard Bowden to join him on a State Department trip to Africa. Livingston and Richard Bowden arrived in Kigali, Rwanda on a dark, damp night in December of that year after an exhaustive series of flights from Paris. Bowden, a highly acclaimed Austin fiddle player and a regular component of Livingston's multicultural stateside show, "Cowboys and Indians," had replaced Tucker Livingston who had married in 2007 and settled in India to study indigenous Indian music. Rwanda was the first stop on a State Department swing that would present these musical ambassadors to the people and politicians of four aspiring African democracies. Rwanda, located in central Africa, is a presidential republic based on a multi-party system that is steadily recovering from decades of devastating conflict between social groups and widespread genocide. Their tour would continue in Malawi, a southeast African country with a democratic, multi-party government; Namibia, an expansive country on Africa's south Atlantic coast with a stable multi-party parliamentary democracy; and Lesotho, a landlocked country surrounded by the Republic of South Africa with a parliamentary monarchy and a constitution that effectively insures basic civil liberties. A representative of the American Embassy retrieved the weary travelers from a deserted airport, deposited them at their hotel and told them to prepare for an early morning meeting with Rwanda's American Ambassador.

At 8:00 am, only a few hours after their arrival, Livingston and Bowden were ushered into the office of Stuart Symington, the United States Ambassador to Rwanda. Symington was finishing up an email, asked the musicians to have a seat. After completing his task, he pulled up a chair directly across from them, put his elbows on his knees, and began, "Listen boys, you two are our ambassadors to Rwanda and there are some things you need to know . . ." Symington recounted the tumultuous late 20th-century history of the small African country—ethnic division, Hutus, Tutsis, war, genocide, millions lost, stunning horrors—all only 15 years ago. "The entire country suffers from post traumatic stress," their host said, "and most of the adults you'll meet out there have either lost family, wives, children or they've witnessed and sometimes participated in some very horrible situations." To drive this point home, the Ambassador instructed them to visit the Kigali Memorial Centre, essentially a holocaust museum opened in 2004 on the 10th Anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide on a site where 250,000 people are buried. He also briefed the musicians on what to expect from the local population: "Everywhere you go people are going to come up and ask you, 'What can you do for me?'" Symington went on to explain the essence of their mission in Rwanda: "You must figure out a way to turn that question around and make them believe that the answer to the question lies with them! What they can do for themselves?" Although Symington offered no specific directives as to how to motivate Rwandans to proactively address their respective futures, Livingston left the meeting with an idea in the works. It was an idea spurred by his interactions with musicians around the world and by his newly minted relationship with the City of Austin.

In citing Livingston's "interaction with musicians around the world" (which suggests a broad spectrum of activities over the last 25 years), I'm referring to a set of questions that have regularly surfaced in his exchanges with local musicians. On a typical State Department tour stop, the public concert is one of several activities on Livingston's agenda. The post-concert workshops that address subjects ranging from guitar playing techniques to trends in popular music are probably the most engaging and personal aspects of the overall mission. Over the years these sessions have generated predictable themes of enquiry. Music enthusiasts in countless foreign venues want to know how to "get started" in the music business; how to find places to play; how to find

the instruments they need; how to record their music and take it to the next level. They want to know what the "next level" is and if there is a proscribed model for success. The theme of these queries suggests an underlying compound question: "How can my musical aspirations serve as a tool of upward mobility and how can I improve my life and the lives of my loved ones by channeling my aesthetic dreams?" All of these are challenging questions and considerations, and after meeting with Ambassador Symington, a template for achievement for his international acquaintances began to take shape. The basic components of this proto-template were informed by Livingston's history as an aspiring musician in Austin and the city's contemporary music scene.

In November 2009, the month before he traveled to Africa, the Austin City Council appointed Livingston as "Austin's Musical Ambassador to the World." Various generations of Austin City Council members had been aware of his extensive international travels on behalf of the State Department and in light of his recent plans to tour Africa, the current Council elected to fortify his global adventures with official credentials to represent Austin and the city's musical interests abroad. Further, one of the cities Livingston was scheduled to visit in Africa, Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, is one of Austin's International Sister Cities, another fortuitous link in his pending travels. When Livingston arrived in Africa less than a month after accepting his municipal responsibilities, he was equipped with the appropriate certifications as well as several sets of Keys to the City of Austin to present to African dignitaries as instruments of goodwill. Inspired by Ambassador Symington's mandate to inspire local audiences to help themselves, Livingston reasoned that the best message he could impart was based on his experience as a young Austin musician. He and Bowden therefore adopted a new introduction to their concerts and workshops: "Hi! I'm Bob Livingston and this is Richard Bowden and we've come all the way from Austin, Texas, the 'Live Music Capital of the World!' We're here to bring you greetings and tidings of joy through music!"

