

THURSDAY 28 MAY 2026

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: TBA

1:15 – 2:45 PM

Dr. Beth Fowler. Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. “Not a Great Women’s Libber”: Frances Williams Preston and Second-Wave Feminist Politics in the Country Music Industry, 1967-1978”

Frances Williams Preston was already widely recognized as one of the first women to work in a leadership position in the country music industry by the time that women’s liberation activists began organizing on a national scale in the late 1960s. Despite her pioneering role, and her assumptions of gender equality in the workplace, she declined to identify as a feminist. The ways that she defined women’s roles in corporate offices, and her presentation as a polished, upper-middle-class professional, often deviated from the gender identities performed by her country music songwriter clients, including Dolly Parton, Tammy Wynette, and Jeannie Seely. And yet her responses to shifting gender expectations during the Second-Wave Women’s Movement both intersected with and challenged those advocated by women country artists during the late 1960s and 1970s. This paper investigates how Preston responded to both feminist expectations and the rise of neoconservatism in country music culture just as her songwriter clients navigated their own complicated relationships to national and Nashville gender politics.

Dr. Kate Ngai. Glasgow Caledonian University. Glasgow, Scotland. ““Have You Talked with Rissi Palmer?”: Artist-Led Archives and Intergenerational Memory”

When researching Black female country artists, I repeatedly heard: “Have you talked with Rissi Palmer?” This question highlights Palmer’s dual role as curator and community builder. While central to current conversations about diversity in country music, her specific labor as a cultural broker has yet to be fully examined.

Since launching Color Me Country Radio in 2020, named after Linda Martell’s 1970 album, Palmer uses interviews and grants to situate emerging artists within forgotten historical lineages. This fosters a distinct knowledge exchange that runs alongside, but operates distinctly from, academic scholarship.

Drawing on Taylor’s (2003) archive/repertoire framework and Caswell’s (2014) counter-archival scholarship, I argue Palmer operates where the industry has failed. She

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

uses the "repertoire" of oral history to document artists suffering "symbolic annihilation" (Caswell 2014), the erasure of marginalized communities from the historical record (p. 27). Palmer accomplishes three forms of intergenerational transfer: historical visibility, practical mentorship, and community solidarity. Her work exposes systematic erasure while demonstrating artist-led recovery. Sustainable representation cannot rely solely on artist resilience; it requires institutions to recognize and support the community-led frameworks actively preserving the genre's history.

**Dr. Phoebe E. Hughes. Binghamton University. Binghamton, New York.
"Female Revenge in Country's Contemporary Age"**

Over the last thirty years, country music has begun to refigure the murder ballad, with some artists drawing on the tropes of the genre to offer either nostalgia laden stories of prison breaks (see Blake Shelton's "Ol' Red" 2001) or tales of women taking revenge on a cheating male partner (see The Chicks, "Goodbye Earl" 1999). These tracks are a modernization of murder balladry traditions; a song form dating back to seventeenth-century Europe, which has long been part of the popular imaginary in Appalachian, country, and blues music of the United States. More often than not, murder ballads depict men committing violent crimes against women, with female performers and experiences removed from the musical practice (Cook, 1994).

Since the 1990s female country acts have been updating murder ballads to include remixed feminist tales of revenge often with an important story of female friendship on the side. Through use of contemporary examples, including Carrie Underwood's "Two Black Cadillacs" (2012), Taylor Swift's "no body, no crime" (2020), this paper traces the shifting female perspectives in contemporary country music. Thinking both with the postfeminist gaze of Taylor Swift's immense stardom and the precarity of being a female country artist in the 21st-century, this presentation poses the question of what it means to make use of a song form like the murder ballad, which frequently valorizes violence against women, in an age where female autonomy is increasingly scrutinized.

2:45 - 3:00 PM Break

3:00 - 4:00 PM

Dustin Dunn. Independent Scholar. Ann Arbor, Michigan. "Searchin' for you": Feminine agency and romantic narratives in the Creation of Patsy Cline."

Patsy Cline's short life and even shorter career captured lighting in a bottle during the years 1960-1963. In this paper, I explore Cline's career through a multimodal lens of analysis (Burns, 2019) that studies the music, production, television appearances and other musical ephemera in order to understand the legend that became Patsy Cline. This understanding aims to show how Patsy Cline had an incredible talent forging her own path as a female country music star at the dawn of the golden age of the Nashville sound, second-wave feminism, and suburbanization mid-century American life. Up to and after her premature death, Cline's work with legendary producer Owen Bradley

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occupies a unique position in country music history. This position forged a path for women of hers and subsequent generations. Artists such as Loretta Lynn and Reba McEntire for example, cite Cline professionally, personally, and musically as influences. (see American Masters' documentary, "Patsy Cline," 2017). Cline's 1957 chart topping hit "Walkin' After Midnight" emboldened American audiences across gender divides with an unapologetic but consumer friendly presentation of romantic agency through first person female narratives of love and loss. No longer was the Hillbilly Maiden and Cowgirl Singer the primary archetype of a country music woman (Van der Wel 2020), but the suburban housewife emerged and would become a model for female artists through the end of the 20th century. Cline's lingering legacy and posthumous recording releases not only show us what might have been, but who she was and wanted to be.

