

# THURSDAY 29 MAY 2025

## Pre-Keynote Sessions

### 10:00 AM REGISTRATION OPENS

Bring your instrument. Pick a little if you will.

### 11:45 – 12:45 PM LUNCH

Luncheon Talk: Chet Atkins: Mr. Guitar!'

Dr Don Cusic. Belmont University, Nashville, TN

### 1:15 – 2:45 PM Dr. Paula Bishop, Presiding

**Dr. Holly Riley. Middle Tennessee State University. Murfreesboro, Tennessee.**  
**“Broadway Bars and Country Stars: Country Music’s Celebrity Capitalism.”**

This presentation explores the intersections of end-stage capitalism and celebrity iconography through an analysis of bars and venues owned by country music artists. From multi-destination empires like Dollywood and Margaritaville to the expanding series of artist-branded venues in and beyond Lower Broadway, the star-owned country bar provides intriguing insight into how the industry brands its own celebrity capitalism. Through and beyond music, bars like Lainey Wilson’s “Bell Bottoms Up Bar,” Dierks Bentley’s “Whiskey Row,” and Kid Rock’s “Big Ass Honky Tonk & Rock ‘n’ Roll Steakhouse” perpetuate country music’s symbiotic music-tourism industry and continually define the recognizable symbols of the genre through coding and branding.

**Dr. T. Alan Holmes. East Tennessee State University. Johnson City, Tennessee.**  
**“How Petty Country Defines Country.”**

In her liner notes to *Petty Country: A Country Music Celebration of Tom Petty* (2024), essayist Holly Gleason writes, “Tom Petty wasn’t a country artist, that goes without saying.” However, by 2024, the country industry had several opportunities to attempt to define country as a genre. In 2023, Luke Combs shook up the charts by covering Tracy Chapman’s “Fast Car,” a contemporary folk song originally released in 1988, and earning it both “single of the year” and “song of the year” at the 2023 Country Music Association Awards. The same year, Dolly Parton declared herself a rock star and released a Dolly-ized rock album by November, after initially resisting induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame the previous year. In March 2024, Beyoncé released *Cowboy Carter*, a country/Americana mix presenting numerous genre variations on the concept of country music. *Petty Country* provides a sample of how contemporary country defines itself and, at times, Tom Petty’s songs, as country songs. Through note-for-note emulation, genre-associated instrumentation, or, in some cases, dramatic reinterpretation, the contributing artists of *Petty Country* challenge listeners to reconsider their notions of what “country” means.

**\*\* All Times are Central Daylight Time (GMT-5)**

**Dilan Bat-haee. University of Georgia. Athens, Georgia. “Join the Boys in Blue: Anti-Confederate Sentiment in Country Music.”**

Contrary to popular belief, country artists can achieve and maintain commercial success while singing anti-Confederate songs and advocating for racial equality. In her top-20 hit from 1974, Tanya Tucker belts the title of her song “I believe the South is gonna rise again” in the chorus, unexpectedly adding “but not the way we thought it would back then.” While many country musicians have promoted the Lost Cause with pro-Confederate lyricism, a number of artists have shown support for the Union Army and its broader war aims in America’s bloodiest conflict. Lyrical analysis and oral history interviews reveal that country musicians, from Steve Earle to old-time banjoist Frank Proffitt, have released toe-tapping songs glorifying the efforts of Union soldiers fighting against rebels in the Southland. Similar to classic country star Tanya Tucker, contemporary country artist Corey Smith and others call for racial reconciliation and a move in Southern society away from deification of Confederate insignia and memory. During the most recent racial reckoning occurring in American society in 2020, the Dixie Chicks and Lady Antebellum famously ditched their respective “Old South” monikers for band names without Confederate-adjacent titles. Throughout the evolution of country music, from its hillbilly roots to modern pop-influenced productions, a wide-ranging list of country singers have portrayed the Union war effort in a positive light, bolstering arguments that racially progressive thought has a home in the genre.

**2:45 - 3:00 PM      Break**

**Donna J. Baker. Northwestern State University of Louisiana. Natchitoches, Louisiana. “A Woman’s History of Hank Williams.”**

With the recent publication of *A Women’s History of The Beatles* (2021) by Christine Barrett-Feldman, and *Mary Climbs In: The Journeys of Bruce Springsteen’s Women Fan* (2023) by Lorraine Mangione and Donna Luff, and following 2023’s centennial celebrations across the American South, it seems to be an appropriate time to apply a feminist perspective to Hank Williams. The large volume of Williams scholarship rivals that of the aforementioned rock ‘n’ roll icons despite his brief period of productivity and popularity, but like studies on The Beatles and Springsteen, this research has been conducted predominately by men. Still, this body of work is large and robust enough to support applications of gender studies and feminist theory, as well as textual analysis and other digital humanities methods to see what new can be learned about this significant figure of American vernacular music.