This proclamation set the stage for a different approach to Livingston's cultural exchange, it offered a functional template that had generated exceptional results for the capital city of Texas and its musicians and, by extension, could yield similar results in developing nations. The substance of this new format is best revealed through the questions, answers and comments that commonly surfaced in Livingston's performances

and workshops. What follows is an illustrative, paraphrased exchange between Livingston and Bowden and several young African musicians in a workshop setting.⁵⁵⁰

Livingston: For you to do well in your country, you need to embrace your own culture. Study your traditional music and your African musical roots.

Musician I: Oh, no . . . That is not good . . . That is old music, it is tired and stale music.

Musician II: Yes, we want to learn to play rock music and blues music. That is the music we love. It is exciting and that is the music that will make us famous!

Livingston: Yes, rock and blues are good styles, but you must realize that so much of our American music, music of all kinds, grows out of our musical traditions, and many of our musical traditions come from Africa! Your traditional music is an important part of our music and that music should be an important part of the music you're making.

Musician III: How can that be? The music we have here, the music of our fathers does not sound like the American music we like.

Livingston: Yes, you may not hear these influences at first because they are mixed with other influences over a long period of time. But those influences, especially many of the sounds of Africa are certainly there in American music. Besides, until you know more about your own music how are you going to recognize those influences in American rock 'n' roll or in a blues song?⁵⁵¹

Musician II: But who does this "music mixing" that you describe in America?

Livingston: Well, people don't just sit around and decide to it. This music mixing happens when people live and work and play music together. It happens gradually over time as people hear musical styles from different places and try to make the new sounds they're hearing part of their music. They hear things they like and they want to use them. There are many different types of people who have come to America, people who have

⁵⁵⁰ I constructed this dialogue from interviews with Livingston and Bowden. I tried to recreate a composite dialogue from several situations that Livingston described, and after putting it together, I submitted it to Livingston for his approval. He made changes, and what appears above is the final result that includes Livingston's corrections and input.

⁵⁵¹ Livingston is quite adept in citing musicological examples of the confluence of traditions, styles and genres. In referencing African music as an influence on American blues, for example, he might refer to the call and response structure of a basic twelve-bar blues or the influence of the African pentatonic scale on imported European diatonic scales. There are many examples to illustrate the synthesis of international influences in American musical styles.

brought their music with them and those people come together in cities, in schools, and at their jobs. Everybody hears new things they like and they try to blend those sounds into their own style of music.

Musician II: Yes, but I don't really hear in the American songs that I like the sounds I've heard growing up in this country.

Bowden: Don't you think that you heard some new sounds today when the drummers and the singers from your city joined us? Didn't that sound different from the way some of our American songs usually sound?

Musician I: Oh, yes, it was new. It was good, and yes, it was different.

Musician III: Yes, maybe this mixing is a good thing, but how do you do this mixing?

Livingston: Just like we did it today! You do it by trying new things. You do it by playing with each other and by listening to different styles of music from different parts of the world. You do it by doing it! You have access to the Internet, and you can learn many kinds of music if you are simply curious. And as I said, you study the music of your country. You study the music that's all around you. And you study the music of other countries.

Bowden: That's right! We didn't know what to expect today, but we know that when we invite other people to play with us, people with different ideas, new and interesting things happen. We try to play with new musicians wherever we go.

Livingston: Exactly. And over time, as you keep playing with your friends and with new players, new styles start to develop. That's what has happened over time in America. That's where a lot of our music comes from. That's exactly what happened in Austin when I was learning music there.

Musician I: But surely you do not have African bands in America. You have American bands.

Livingston: Oh, but we do have African bands in America, particularly in Austin where many musicians from around the world come to play in our universities, colleges, concert halls and clubs. We have Reggae bands, we have Salsa bands, Brazilian bands, German and Czech bands, we have tons of Conjunto bands and Austin musicians go out and hear them!

Musician II: Ah, this is so wonderful, but that cannot happen here. Where would they play and who would come?

Livingston: Well, it may not happen here now, and it may take a while, but when I started in Austin many years ago, I would have said the same thing. I would have said that it was silly to think that people would be coming from all over the world to play music in our town, but now we're the "Live Music Capital of the World!"

Musician I: But how did that happen? It seems so big and we are only a small country. We want to play our music and we want to learn, but you speak of such grand ideas.