Dr. Michelle Conceison, Middle Tennessee State University. Murfreesboro, TN. "Collecting Material Items of Women Hall of Fame Inductees: From Hazel Dickens and Louise Scruggs to Lynn Morris and Alison Krauss"

One of the highest achievements a musician can attain is to be inducted into a hall of fame – whether within a genre of music, a geographic area, or for overall achievement in music. Many halls of fame are associated with museums erected to educate the public about their area of the music field. Collections at those museums are centered around hall of fame inductees but usually extend beyond that scope to encompass additional artists who are not "hall of famers" but are substantively influential in the field. Some may be inducted in the future. Obtaining material items to tell stories of music halls of fame inductees can be challenging. Museums take multiple approaches to gather items for preservation and display, often working with what they can get within their means and capacity.

With focus on four prominent women inductees of the Bluegrass Hall of Fame and Museum in Owensboro, Kentucky as a jumping off point – Hazel Dickens, Louise Scruggs, Lynn Morris and Alison Krauss – this presentation will examine relevant material items held within the Bluegrass Hall of Fame archive, items on loan to the museum, items that have not yet been identified, found, or attained, and the challenges music museums face telling the stories of prominent women in music. It will also endeavor to touch on perspectives held in music communities about the value of material items, relationships and trends affecting approaches to preservation of legacy, and considerations for future material cultural preservation approaches.

4:00 - 4:15 PM Break

4:15-5:15

Brian Peterson. Shasta College. Chico, California. "An Unexpected Archive: The Dukes of Hazzard, Primetime Television, and a Trove of Popular Country Music, 1979-1981."

This paper explores the brief span of top country music artists making guest performance appearances on The Dukes of Hazzard (Warner Brothers, 1979-1985). A

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staple of late twentieth-century popular culture, this television comedy series featured action stunts, regular car chases, and comedic figures set in a fictional, rural Georgia county. An unexpected audience favorite, writers capitalized on its Southern identity and regional appeal with the creation of “Boss’ Celebrity Speed Trap,” an occasion finale to episodes where corrupt county commissioner, Jefferson Davis “J.D.” Hogg (Sorrell Booke), instructs local sheriff, Roscoe P. Coltrane (James Best), to alter posted speed limit signs to entrap traveling motorists. In the reoccurring sketch, apprehended yet innocent country artists receive the option to sing one song at the Boar’s Nest (the town restaurant and tavern) in lieu of paying any fines or serving any jail time. Approximately twelve, renown country artists or groups from this era appeared on the show, such as The Oak Ridge Boys, Tammy Wynette, Buck Owens, and Dottie West, resulting in an exciting legacy of studio-produced, vintage television recordings of great music and performances. A brief survey, rich in selected media examples (including some fun surprises), comprises the basis of this paper with concluding remarks about the relationship of broadcasting and country music with authenticity, marketing, and commercial media.

Dr. Mark Dillon. The Larry Gatlin School of Entertainment Technology at Guilford County Community College. Greensboro, North Carolina. “Fords, Cadillacs, and Hillbilly Music: The Automobile as Symbolism and Identity in Country Music.”

From Hank Williams’s “Hot-Rod Ford” to Luke Combs’s cover of Tracy Chapman’s “Fast Car,” the automobile has long been one of country music’s most enduring symbols—representing freedom, aspiration, and identity. This presentation traces the evolution of the car and truck motif in American country music from the postwar era to the present, exploring how mechanical mobility mirrors emotional and social mobility in the rural imagination. Drawing on lyrical analysis, chart data, and visual culture, the study examines how early “hot-rod” and truck-driving songs of the 1950s and 1960s articulated working-class masculinity, how the pickup truck emerged as a stage prop and cultural shorthand for authenticity in the 1990s, and how contemporary artists—from female singer-songwriters to alt-country storytellers—reimagine the vehicle as a site of autonomy, escape, or critique. Ultimately, the paper argues that the car in country music functions as a metaphorical engine of American self-definition, carrying the listener from the mythic open road of the postwar dream to the congested highways of 21st-century identity politics.

5:30 PM REGISTRATION & SOCIAL HOUR

Bring your instrument!

7:00 - 8:30 PM KEYNOTE EVENT

From Census to Solution: How Data Is Driving Policy Changes to Make Music City More Music Friendly

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

Speaker: Jamie Kent

In 2024, the Greater Nashville Music Census captured one of the most comprehensive snapshots ever assembled of the people, pressures, and possibilities shaping Music City's creative ecosystem. But the real story is what happened next.

This keynote explores how five key findings from the census moved beyond research and into action, informing new policies, pilot programs, partnerships, and funding strategies designed to make Nashville a more sustainable place for musicians, venues, and music workers to live, create, and do business. From musician parking solutions and capital support initiatives to cross-sector collaborations that rarely existed before the census, the data is already reshaping how the city supports its music community.