**Mary Ann Conway. Independent Scholar. “Weldon Myrick: On the Stage and in the Studio.”**

Weldon Myrick came to Nashville after starting his country music career in the heart of Texas. As soon as he arrived in Nashville, Weldon quickly embarked on one of the most legendary and prolific careers in music history as a pedal steel guitar player. After moving to Nashville in 1963, it was not long before his extraordinary talent in the studio was revered by

the top names in the Country music business. Weldon's sound on the pedal steel helped launch Country music stars and careers and produced countless number one hits from the recording studios in Nashville. It has been said that Weldon played on more number one hits than any other steel player in country music. I will present documentation from the archives at the Country Music Hall of Fame from some of those recording sessions as well as firsthand accounts and research regarding his studio work. Simultaneous to his career in the recording studio by day, Weldon appeared on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry on his pedal steel guitar as a sideman in the Opry House band by night. Before long, Weldon Myrick was a draw for many fans and peers who wanted to see him in person, and witness the playing of the musician who created magic in the recording studio. With Opry footage, research and firsthand accounts I will present a look at the Grand ole Opry stage graced by Weldon Myrick. A day in the life of Weldon Myrick may have started in the recording studio, but it ended many nights on the Opry stage.

#### **4:00 - 4:15 PM     Break**

##### **Dr. Tim Dodge. Auburn University. Auburn, Alabama. "Bill Haley: Country Artist."**

Best known as a founding father of Rock 'n' Roll for "Rock Around the Clock" and other hits in the pivotal years of 1955-1956, Bill Haley's career as a country singer and recording artist in the 1940's and early 1950's is largely unknown. This presentation will explore the country side of Haley up through his initial forays into what would soon be known as Rock 'n' Roll. While never making the charts, Haley's country recordings are quite appealing and should not be forgotten.

##### **Brian Peterson. Shasta College. Chico, California. New Sounds from the Lone Star State: The Otwell Twins, Lawrence Welk, and Country Music Covers in Commercial Television, 1977-1982."**

A staple of popular television in the twentieth century, The Lawrence Welk Show (1955-1982) included country music as a featured dimension in its regular personnel and repertoire. Early artists, such as Lynn Anderson (1947-2015) and Clay Hart (1936-1992), provided a consistent presence of this music in the program. A significant affirmation of this music's vitality to Welk's audience occurred with the decision to expand staffing following the departure of Anderson in 1968 and Hart's egress in 1975. This resulted in the new wave of Welk country artists invited into his "musical family" to continue regular country music performance in the show, including two brothers, Roger and David Otwell (b. 1956), from Tulia, Texas. Billed as "the Otwell Twins," their singing and guitar skills became a regular dimension to the cast of The Lawrence Welk Show, notably their featured work in a vocal quartet with the Aldridge Sisters, Sherry (b. 1951) and Sheila (b. 1956). A critical inquiry into their professional career raises questions about the efficacy of "the champagne style" and Welk's platform in popular syndication as a launching for musical talent associated with "champagne music" beyond into more focused country idioms. Was this period of professional exposure helpful to the Otwell Twins in their post-Welk career after the end of

the show in 1982? This paper explores the rise of the Roger and David Otwell and examines the potential yet limits of crossover from Welk's empire to commercial country music.

## **5:30 PM      REGISTRATION & SOCIAL HOUR**

Bring your instrument!

## **7:00 - 8:30 PM      KEYNOTE EVENT**

### **Celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Black Banjo Gathering**

#### **Speaker: Dom Flemons**

Dom Flemons is known as "The American Songster®" since his repertoire covers over one hundred years of American roots music. Flemons is a folk musician, black country artist, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, music scholar, historian, actor, slam poet, record collector, curator, podcaster, cultural commentator, influencer, and the creator, host, and producer of the American Songster Radio Show on WSM in Nashville, TN. He is the Co-Founder and original member of the groundbreaking Carolina Chocolate Drops, the first ever black string band to win a GRAMMY Award. Over the past 25 years, he has received major awards, gained world-wide media recognition and has become one of the most influential and highly decorated voices in American roots music.

**The keynote presentation will include a live demonstration of a wax cylinder recording.**

**Made possible with the generous support of the Center for Popular Music and SongData.**

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## **FRIDAY 30 MAY 2025**

### **7:30 AM      REGISTRATION & BREAKFAST**

### **8:30-9:30 AM      Erica Barker, Presiding**

**Dr. Gregory Hansen. Arkansas State University. State University, Arkansas.  
"Country Music and Legends Within Storyworlds."**

Ample scholarship in folklore explores relationships between legends and ballads. Discussion of relationships between legend and belief can provide useful resources for understanding the continued appeal of legendary figures within country music. Particularly useful perspectives include considerations of various genres of legend within ways that listeners engage in storyworlds. Two particularly salient subgenres of legend that are prominent in country music allow us to enter into the idea of a storyworld. The first genre is

**\*\* All Times are Central Daylight Time (GMT-5)**

the personal legend, and the second is the supernatural legend. Personal legends tend to narrate elements of the life of folk heroes, who often are cast as legendary figures. Supernatural legends may include personal legends, but they feature a wider range of topics and include stories of mystical characters. Ghost stories, for example, are common forms of supernatural legends. This conference presentation focuses on legends within country music that represent these two different genres and illustrate ways to connect to larger storyworlds. The first includes legends connected to John Luther “Casey” Jones, and the second consists of various legends and memorates associated with the Allen House in Monticello, Arkansas. Consideration of William Saunders’ “The Ballad of Casey Jones” within the wider context of museum exhibits shows how connections between history and story are resonant within wider storyworlds elicited through expressive culture. Stories associated with the death of Ladell Allen Bonner establish the Allen House as one of the most haunted sites in America. The story of her tragic death is preserved within belief, oral narratives, and house tours as well as in Lisa Coons’ song “The Tale of Ladell.” Both of these tunes comes to life when visitors imagine them within the sites of memory that evoke larger storyworlds.