Livingston: You don't have to worry about these big ideas, you just need to work together, share your ideas, help each other out and the big ideas will happen with time.

Bowden: When I moved to Austin in 1970, I remember getting a lot of support from my friends. Just like you, all of us wanted to make something happen with our music and we tried our best to pull together and help each other. We would go to places and hear different kinds of music, and when things were slow, we'd hang out and share what ideas and dreams we had. We were young and we liked to try different things and experiment and we played music all the time.

Musician II: But till, here, in Rwanda, we have no places to play. We have no . . . how do you say, "venues."

Bowden: Sure you do! You, for example, standing right there, *you* are a venue. You have your guitar, your voice, your ideas, and you're surrounded by an audience!

Musician I: But is that a professional thing to do?

Livingston: Certainly! It is a good thing. People play everywhere in Austin; on street corners, in the parks, in the schoolyards, all kinds of places. Any place is a good place to play. When I travel I play on trains, I play at the stations, I play many places and people like to listen. You just have to be bold enough to give it a try.

Musician III: Yes, I understand that, but we would like places to play, places where we people will listen to us.

Livingston: Then go out and create a place to play. You have many coffee shops here in Kigali. You can play there. In Austin, coffee shops and restaurants are very popular places to play.

Musician III: I see, but the shop owners don't have music, they have no stages and they will not pay us!

Livingston: Just ask the shop owner if you can play in the corner and put your hat out for tips and the audience will contribute.

Musician II: Ah, yes, but that is not dignified.

Livingston: Of course it's dignified. Most of the places I play in America, I set out a tip jar. I've been doing it for years. You dignify yourself with your music!

Bowden: Also, you might try to come in and play at a place the same time every week, you know, set up something regular so people will know you are there. And if you are doing your music well and if you're trying new things, you will see more people every week. This has worked very well for me and my friends in Austin for many years.

Musician I: But your city, Austin, is the big music capital, so of course these things will work there, but here it is different. Our neighbors and our leaders do not know our music, they think of other things.

Livingston: Well, of course they have other things on their minds, but it's your job to take your music to them . . . It's your job to show them how important music can be for you and your community. Austin was not always a big music city. All of us musicians had to work together for a long time to get the city's attention. It doesn't just happen; you need to make it happen. See, it starts out simple. Let me give you some examples of how these things shaped up back home . . .

Livingston would then address some common aspects in the development of the Austin music scene as they apply to the environment at hand. A familiar theme might be expanding on the coffee shop example. Livingston explained that by establishing a steady weekly night, a single performer or a small group could develop a following and the proprietor, as he sees his sales increase on the experimental music night, might consider in trying another night with another group. In that case, the respective entertainers could come out, bring their friends and support each other's performances. This technique could be expanded to other parts of the city with coffee shops or small restaurants and with diligent effort, a citywide performance circuit might take shape. They could make some rudimentary posters and place them around town, and eventually

they might be able to have a small weekend show in a local park and bring together the respective draws of the acts that had been working and promoting together. "Sometimes when we were talking to a group of musicians," Livingston said, "we'd start a trade association right there on the spot."⁵⁵² He went on to explain that local businesses and the economy in general could expand through their efforts: If you have groups playing around town and people are coming out to support you, then the businesses you're performing will experience a boost, people will have a new form of entertainment, and with playing regularly, you're constantly building up a fan base to sell your music when you record. Livingston explained that young groups getting started in the 21st-century had a distinct advantage over their predecessors because of the advances in recording technology. Whereas a recording project in Austin during the early 1970s involved a major capital investment and a corporate infrastructure, making a CD in the digital age could be as simple as rounding up a laptop, a wave-file recording application, and a few microphones. Internet capability also provides myriad promotional and sales possibilities. Plus, he would go on, when you make a CD, one of your friends from the art community could design the cover for you and you could give them a small percentage on the sales of the discs, and you can take your new product to the local radio station and chances are, they'll play it. In Austin we've found that even the big radio stations like to help out the local groups. If you keep at it and keep working together you'll soon have a local music store, people will be needed to fix instruments or provide a sound system for an outdoor weekend show, and all kinds of new people start to get involved. This is when the city leaders start to get interested because they can see some real results in the economic community. Livingston continually uses Austin as a case study, and in fielding question from workshop attendees he can authoritatively refer to specific examples from the forty-year evolution of the Austin music scene. In light of these considerations as Livingston would lay them out in various stops on his latest 2009 tour, aspiring musicians, even in a seemingly obscure African town, could come together to create their own music capital.

