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The History of Texas Music (review)

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Book Reviews

JESÚS F. DE LA TEJA, *Editor*

The History of Texas Music. By Gary Hartman. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008. Pp. 318. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 9781603440011, \$45.00 cloth; ISBN 9781603440028, 19.95 paper.)

Just what is Texas music? And what makes it so good? These are major questions Gary Hartman, director of the Center for Texas Music History at Texas State University, addresses in this foundational volume. Hartman argues that Texas music is defined more than anything by “place,” defined as “a social and cultural nexus . . . in which a variety of factors . . . converge to create a distinctive and dynamic environment unlike that found anywhere else in the world” (p. 6). This perfectly describes the Lone Star State, situated at a geographic crossroads where a profusion of peoples and regions intersect, producing not only terrible conflict, but also an incredibly unique and diverse music that has enriched the nation and the world.

Hartman stresses that so many vital musical genres have originated in Texas due to its rich ethnic diversity. Narciso Martínez and Santiago Jiménez Sr. pioneered conjunto, a music dominated by accordion and *bajo sexto*, that in its appeal to working-class Tejanos was a valuable source of ethnic pride. During the Depression, Bob Wills and Milton Brown fused traditional Anglo folk and country music with blues, jazz, and pop to create the unique amalgam known as Western swing. Texarkana’s Scott Joplin combined his classical training and his exposure to black and white folk music to become the most important composer of ragtime, a highly-syncopated piano music that is the precursor of jazz. World War II stimulated a movement to the cities that produced the country music subgenre of honky-tonk, a style that featured electric instruments, simple chord progressions, and lyrics that dealt with real-life traumas like cheating and drinking. Finally, Willie Nelson’s permanent return to Texas in 1972, coupled with his signing to Atlantic records and his work with co-conspirators Waylon Jennings and Kris Kristofferson, produced the rise of outlaw country, a style that rejected the slick country-pop that by then had become dominant in Nashville.

Texas music is a product of places as well as place. One of the major values of this book is the coverage allotted to leading venues and institutions that have promoted Texas music. Austin clubs like Antone’s and the Armadillo World Headquarters, the Cheatham Street Warehouse (San Marcos), and Anderson Fair (Houston) gave musicians crucial exposure and fan bases. Scores of dance halls around the state showcased accordion-based Czech music and have equiva-

lents in German and Polish communities. The jazz program established at the University of North Texas in 1947 has trained numerous musicians and contributed to a thriving live music scene in Denton. Dallas's Deep Ellum district in the early 1900s was a proving ground for seminal blues artists like Blind Lemon Jefferson and T-Bone Walker, and in much later days provided tutelage to Jimmy and Stevie Ray Vaughan. Finally, long-running programs like Austin City Limits and the Kerrville Folk Festival have exhibited Texas music to a wider world.

Some minor quibbles with this book predictably involve who should be classified as a Texas musician. Hartman makes a good case for rock and roll founder Bill Haley given his obvious debt to Western swing as a Pennsylvania bandleader in the late '40s and his down-and-out death in Harlingen in 1981. Not so convincing is the inclusion of rockers Stephen Stills, Sly Stone, and Don Henley, all of whom were born in Texas, but are more closely associated with California. Buck Owens is in the same category, despite his ongoing influence on a host of Austin-based musicians like the Derailers and Jesse Dayton. But how about some coverage of Elvis, whose numerous Texas gigs during his early days on the Louisiana Hayride gave him invaluable experience and directly encouraged youths like Buddy Holly?

The late, great Doug Sahm sang that "you just can't live in Texas if don't have a lot of soul." Gary Hartman has written a book of undeniable excellence that explains why Texas music is such an essential expression of this state's history and soul.

Lone Star College-Kingwood

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Catholicism in the American West: A Rosary of Hidden Voices. Edited By Roberto R. Treviño and Richard V. Francaviglia. Introduction By Steven M. Avella. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007. Pp. 184. Preface, introduction, list of contributors. ISBN 9781585446216, \$29.95 cloth.)

A reviewer of books on history sometimes is asked to assess a tome that, in his or her reading of the work, emerges as not only a significant contribution to the world of scholarship, but is also a piece of writing compelling to read. This is the experience the present reviewer enjoyed as he probed the substance of *Catholicism in the American West: A Rosary of Hidden Voices*. Father Steven M. Avella, author of the publication's introduction, and the six contributors to the book have given readers a penetrating picture of aspects of the recent past and the Catholic presence not only in the Southwest, but the entire American West.

The six essays make an outstanding effort to enlighten a nationwide readership mainly exposed to publications that offer weak coverage of Catholicism. This is particularly true where books fail to give enough attention to Catholic life as it has grown beyond the Hispanic heritage in the American Southwest and the West in general in more recent years. The work focuses on not only ethnic history, but also highlights personages, movements, and other themes that have received little attention from the public as well as within the Catholic world.

This book grew from lectures that four of the contributors offered on March