**Dr. Anna Valcour. Brandeis University. Waltham, Massachusetts. “Everyone but Black Lung’s Done Turned Him Away: A Phenomenological and Voice-Based Analysis of “Black Lung” by Hazel Dickens.”**

Sheltered from the cries of the dying, the asking hand too weak to reach out, the blackened lungs scarred by decades of coal dust, the boss man closed the door. Following the death of her eldest brother, Hazel Dickens composed “Black Lung” in 1969, to give him the voice he was refused in life. During the 1960s, West Virginian coal miners and their families fought for the necessity of health and safety regulations as well as fair compensation from the mining companies who sought to delegitimize the disease, inculcate the miners, and ignore their suffering. Listening to Dickens’s hauntingly high belt in “Black Lung,” I am gripped by the movement of the piece and the multivalent sensations of acoustic space. But how does Hazel Dickens’s voice create this unique soundscape that aurally encompasses place? How do we experience the emotionality expressed in the singer’s voice? For me, the sonic effect of her vocality, dialecticism, and ornamentation envelops the listener in a disembodied yet extremely personal space as she confronts the horrors of black lung, and the desperate alienation and dehumanization felt by working-class coal miners. For this presentation, I will be drawing heavily on the analytical practices of Aaron Fox’s investigation of country music and vocality, Steven Feld’s acoustemology, and Victoria Malawey’s analysis of vocal delivery in popular music. The compelling sincerity of Dickens’s grievances, the rage spurred by injustice and neglect, and the urgent demand for social change, I argue are all present in her vocal techniques and emotionality.

**9:30-9:45 AM Break**

**Si Kahn. Independent Scholar and Activist, North Carolina. “Oral Transmission and Modification of Traditional Songs.”**

**Dr. Greg Reish. Middle Tennessee State University. Murfreesboro, Tennessee.**  
**“Get Back to the Country: Rethinking Neil Young’s Old Ways.”**

Steeped in Nashville Sound production practices, featuring duets with Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, and backed by an A-list team of Nashville session musicians, Neil Young’s 1985 album *Old Ways* is usually viewed as one in his string of perplexing “genre exercise” releases of that decade, and in the context of contemporaneous legal battles between the enigmatic artist and his record company. But unlike Young’s preceding diversions into abrasive hard rock, sequencer driven electronica, and cosplay rockabilly, *Old Ways* also constitutes a return to form for the country-rock pioneer, and a continuation of deep-rooted country elements in Young’s songwriting and performance style. In this paper I offer an all-too-brief overview of Young’s country music stylistic core and reassess the meanings of *Old Ways* at that critical juncture in his career.

**10:45 - 11:00 AM      Break**

## **11:00 AM The Charles K. Wolfe Memorial Panel**

### **Celebrating Diane Pecknold’s contributions to country scholarship**

2025 marks the 100 year anniversary of the Grand Ole Opry — an institution that has played a central role in the evolution of the country music industry. In acknowledgement of this centenary, ICMC is celebrating the contributions of Diane Pecknold, whose work on country radio — including the Grand Ole Opry — has been central to country music studies.

In conversation with **Jewly Hight**, **Diane Pecknold** will join us for an intimate conversation reflecting on her foundational research for *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry*, a book that reshaped our understanding of the commercialism and business of the Nashville-based industry, and the role of radio at the center of its model. They will also delve into her work to edit the collection *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, and reflect on how both projects have influenced scholars and continue to shape our understanding of the industry past and present.

## **12:00 PM              Awards Luncheon**

The Chet Flippo Award for Excellence in Country Music Journalism.

Honoree: **Natalie Weiner**

The Belmont University Curb Music Industry Award for Country Music Book of the Year.

Honoree: **Cold War Country: How Nashville’s Music Row and the Pentagon Created the Sound of American Patriotism** by **Joseph M. Thompson**

**\*\* All Times are Central Daylight Time (GMT-5)**

**1:30-3:00 PM**

**Dr. Kristine McCusker, Presiding**

**Barry Mazor. Journalist and Independent Scholar. Nashville, Tennessee. "The Everly Brothers: Sixty Years of Shifting Relations to Country."**

My new book, "Blood Harmony: The Everly Brothers Story" will be published a few weeks after ICMC 2025. Based on my past several years of research on the topic, I will trace both the evolution of their music's involvement with country and Phil and Don Everly's shifting commentary on that theme--sometimes solidly in agreement, at other times divergent. From early childhood right through their late performances together, over a 60-year period of performing, recording and writing, their lasting identification with country music carried on through different musical trends, the evolution of their career, changes in their audience and changes in country music itself. I will offer a swift overview of how that played out.