⁵⁵² Livingston Interview, 03-19-2011

Livingston has plans to return to Africa in 2011 and to other points of the compass in the years to come as "Austin's International Music Ambassador." As presidents, prime ministers and world leaders continue their gilded-hall efforts to soothe global suffering and rebuild goodwill between nations and as their grand designs "trickle down" to the rank and file in the form of treaties, policies, and relief efforts, Livingston will continue to encourage communities everywhere that they can create their own unique music scenes. It's questionable however, whether the "hearts and minds" of the common folk will reflect the sea change handed down from on high. To insure any lasting harmony between societies new ideas and modes of communication must be embraced by laborers, farmers, teachers, local leaders, students, artists, musicians, writers—In short, the people who *are* the culture. In this challenge, Livingston provides a proven template. His extended efforts over the last twenty-five years have reified his motto, "When all else fails, music prevails."⁵⁵³ He illustrates through his "Cowboys and Indians" program and his retooled message for aspiring communities around the world to create their own "Live Music Capitals" that even small adventures into the nesting places of the ethnic "other" can make a significant difference in developing meaningful ties with another lifestyles and other nations. Equipped with the skills he honed in Austin during the heady cosmic-cowboy-progressive-country years, Livingston has successfully delivered the State Department's message that the American people share the common humanistic values of our international neighbors and that "we're all in this together" to countless people in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the countries of Africa.⁵⁵⁴ These encounters have been warm, close, and personal, and judging by Livingston's correspondence and press files, they have left a lasting and positive impression with audiences around the world. Livingston's program clearly illustrates the wisdom of sharing cultural commodities and focusing on those things that people everywhere hold dear. Only through such exchanges can we be assured of any "enduring freedom."

Cultural Products - Taking Inventory

⁵⁵³ From Livingston's "Texas Music International" website:
http://www.texasmusic.org/bob_livingston.php

⁵⁵⁴ Livingston interview number 1

The Austin music scene generated a collection of transient cultural products like Moon Hill Management and cultural legacy products with enduring institutions like *Austin City Limits* and the "Kerrville Folk Festival" as well as Bob Livingston's international cultural outreach program that has taken Austin music and American sensibilities around the globe. There are other cultural products with seventies roots that deserve mention like Willie Nelson's 4th of July Picnics, The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar, and Waterloo Records—one of America's most popular independent retail record/CD stores—that is considered the heir to Inner Sanctum Records, the small retail record shop just off the Drag that was the daytime headquarters of the shifting Austin music scene during the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁵⁵⁵ The seventies scene provided a substantial boost to Austin's tradition of outdoor music events like those commonly staged Lady Bird Lake and Auditorium Shores that began with Austin Aqua Festival in 1963 and at other locations throughout the city's extensive park system. Austin's title as "The Live Music Capital of the World" owes a singular debt to the splash of the seventies.⁵⁵⁶ Similarly, Texas Music Office tapped a great deal of the "scene capital" and cultural momentum initially generated during the progressive country decade. This state-funded music-business

⁵⁵⁵ Joe Bryson was the proprietor of Inner Sanctum and an extremely active operative in the Austin scene throughout the seventies and early eighties. In an interview with Bryson on April 12, 1998 while discussing the musical and generational shift of Austin music from the seventies to the eighties, he said of the new group of aspiring musicians, "At night they were in the clubs, but during the day, they were at Inner Sanctum. It was kind of like a clearing house for the new music and musicians during that period."

⁵⁵⁶ Although this is a City Council-oriented, self-aggrandizing claim, I believe that a detailed analysis would support the claim. A comprehensive study might include weighing the number of live-music venues against the city's population or considering the demographics of musicians and music business operatives in relation to the general population. It might involve considering the annual economic impact of the music business in Austin that would include night-club revenues, band revenues, Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission liquor taxes (a significant source of state revenues), local record and musical merchandise and instrument sales, advertising incomes (radio, television, print and related media formats), monies generated by support industries like art and design enterprises, photographers, printing companies, booking agencies, management companies, recording studio and audio-video-film production operations, revenues derived through hotel, restaurant sales and other cash flows related to perennial events like South by Southwest, the Austin City Limits Music Festival, the Pecan Street Festival and other music-based events. Also worth mentioning are the goodwill value of Austin's music-city persona as a boon to tourism and a worldwide brand. There have been studies like this through the years that have painted a favorable economic and cultural picture of our city as a live music Mecca, and I believe an objective new study would provide adequate evidence to support the claim that Austin is in fact, "The Live-Music Capital of the World."

promotional office and information clearinghouse was the first of its kind in the country, having been established in 1990 under Governor Bill Clements. The Texas Music Office works worldwide to promote Texas music and has done an exceptional job in researching and archiving the State's musical history.⁵⁵⁷

These cultural products were the pragmatic manifestations of Austin's climate of creativity of the 1970s and have helped perpetuate the legacy of the scene. They have advanced as powerful commercial tools that have contributed appreciably to regional and national economies and signify the reification of ideas that took root and flourished in Austin's fertile aesthetic environment. They were the components that provided the substructure for additional innovations and have served as an economic and cultural magnet for countless developments that have inured to the benefit of Texas, its musicians and artist, and its population. These cultural products stand as durable signposts that continue to influence the fabric of popular culture in the 21st Century. And, as argued in the preceding pages, the bricks and mortar of this unique cultural composite has been the songs and the songwriters of the scene.

⁵⁵⁷ From the Texas Music Office website: <http://www.governor.state.tx.us/music/about/history/>. The Texas Music Office (TMO) maintains an extensive business referral network, it labors to attract new business to Texas and encourages extant organizations and musicians of all stripes to stay, and serves as a liaison between music businesses and other government offices and agencies. In 1985, the 70th session of the Texas Legislature identified music as an industry in need of state government recognition and assistance and created the Texas Music Commission, a nine-member advisory board appointed by the Governor Mark White to hold hearings and issue annual reports to the Legislature. This was the first law passed by a state legislature in the United States creating an office promoting commercial music business. The efforts of the Texas Music Commission culminated with the opening of the Texas Music Office on January 20, 1990 with the legislative mandate "to promote the development of the music industry in the state by informing members of that industry and the public about the resources available in the state for music production." The organization has proven to be an exceptional resource for the state's music businesses and its musicians and other states and cities around the country have followed suit. "By 2007, 13 city and state music promotion offices were in operation: Albuquerque Mayor's Office of Music, Austin Cultural Arts Division, Austin Music Marketing Office, Chicago Music Commission, Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism Department of Cultural Affairs, Chicago Cultural Center, Louisiana Music Commission, Memphis and Shelby County Music Commission, New Mexico Music Commission, Oklahoma Film & Music Office, San Francisco Entertainment Commission, Seattle Mayor's Office of Film & Music, and the Tennessee Film, Entertainment Music Commission." For a detailed analysis of this exceptional organization, visit: <http://www.governor.state.tx.us/music/about/history/>

EPILOGUE

In the process of writing this dissertation about Austin music, I've sorted through a number of academic texts that have invested heavily in the notion of "identity" in dealing with subjects like music scenes, creating art and music in modern media formats, and the evolution of popular culture; subjects that generally signify how individuals act out a sense of self on experimental public stages. Texts like Barry Shank's *Dissonant Identities* analyze the creation of "musicalized identities;" the scene studies of Andy Bennett and Richard Peterson, Sarah Cohen, John Connell and Chris Gibson approach music making from the aspects of place and identity; and Jason Mellard's insightful dissertation employs the progressive country scene as a cornerstone for his investigation of "'the Texan' during the 1970s across local, regional and national contexts to unpack how the 'national' discourse of Texanness by turns furthered and foreclosed visions of a more inclusive American polity in the late twentieth century."⁵⁵⁸ These and other studies incorporate music scenes as vehicles for layered studies of identity and other contemporary subjects of academic inquiry like place, gender, ethnicity and race.

The very large subject of "identity" plays strongly into this analysis, but I'm not as keen on the aspects of "scene identity" as the scholars listed above because the musicians and songwriters who made the music in Austin did not define the terminology used to identify the stylistic nature of the scene. From the onset, the artists were bit players in the popular branding of their creative works.

In the first paragraph of this dissertation, I mentioned that the phrase "progressive country" was the creation of the local radio station KOKE-FM in 1972. I have argued that the actual music made on the stages of Austin and in the recording studios was more accurately described as a cross between folk and rock music. Although Willie Nelson has been strongly associated with country music throughout his career, his seminal influence on the Austin scene was well beyond the essence of straight, Nashville-style country. Indeed, Nelson might be one of the most eclectic stylistic pioneers of the Austin scene with concept albums like *Red Headed Stranger* and his collection of American classics like *Stardust*. Even Michael Martin Murphey shunned the title of his own

⁵⁵⁸ Mellard, p. ix.

creation, "Cosmic Cowboy," when regional pundits adopted it to define the protagonists of the progressive country years. For better or for worse, scene identities are labeled and promoted by contemporary media sources and may or may not reflect the aesthetic investment of those who have created the music. Still, the efficacy of identity, whether group or individual, is a fundamental analytical tool in sorting out the components of a modern music scene. In considering the fundamental components of the Austin music scene, I came across a valuable "identity portal" in the form of a photograph that visually encapsulated many of the ideas I've tried to incorporate into my assessment of scene making and music making in Austin during this seminal period.