**Erika Barker and Julia Underkoffler. Birthplace of Country Music Museum. Bristol, Virginia. "Country Music, Comedy, and the Small Screen: Minnie Pearl, Tennessee Ernie Ford, and Roni Stoneman."**

After World War II, television grew at an exponential rate. From the 1940s through the 1960s, advanced technology, greater disposable income, and the increase in the number of stations helped television to become the era's primary mass medium. Television allowed country music to reach a wide audience, and popular shows such as I Love Lucy and The Andy Griffith Show had regular segments featuring country musicians. Three of the era's country performers – Tennessee Ernie Ford, Roni Stoneman, and Minnie Pearl – became crossover successes on television -- Ford as the host of a variety show and Stoneman and Pearl as performers on other shows. Through a blending of musical performances with comedy sketches and other acts, Ford's variety show was reminiscent of early vaudeville, and its skits – along with programs like Hee Haw – included characters that reflected common Appalachian stereotypes, especially in the areas of speech and dress. This session will explore the impact of country music and comedy on the small screen through these three performers.

**Dr. Charlie Dahan, Middle Tennessee State University. Murfreesboro, Tennessee. "Treated Wrong Blues: Preserving the Gennett Records / Starr Piano Industrial Complex in Richmond, Indiana."**

This presentation explores the preservation efforts surrounding the Starr-Gennett industrial complex in Richmond, Indiana. The site was the home to Gennett Records, a pivotal label in the early development of country music. Though only one original structure remains, this site is significant as the birthplace of iconic artists, including Gene Autry, Louis Armstrong, Charley Patton, Hoagy Carmichael, Bradley Kincaid, Lawrence Welk, and Guy Lombardo. Gennett's contribution to the growth of country music with records by Ernest Stoneman, Uncle Dave Macon, Fiddlin' Doc Roberts, Taylor's Kentucky Boys, Vernon Dalhart, and hundreds of others, alongside its production of blues, jazz, and early American popular music, solidifies its place in American music history. The ongoing efforts to save and interpret this space reflect broader cultural movements to preserve music heritage sites. This presentation will highlight the importance of the Gennett Walk of Fame, which honors

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the artists and recordings that shaped American music, offering a tangible link to the past. It will make a case for the physical preservation and use of the remaining structure, arguing that the site deserves recognition as a cultural landmark. By maintaining and interpreting these spaces, we ensure that Gennett's contribution to country music, and American music more broadly, is not forgotten.

### **3:00- 3:30 PM      Break**

#### **LaDawn Fuhr. Arkansas State University. Jonesboro, Arkansas. "Six Degrees of Delta Musical DNA: Exploring the Country Roots of Tami Neilson."**

Tami Neilson is a Canadian born New Zealander who, according to No Depression, "is at the forefront of the women who are taking back country music..." and she's doing it with a legacy of performance in her veins. Tami is a singer, songwriter, musician, and producer who grew up in The Neilson's, a family band consisting of her parents and two brothers, the latter who still perform with her today. Touring Canada and the United States, Tami and family opened for Arkansawyer Johnny Cash, Tennessean Kitty Wells, and Texan Roy Orbison, among others. Tami forged a deep friendship with Cash sister Joanne and her husband, the late Dr. Harry Yates, and appeared on their radio show whenever they were in Nashville, yielding a powerful duet between Tami and Joanne called "Sister Cash." The song appears on Tami's 2014 debut album, "Red Dirt." Ralph Stanley said to get that kind of musical DNA it should be "borned in ya" and Tami has proven it can be "borned" anywhere.

Since 2014, Tami has recorded nine studio albums, with her sixth studio album, "Sassafrass" inspired by Arkansawyer Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Alabamian Big Mama Thornton. Tami has been the recipient of multiple New Zealand music awards for Best Country Album (2009, 2010, 2012, 2015), New Zealand Country Music Awards Best Female Artist (2010, 2011, 2014), and the coveted Silver Scroll Award in 2014. Tami is also a friend of Texan Willie Nelson, with a hit duet, appearances at Luck, and a new album of Nelson cover songs titled "Neilson Sings Nelson." Additionally, Tami appeared at the 2024 Patsy Cline Tribute at the Ryman, Americanafest over multiple years, and made her Grand Ole Opry debut in September 2024, alongside Arkansawyer Ashley McBryde who designed a special t-shirt honoring Tami to commemorate the occasion. This piece will examine the Delta musical DNA that resonates in Tami Nielson, her music, and the impact she is having on modern country music worldwide.

#### **Joe Weed. Country Music Artist and Scholar. Los Gatos, California. "Tacos and prune Juice: A Forbidden Recipe?"**

I submitted this piece to a film director for use in "Heart's Delight," a 45-minute film about the orchard heritage of Silicon Valley, where I lived from 1956 to 1977. Before the emergence of the companies that caused it to be re-named "Silicon Valley," the valley was known as the "Valley of Hearts' Delight," its air redolent with the flowers and fruits from prunes and apricots.

The director was enthusiastic about using "Vals Buena Vista" during a segment about Armando Vallín, a Mexican-American who had worked for an orchard farming family for over 40 years. Mr. Vallín put his children through college as a working father, and speaks fondly of the family that hired him over many decades. In the film, he speaks only in Spanish.