When Professor Jeff Meikle was in graduate school in the early 1970s in Austin, he enjoyed the local music scene and from time to time, he photographed local music events. One afternoon in the late 1990s I was visiting with Professor Meikle in his UT office and he mentioned that he had some photographs from the Dripping Springs Reunion of 1972, a large outdoor weekend concert held thirty miles west of Austin in a dusty ranch meadow. He was kind enough to let me flip through some images and one photograph caught my eye.

The image focused on two well known Austin musicians, Kenneth Threadgill and blues guitarist Bill Campbell. They stood side by side in what appeared to be a backstage area with their attention fixed on something in the distance. On the right side of the frame was a skinny kid walking up behind the two musicians with bushy sideburns and a cowboy hat. It was me. Although I can't remember who I might have been playing with at the show, I certainly remember the event, I remember some isolated scenarios like meeting Loretta Lynn, and I definitely recall visiting Threadgill and Campbell. I would see Threadgill several months later at the first Kerrville Folk Festival in May, and Campbell was a mainstay in the local scene. During the 1960s and 1970s Campbell was one of Austin's foremost blues practitioners and was known for his authenticity long before the blues became the city's hot topic and international breakout style of the 1980s. For the younger players in town, Campbell represented the real deal along with east-side bluesman W.C. Clark.

In revisiting the photograph years later while writing this dissertation, I realized that Meikle had captured a succinct storyboard of the progressive country scene of the

early 1970s. Meikle took the photograph in March 1972 when the Austin music scene was on the national launch pad and the ignition sequence was well under way. Willie, Murphey, Fromholz, Walker, Clark, Van Zandt and other protagonists had recently settled in Austin or had become regulars in the lucrative local gig market. These players were either recording new albums, promoting current releases or both. The Dripping Springs Reunion, although a financial bust, was the first major outdoor, multi-day independent production that mixed established country stars with the eclectic contingent of younger Austin migrants and would serve as a ragged template for Nelson's Fourth of July concert series that would begin the following year at the same location. Dripping Springs was the first cross-generational, cross-genre outdoor public soiree presented to a disparate audience and Meikle's photograph illustrated the ephemeral musical coexistence of the crowd. A careful study of the subjects in the photo milling around backstage illustrates the different styles of dress, hairstyles, and by extension lifestyles. In the main audience at the concert there were truckers from Waxahachie, their beehive wives, and other working-class fans buzzing along to the same tunes that the Austin field hippies had grown up listening to only a few years before in their regional Texas high schools.

The three musicians in Meikle's photograph were from different stylistic backgrounds—Threadgill had a long association with the country yodeling blues of Jimmie Rodgers, Campbell had a background in the electric blues of T-Bone Walker and Muddy Waters, and I had a short but spirited history in copy rock. The image isolates a public moment when the Austin scene was on the move and would soon be labeled "progressive country" by the local radio station, KOKE-FM. The dress, demeanor, and age differences of the subjects suggested three distinct identities. Mr. Threadgill, wore his characteristic western shirt, baggy pants accented by a large belt buckle, pointed-toe Tony Lamas, and an "everyday" straw cowboy hat shaped to keep the sun off his weathered skin. Neither the hat, the boots nor the buckle were stage props. Threadgill had been wearing same "performance gear" for decades. Campbell made no attempt to define an image or present a professional persona with his unassuming oxford-style shirt with sleeves buttoned and tails tumbling over a pair of everyday levis. I presented a much different picture. I was a disjointed sartorial potpourri.

I wore a weathered Stetson hat with a colorful hatband of geometric designs that circled the crown and dangled down from the back of the hat, my hair tied in a ponytail and the bushy sideburns were a weak substitute for a full beard that was still a couple of years down the road. My shirt was a cowboy cut with prominent pearl snaps and diving pocket patches, the jeans were bellbottoms—not the typical Texas Wrangler boot cut—and the shoes, if that's the right word, were track shoes. I remember those silly things: They weren't really tennis shoes, they were a light canvas track and field shoe without the spikes, black with white stripes that circled the area behind the toe box. Finally, I was carrying a pipe—not a hippie-era recreational pipe—a straight-shank Dublin style tobacco pipe. It was a curious accoutrement for a springtime outdoor music concert in the dusty hills of Dripping Springs. Studying this image almost forty years after it was taken, I asked myself, "Who was this little snot trying to be?" The answer, then and now, is clear. "He didn't know." And that of course, is exactly the point. The young musician who walked into Meikle's 1972 photograph was a composite of popular trends, an identity in progress—ersatz cowboy hat, hippie jeans, a pipe to help ponder these cultural influences, and the pseudo track shoes to maintain all deliberate speed toward an undefined finish line in the entertainment industry.

The young players who populated the Austin scene of the period weren't necessarily negotiating a musicalized identity; they weren't acting out a predetermined cultural template like the mythical American cowboy. Although they might incorporate these tropes into their musical expressions, these symbols operated as external influences rather than internal psychological motivators. Most of these aspiring players were in their early twenties and had experienced an emotional musical conversion in their adolescence. In interviewing entertainers through the years and in studying the work of other musicologists and journalists, interviewees often describe a defining moment when they "saw Elvis on the Ed Sullivan Show" or when they snuck into the mysterious nightclub on the other side of town. I distinctly remember hearing the Beatles' "Please Please Me" in 1963 as a kid in England while listening to Radio Luxembourg on my transistor radio one evening. I wanted to make music that sounded like *that!* My lifetime definition of *cool* was indelibly etched into my aesthetic sensibilities. Moments like this sparked a visceral desire in many of my contemporaries to embrace and emulate the

popular sounds that permeated the modern airwaves. They too experienced the hard-wiring of their "cool circuitry" and were intent in finding ways to make a living by continuing to play the music that they loved. They were energized by their popular musical discoveries and found a new avenue of expression by contributing to the music of the songwriters who were settling in Austin in the early 1970s.

The songwriters, only a few years older, shared a similar romantic dream.⁵⁵⁹ They had achieved varying degrees of success in writing, performing, and marketing their songs. Fromholz was recycling his Texas roots, channeling new ethereal adventures, and shaping personal experiences into entertaining lyrical parables that touched experiential nerves in his audience. Murphey continued seeking out new and provocative intellectual avenues by making the case for displaced Native Americans in his song "Geronimo's Cadillac" then quickly moving on to tout the virtues of "riding the range and acting strange" in "Cosmic Cowboy." Walker continued collecting his rambling war stories and setting them out in crisp and accessible poetic formats, and other prolific writers like Clark and Van Zandt were shaping emotional encounters and engaging experiences into timeless gems of lyric and melody. Nelson rolled back to Central Texas with a large and successful catalogue of hit songs and a catalogue of music business experience to match. He was determined to rekindle the dream of making music his way with his friends back home in Texas.

These musicians and songwriters were a collection of musically charged adventurers chasing their creative dreams. Several of the songwriters who shaped the Austin scene—Murphey, Walker and Nelson for example—had revenue streams through their publishing interests, while others like Fromholz and Wier had created popular stage acts and enjoyed a steady paycheck through gate receipts. All of these artists made a living by writing and playing their original music and they all elected to reinvest in their careers by seeking out musical partners and developing their signature sounds with their bands. The common denominator in their momentum was rooted in their songs.

Thirty-seven years after the publication of Reid's *The Improbable Rise*, the primary protagonists of this "progressive country" story—if they are still among the

⁵⁵⁹ Willie Nelson, born in 1933, was an exception in this age demographic. Still, he was only thirty-nine years old when he relocated to Austin in 1972 and enjoyed the lifestyle of his "younger" friends and associates.

living—continue to write songs, play, interpret, record, market or sometimes, write about songs. Turn on the radio, the television, or visit the Internet and you're likely to find cultural products with roots in the Austin scene of the 1970s.

Forward

My goal in this dissertation has been to tell the story of the Austin music scene of the 1970s and explain why it's a story worth telling. After forty years the story has ebbed into the realm of historiography and requires a fresh assessment of the various histories of record. I've tried to offer new perspectives. In this effort, I've tried to shift the discussion away from an exclusive "star" approach to include other essential participants—people like the business operatives, the support players, the roadies, technical personnel, and the fans and friends of the scene.

One of my main goals in this effort has been to bring the essence of music into the discussion of the Austin music scene. In my judgment, the actual aesthetics and the components of the creative act of making music, writing songs, creating unique sounds and presenting them to a listening audience have been woefully absent in the treatments of this unique period of Austin's music history. The music often plays second fiddle to reportage and stuffy analysis. Many of the aforementioned academic sources rarely dive into the nuts and bolts of the music making process.

Mainly, this dissertation is a foundation. The task at hand is to move forward and include the voices of other participant observers and register their valuable insights. The members of my dissertation committee have offered their support in this effort and I look forward to expanding *and* editing this dissertation.