During a pre-publication review of the film, an editor told the director that he should remove the “Vals Buena Vista,” as it was a cultural mis-appropriation. It cast Mr Vallín in a negative light, as though he embodied a traditional anglo-American stereotype of a Mexican peasant sleeping by a cactus, his face covered by an enormous sombrero.

Was this a valid criticism? Had I, the composer and producer, somehow transgressed when bringing together musical elements from diverse cultures to paint a warm and positive feeling?

Had the director erred in choosing this piece to accompany Armando Vallín’s segment in which he describes his decades of work and his successful economic outcomes? Does the music paint him as a caricature?

Was the critic bringing their own prejudices and preconceptions to this case of a brown person being featured while Vals Buena Vista played in the background?

#### **4:30 Break**

travel to Columbia A Studio

**5:30 - 7:00 PM – Picking, eating, and socializing before the panel.**

## **7:00 PM Special Conference Event**

*Located in Historic Columbia A Recording Studio at 34 Music Square E (parking in back)*

### **They Came to Nashville**

**Panelists: Will Day, Charles Alexander, Victoria Banks**

Country music has long been a global art form. Despite narratives that position the genre as uniquely “American”, researchers have long pointed to the genre’s multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and geographically diverse roots. Artists from around the world continue to contribute to the genre — many traveling to Nashville, TN to collaborate, record, and build their careers. Join us at Columbia A for a panel with three singer-songwriters who will discuss their passion for country music and journeys to Nashville.

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# SATURDAY 31 MAY 2025

**8:30--9:30 AM     Dr. Holly Riley, Presiding**

**Dr. Mike Longan. Valparaiso University. Valparaiso, Indiana. “Fabricating Experiential Authenticity Through Live Country Music.”**

Richard Peterson’s production of culture explanation for the “fabrication of authenticity” is inadequate for studying live music events because it focuses upon the industrial production of representations of authenticity and neglects authenticity generated through musical experiences. This paper amends Peterson’s approach by borrowing the concepts of objective and experiential authentication from literature in tourism studies and incorporating observations about the importance of space for cultural production from cultural geography. Objective authentication involves singular cultural producers (artists, labels, critics, etc.) who represent music as authentic and can occur most anyplace. By contrast, experiential authentication requires a space where an audience can gather and share their emotional responses to music. The amended framework is used to interpret observations collected at concerts and festivals in Indiana, Nashville, and Australia that show how location, distance, and social space influence the fabrication of both objective and experiential authenticity. While rural locations readily facilitate objective and experiential authentication of country performances, urban festivals in Nashville and Tamworth rely upon landmarks and monuments associated with country music history as well as festival branding to overcome their locations’ lack of objective rural authenticity. Concerts and festivals produce experiential authenticity by reducing the distance between audience and artist through musical performances, fan club parties, and meet-and-greet opportunities. In large concert venues, production designers generate experiential authenticity by using lighting, video, and other theatrical techniques that heighten the artist’s emotional message and that envelop the audience with spectacle. Finally, performers communicate with and involve the audience as co-performers to produce a social space that experientially authenticates their music and artistry. Because of their experiences of live performance, audiences embrace music as authentically country that critics would otherwise dismiss as inauthentic.

**Dr. Ralf Von Appen. University of Music and Performing Arts. Vienna, Austria. Country Music and the Quest for Authenticity in Germany.”**

This paper examines the German engagement with U.S. country music, emphasizing the role of cultural authenticity and the distinct relationship between the two German states and the United States. Since the post-war period, the fascination with country music has been intertwined with a broader interest in American culture. For German fans and musicians, country music has come to represent both an aspiration for connection to the United States and a challenge to localize and make the genre relevant to their own experiences.

A central theme in this exploration is the attribution and construction of ‘authenticity.’ Early German fans, particularly listeners of the American Forces Network (AFN), sought to become ‘authentic fans’ by understanding the genre’s history, social background, and repertoire. Musicians, such as the Berlin Ramblers, aimed to reproduce the sound of their U.S. counterparts. However, for some, especially in West Germany, authenticity also meant adapting country music to reflect local realities. In the 1970s, Gunter Gabriel, a key figure in this movement, rejected English lyrics, seeing them as inauthentic to German life. His work marked a turning point, where country music in Germany began to reflect more personal and localized themes, emphasizing honesty and self-representation.

Soon, a divide emerged between country-influenced Schlager music, which prioritized mass appeal and emotional positivity, and a more roots-oriented form of country music, which sought authenticity in both its lyrical and musical elements. Many fans turned to bluegrass, valuing its instrumental complexity. Bluegrass’s acoustic nature and connection to tradition reinforced its image as a purer form of the genre, distinguishing it from the commercialized Schlager.

This paper argues that the quest for authenticity has been key to shaping German country music, influencing its development and reflecting broader cultural tensions between popular and niche music forms.