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Masters Thesis in the Program of Community and Regional Planning, University
of Texas at Austin, (1983)
- Sparks, Hugh, Cullen. *Stylistic Development and Compositional Processes of Selected
Solo Singer/Songwriters in Austin, Texas*. (Thesis, University of Texas at Austin,
1984).
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Armadillo World Headquarters*. (Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1985).

Interviews

Dissertation Interview Catalogue (Transcribed)

- Henry Hubbard 3-15-1991
By Harold McMillan given to Hillis 10-29-1993
- Steven Fromholz 9-1-92
In Transit from Austin to Dove Hunt (Probably Jack's Ranch)
- Various Informants Re: the Question: WHY AUSTIN?
Charlie Hatchett 9-16-1992
Linda Callaway 9-16-1992
John T. Davis 9-16-1992
Brady Coleman 9-18-1992
Mac McQuade 9-19-1992
David Moerbe 9-19-1992
Cleve Hattersley 9-19-1992
Olin Murrell 9-20-1992
Willis Alan Ramsey 10-24-1992
- Clifford Antone #1 10-29-1992
Transcripts from Gina Caponi's Class
- Layton Depenning 2-14-1993
Saxon Pub
- Jody Williams 3-19-1993
Four Seasons Hotel during SXSW
- Merlin Littlefield 3-20-93
Four Seasons Hotel during SXSW
- Cam King 3-21-1993
At Hillis' House
- Rob Patterson 3-27-1993
At Café Mozart in Austin, Texas
- Richard Mullen 4-8-1993 & 4-15-1993
At UGL UT & at Quackenbush's (Respectively)
- Jeff Farley & Stephen Doster 2-27-1993
Hillis' House
- Harold McMillan 10-7-1993
Telephone

Paul Ray 10-28-1993
Hut's Restaurant
Lost Gonzo Band 11-5-1993
At Rough Cedar Studios @ Recording Session
Bill Browder 4-18-1993
By David Moerbe
Leighton Hamilton 10-19-1993
At Saxon Pub
Van Wilks 10-13-1993
At The Saxon Pub
Rusty Weir Interview #2 3-19-93
At Saxon Pub
Clifford Antone #2 10-6-1993
Four Seasons Hotel
Larry Watkins 11-1993
Telephone Interview
Carlyne Majer November 1993
Telephone Interview
Mike Festa 4-22-1993
Hillis' House
Joel Dinerstein 4-22-94
At Hillis' Home Office
Doug Shea 2-6-1994
Telephone Interview
Mike Mordecai 2-7-94
Telephone
Boomer Castleman 6-18-1994
At Cathy Kimmel's House, Austin
Bobby Bridger 9-22-1994
Telephone Interview
Allen Damron 10-4-94
Telephone Interview
Marc Katz 2-20-1994
Telephone Interview
Richard Steele 6-24-1994
Telephone Interview
Angie Blair 8-9-1994
Telephone Interview
Mike Mordedai & Henry Gonzales 9-30-94
Telephone
Robert Skiles 10-14-1994
Telephone Interview
Michael Martin Murphey 11-9-1994
Telephone Interview
Bob Livingston 4-10-2001
Bob's Office on Guadalupe

Bob Livingston 5-1-2001
Telephone
Scott Newton 11-14-2004
At Scott's House re: ACL Photos
Susan Walker 11-9-1994
Telephone Interview
Charlie Jones 11-15-2004
By John T. Davis, Telephone Interview
Terry Lickona 11-15-200
By John T. Davis @ ACL

INTERVIEWS (Not Transcribed).

Freddie Krc, March 15, 2001
Bob Livingston, April 10, 2001
Bob Livingston, May 1, 2001
Tommy Taylor, April, 2001
Bob Livingston, March 19, 2011
Bob Livingston, September 10, 2011
Richard Bowden, April 15, 2011
Joe Bryson, April 12, 1998
Steven Fromholz, April 14, 1994
Steven Fromholz, April 14, 1999
Steven Fromholz, April 13, 2000
Angela Blair, March 4, 2000
Joe Ables, May 18, 2011
Michael Martin Murphey, April 5, 2011
Steve Weisberg, April 5, 2011
John Inmon, September 8, 2008
Jan Reid, August 27, 2008
Gary P. Nunn, August 26, 2008

Vita

Craig D. Hillis was born on December 12, 1949 to Dwight Norman Hillis and Valerie Ann Hillis in Long Beach, California. He received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History from the University of Texas at Austin in 1992 and a Master of Arts Degree from the University of Texas at Austin in 2000.

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