#### **9:30 - 9:45 AM      Break**

##### **Dr. Ben Atkinson. University of Leuven. Leuven, Belgium. “Every Girl in This Town: The Women of the Nashville Country Music Community 1990-2024.”**

This paper presents the accumulation of four years of PhD research, the first ethnomusicological study focusing on the lived experience of women in the Nashville country music community. My thesis is informed by the potential myriad opportunities for women performers in the genre during the 1990s, and the conservative reframing of country music in the early 2000s, alongside issues of cultural and social change, the development of new technology and the transformation of traditional mass media. I consider issues of gender, race, and age discrimination; the impact of socio-economic change, women’s and gender movements; gatekeeping in its myriad forms; and the rise of social media. My thesis explores the ways in which the country music industry controls opportunities for women to build careers in the genre, the extent to which the turbulent landscape of today’s music industry and a fragmented Nashville community differs from the past, and what this might tell us about the future.

##### **Dr. Taylor Ackley. Brandeis University. Waltham, Massachusetts. “Where Can Grass Grow?: Virtuosity, Inequality, and Community in Northeastern Bluegrass.”**

Every Tuesday evening at Lily P’s it gets so crowded near the stage that strangers share tables where they munch on fried chicken and sip beer while taking in the roaring sound of banjos, fiddles, and mandolins playing bluegrass at a breakneck pace. Just below the amplified sound of the featured band, you can hear a jam at the other end of the restaurant

where musicians of all levels take turns leading a group of close to a dozen folks through bluegrass, country and folk standards. Outside there are two or three other similar circles of players. If those get too crowded, another jam forms in the hallway behind the kitchen. There are few places in the United States where such enthusiastic crowds of bluegrass lovers gather each week, but the fact that this happens in Cambridge Massachusetts, just across the Charles River from downtown Boston is all the more surprising.

In this paper I will examine the history of bluegrass in Boston. Drawing on my embedded ethnographic research in the New York and Boston bluegrass scenes, and scholarship by Tim Newby, Kip Lornell, and Fred Bartenstein, I ask what makes certain places fertile for bluegrass scenes to develop? By tracing the lives and careers of the Lilly Brothers, Don Stover, and Joe Val, this paper considers how music facilitates possibilities for connection across cultural boundaries, while also revealing how these collaborations exist within structures of inequality. Ultimately I argue that bluegrass in the Northeast created a network of exchange between northern and southern artists which both exemplified and reshaped class-based privilege and the politics of authenticity in American roots music.

## **10:45 - 11:00 AM Break**

### **Dr. Paul Nail. University of Central Arkansas. Conway, Arkansas. "Some Distinctive Features of a New Book In Three Volumes: A Psychological Biography of Hiram "Hank" Williams."**

At least 15 biographies on Hank Williams have been published to date. Still, a weakness they all share, I submit, is that none has given sufficient weight to the importance of early childhood experiences in shaping the extremely driven, hardworking, and successful singer/songwriter Hank became. In this vein, a key event is that Hank's parents separated when he was only six, leaving him to be raised primarily by his dominating and controlling mother, Lillie Williams, without the countervailing force and stability a fulltime dad would likely have provided. Consequently, Hank developed a lifelong dependency on strong females. Both of Hank's wives, Audrey & Billie Jean, ". . . were feisty, sharp-tongued, and ambitious. Lillie, of course, was precisely that, so the pop-Freudian conclusion is obvious" (Escott, 2004, p. 36).

A related feature of Hank's childhood is evidence that his emotional needs were largely neglected. Thus, tragically, Hank never developed what is widely regarded by psychologists as the key to long-term mental health and stability in life, the core belief that "I am a valuable person" (Peck, 1978, p, 24). Much of Hank's drive to be "the top man in his profession" (Jim Denny, cited in Linn, 1957, January, p. 89) can be understood as compensation, his striving to prove to himself and others, "I am a competent and valuable person."

Based on numerous informed interviews, I propose that Hank & Audrey were largely complementary in temperament, with Hank being an Artistic Type, Audrey a Fieldmarshal Type (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, 2019). This complementarity was probably a strong reason for their mutual attraction, as the bucolic spirit of the Artist seems naturally drawn

to the practical and organized Fieldmarshal, while the Fieldmarshal is enamored with the Artist's "... tranquility ensconced next to Walden pond" (Keirse & Bates, 1984)!

**Dr. Joel Schwindt. Boston Conservatory of Berklee. Boston, Massachusetts. "Be Ye Separate / Go Ye Into All the World": Authenticity in Country Music, and the Neo-Evangelical / Fundamentalist Split**

Ubiquitous manifestations of Christian rhetoric and semiotics in country music have led some scholars to suggest that manifestations of Salvation Theology serve as markers of authenticity (e.g., Ellison 1995; Grossman 2002; Fillingim 2003). Yet to receive sustained attention, however, are the theological roots of the most frequently debated topic on "the real" in this genre, namely, whether the incorporation of "worldly" popular styles renders it inauthentic. This disputation parallels a theological debate from the mid-twentieth century that led Neo-Evangelicals to split from the Fundamentalists (two groups that have formed the core of country music fandom throughout its history), which centered on the latter's practice of separating themselves from "the world" (i.e., "false Christians," other religions), based on the Pauline exhortation, "be ye separate [from the world]" (II Corinthians 6:17), while the former embraced the use of popular modalities to evangelize, citing Jesus's command, "go ye into all the world [to preach the gospel]" (Mark 16:15).

Per Peterson (1997d), the corresponding debate in country music reached a high point in response to Music Row's promotion the pop-laden "Nashville Sound" around mid-century, which they to "evangelize" (my term) new listeners. This distinction is well illustrated in the careers of Roy Acuff and Patsy Cline, with Acuff maintaining his hillbilly image throughout his career by refusing to adopt new, pop-infused styles—including Hollywood's crooning "singing cowboys," or the jazz-inspired Western Swing style—whereas Cline's career was managed by Music Row producer Owen Bradley, who insisted she sing pop-styled songs, leading to a level of crossover success never before achieved by a country artist. We therefore see how the genre's most common debate on authenticity reflects a key, contemporaneous theological debate in a way that would be clear to those within these overlapping religious and musical communities, but hidden from "the world" around them.

**12:00 LUNCH**

**Lunch Speaker: Dr. Michael Nadler. Independent Scholar. Albuquerque, New Mexico. "Bob Dylan: Riding The Skyline and Outlaw Ballads."**

From his earliest days as a performer and songwriter, Bob Dylan sang and wrote about outlaws. His country music roots were apparent from the very beginning of his life as a musician. As Dylan moved far beyond being folk music's spokesman for his generation, one aspect of his evolving persona in the 1960s was devoted to being an outlaw, as a writer and as a "song and dance man." Dylan came to Nashville in 1966 at the height of his burgeoning career to record, and significantly, a number of Nashville musicians, some his age and others who were well-seasoned veterans of Nashville's studios, contributed to his landmark album "Blonde On Blonde." By the close of the 1960s, Dylan would devote his country music sensibilities to albums like "John Wesley Harding" and "Nashville Skyline," and in many songs ranging from "Billy," from the "Pat Garrett & Billy The Kid" soundtrack to "Desire's" "Romance in Durango." My paper will explore the myriad musical expressions of

Dylan in the realm of country music. These explorations will highlight the country outlaw themes of his songs with special attention afforded to the extraordinary Nashville country musicians like Johnny Cash, with whom Dylan established profound musical connections.

## **Sundry and Door Prizes**

### **1:30--3:00 AM     Sharon Thomason, Presiding**

#### **Dr. David Pruett. University of Massachusetts. Boston, Massachusetts. "Hanks Williams Jr.'s A Star-Spangled Country Party (1984) From Conception to Its Showtime Premiere."**

In 1984 the Showtime Network aired Hank Williams Jr.'s "A Star-Spangled Country Party," which was the first major country music concert ever broadcast on premium cable television. The event had been the brainchild of Marc Oswald, a relative newcomer to the country music industry but someone with considerable accolades, having promoted Alabama's first tour in 1980 and who, by 1982, had been promoting events for and working closely with Hank Williams Jr., Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings, and a significant number of other country music headliners. The filming of A Star-Spangled Country Party had taken place aboard the active-duty U.S.S. Constellation aircraft carrier docked at Coronado Island in San Diego Bay and additionally featured Alabama, Waylon Jennings, Jessi Colter, Earl Thomas Conley, Mel McDaniel, and Sylvia with legendary Marty Pasetta (long-time producer/director for the Grammys and Academy Awards) serving as director and executive producer. This paper explores "A Star-Spangled Country Party" from the behind-the-scenes perspective of Oswald, himself, providing insight into its conception, planning, execution, and premiere, including little known facts from the event's partial funding by the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang to the near-death experiences on set. This research provides a snapshot of the commercial country music industry from a unique, insider perspective, illuminating how top-down decisions are made, resulting in the production, dissemination, and consumption of commercial country music.

#### **Dr. Mikael Backman. Lulea University of Technology. Lulea, Sweden. "Nashville Recording Project."**

Over the past 50 years, music technology has evolved dramatically, transforming recording methods and outcomes. Today's young music students, growing up in the digital era, are accustomed to high quality home recordings, using a virtually unlimited number of tracks and various software to perfect pitch and timing. However, my experience in my music history classes showed that mere lectures about the working conditions of Nashville session musicians fail to convey why the music sound as it does. To address this, I designed a project aiming for first year bachelor students to record under conditions similar to those of 1960's Nashville session musicians. This project includes training in Nashville Number System notation and ear-training to transcribe chord changes under time pressure. Students also attend music history lectures about the role of the Nashville session

musicians often referred to as the A-team (Stimeling, 2020). The project culminates in a day of recording, where the students record during two three-hour sessions. Students transcribe demos, create arrangements, and record with a progressively tighter timetable. The final song is recorded within 45 minutes from first hearing the demo to completing the recording. I will present documentation from this project, showcasing a hands-on method to help young musicians appreciate and understand the historical working conditions of Nashville A-team musicians recording Country music in the 1960's.

**Dr. Mark Dillon. The Larry Gatlin School of Entertainment Technology at Guilford County Community College. Greensboro, North Carolina. "Were All Born Naked, and the Rest is Drag: Western Wear and Gender Expression in Country Music ."**

In country music, fashion serves as a powerful tool for identity expression, most notably through the flamboyant designs of western wear often worn by country artists. This presentation will explore the role of western wear, highlighting the influence of artists such as Nudie Cohen and his iconic rhinestone-studded suits, cowboy boots, and hats as both a tradition and a medium for challenging and reshaping gender norms. Using visual and cultural analysis, the presentation will examine how country artists like Porter Wagoner, Dolly Parton, and contemporary figures such as Orville Peck and Chapel Roan use clothing to reflect, amplify, or subvert gender conventions in their performances and public personas. The presentation will discuss the dual role of western wear as both a rooted expression of "authentic" country identity and as a site of experimentation and fluidity in gender expression. It will investigate how western wear creates a space where masculinity, femininity, and everything in between can coexist, offering perspectives on the intersections of fashion, performance, and identity in country music.

**3:00 - 3:15 PM      Break**

**Dr. Dana Wiggins. Georgia State University Perimeter College. Atlanta, Georgia. "Plenty Woman Enough to Act Like a Man: Women, Drinks, Drugs and Country Music."**

For a list of country music's hard livin' men, one has to look no further than Hank William Jr's 1981 number one hit, "All My Rowdy Friends (Have Settled Down)". According to Williams, his drinking buddy George Jones was finally "getting' straight," Waylon Jennings was staying home and "lovin' Jesse," while "prissy as a movie star" Johnny Cash "didn't act like he did back in '68." The joking insinuation is that at some point, all of these men changed from known partiers into responsible, sober, adults.

These male musicians gained fame through both their songs and personas, and in many ways their addictions contributed to their successes. But what do we know of the women in country music who drank in honky tonks or sang till the sun came up? For women, this "hard" behavior did not translate into success, in fact, often times it ended careers.

This presentation examines women in country music, their own alcohol and drug use, and how the genre punished or rendered these women invisible. It also discusses women musicians who attached themselves to men with addictions and how they were characterized by country music. Exploring women like Tanya Tucker, Tammy Wynette, Mindy McCready, and Emmylou Harris reveals the boundaries and gendered limitations for women in country music.

**Dr. Toby Martin. University of Sydney. Sydney, Australia “The Songs of Uncle Roger Knox: Telling Aboriginal History Through Country Songwriting.”**

Uncle Roger Knox is a Gomeroi elder, an Aboriginal nation in eastern Australia. He is also a legendary, and award-winning country singer, and a household name to many Aboriginal people. Over the last ten years Uncle Roger has been working on an album of songs with several different songwriters that tells stories from his own personal history: stories that intertwine with and illuminate bigger themes of Australian and Aboriginal history. These issues include growing up on Government Missions, the importance of community, restrictions on freedoms, and his families' experience as part of the Stolen Generations.

This paper will be presented by one of the co-songwriters and co-producers of the album, and long-time collaborator of Uncle Roger's. The paper will look at how these stories have been told as country songs, and the ways in which songwriting and song singing can engage with important historical narratives in a direct and accessible way. Through fictionalisation, craft and convention, country songwriting offers a way of telling stories in a safe way that gives the writer and singer control over the ways the stories are told. Songwriting negotiates the line between person and persona in ways that are creatively satisfying and empowering. Song also enables historical narratives to be heard by a wide audience.

**Christie Lutz. Rutgers University. New Jersey. “Finding Kookie Kay: The Story of a New Jersey Country Musician.”**

This paper looks at a New Jersey musician, Ella Marie Rand, known professionally as Kookie Kay, and considers her role as a woman musician in a male-dominated country and western scene and in a state not known for country music. Hailing from Brooklyn, Kookie settled in the suburban central New Jersey town of Sewaren. Initially she sang and played drums, but taught herself other instruments. As a young woman Kookie worked for Grand Ole Opry member Johnny Paycheck and was an early friend and supporter of Eddie Rabbitt. She taught herself songs she heard on the radio and also wrote her own songs, or cowrote with male collaborators. Kookie recorded in Nashville, but like other New Jersey country musicians of the 1950s-1970s with something of a national reputation, remained in her home state, raising her family. Unlike Kitty Wells and Rose Maddox, who worked the country touring, Kookie worked her own territory, from one end of New Jersey to the other, playing jamborees and radio stations. As a female performer she may have felt a stronger pressure to keep separate the images of her real and performative selves even more so than male musicians. Kookie didn't typically play clubs. As alternative homes for male country and western musicians of the era, clubs and honky tonks may have been less



hospitable for female musicians, so it is telling if women were indeed more likely to perform outside of them. Her collaborations with male writers and musicians and focus on married and family life did not mean she did not have agency over her own career and journey; indeed, it is quite the opposite. This paper will explore Kookie Kay's career, life, and music. It includes research done for a chapter in a proposed book on country music in New Jersey.

## **4:30 PM                      CONFERENCE CONCLUSION**

### **Happy Trails - song leaders Holly Riley and Mark Dillon**

"Some trails are happy ones,  
Others are blue.  
It's the way you ride the trail that counts,  
Here's a happy one for you.  
Happy trails to you,  
Until we meet again.  
Happy trails to you,  
Keep smiling until then.  
Who cares about the clouds when we're together?  
Just sing a song, and bring the sunny weather.  
Happy trails to you,  
Until we meet again."