Drawing from on-the-ground advocacy, coalition building, and implementation work following the census, this session offers a practical look at how research can translate into real change. Attendees will gain insight into how community data can guide policy decisions, strengthen partnerships between government and industry, and help ensure that a globally recognized music capital remains a viable home for the people who make its culture possible.

FRIDAY 29 MAY 2026

7:30 AM REGISTRATION & BREAKFAST

8:30-9:30 AM

**Dr. Ingrid Gustafsson Nordin. Stockholm University. Stockholm, Sweden.
“Organizing Resistance Through Country Music: Culture, Capital, And
Identity in Fayetteville, Arkansas”**

My presentation is based on my ongoing study of how the alt-country scene in and around Fayetteville, Arkansas, is organized as and for resistance. It will be published as a book on Bloomsbury Academics in early 2027. The project focuses on the practical connections between actions and decisions of musicians, local bars, museums, record labels, and DIY venues, which together constitute a specific country music scene. The project uses organization theory to understand country music as a field of practice. Resistance is thematized in four ways:

1. Organizing as resistance. The focus here is on the record company Gar Hole Records, based in Fayetteville, studying it as a hub for actors and decisions that together constitute the Arkansas scene.
2. Nature as resistance. The focus here is on how the regional environment (rivers, forests, flowers) is mobilized as an identity claim and a tool for political resistance by the local musicians.

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3. Knowledge as resistance. This section explores ideas about embodied and practical knowledge as resistance to abstract, rationalized knowledge. Derived from interviews with local musicians, I discuss different perspectives on what “labor” means.

4. Othering as regional resistance. The regional history and culture in Arkansas/Ozarks/Fayetteville are captured through how it is mobilized by the local actors themselves. The project analyses this by juxtaposing stories about Ozarks/Arkansas with stories about progress, success, expansion, and universalism in the US. Part of the rationale here is understanding Ozark as the Other.

**Dr. David Pruett. University of Massachusetts. Boston, Massachusetts.
“Merle Haggard’s ‘U.S.A. for America’: The Grandest Commercial Country
Music Tour that Never Happened”**

In 1985 the California-based music producer Marc Oswald organized a unique—albeit ultimately unsuccessful—performance tour in collaboration with music legend Merle Haggard that became one of Oswald’s best-known failures and arguably one of the most significant commercial country music tours that never happened. Billed as “U.S.A for America” and designed to lead into John Mellencamp and Willie Nelson’s inaugural Farm Aid concert, the September whistlestop train tour from Bakersfield, California, to Chicago, Illinois, had received direct support from President Ronald Reagan, whom Merle, Marc, and Freddy Powers had met in person at the White House that previous April. Following their 1985 meeting, Reagan reached out via presidential letter to Amtrack to request its assistance with the tour’s transportation logistics. Coca-Cola had agreed to finance the project in part. Hosted by Merle Haggard, the tour featured over seventy-five luminary musical artists and prominent figures such as Tammy Wynette, Barbara Streisand, Johnny Carson, George Lindsey, Jack Nicholson, Johnny Cash, John Denver, Waylon Jennings, John Schneider, George Strait, the Judds, Arlo Guthrie, and Charlie Daniels, each of whom were concerned about the plight of the American family farmer. Unfortunately, Coca-Cola pulled its sponsorship funding last-minute, resulting in the tour’s cancellation—to which a 1985 article in the L.A. Times referred as the tour’s “derailment.” In this presentation I explore this historical tour and the events surrounding its planning, proposed schedule, and unfortunate cancellation as a snapshot of the commercial country music industry and its inner workings from behind-the-scenes.

9:30-9:45 AM Break

9:45-10:45 AM

**Dr. Samuel Parler. Baylor University. Waco, Texas: “Disaster Ballads, Jim
Crow, and the Southern Gothic”**

Commercial country and blues musicians recorded hundreds of disaster ballads in the 1920s and 1930s. These narrative songs recounted historical, contemporaneous, and fictional tragedies like floods and train wrecks, offering audiences a combination of morbid detail, pathos, moralizing, and social analysis. In their grim subject matter, the ballads resonated with the concurrent literary genre of the Southern Gothic, and their

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popularity transcended the color line. Black and white musicians regularly performed disaster ballads, drawing upon a common repertory of lyrics and musical styles as they addressed both shared and racially specific concerns.

This presentation surveys over three-hundred disaster ballad recordings in the country and blues fields from 1923 to 1942. I frame these songs within the discourse of the Southern Gothic, which emerged in literary criticism in the 1930s. Disaster ballads mirrored the Southern Gothic's ambivalence toward European antecedents, anxieties over artistic prestige, and sometimes subliminal engagement with the South's class and racial politics. Guided by this framing, I then present a corpus study highlighting thematic and racialized trends in repertory. Finally, recording histories of the songs "Back Water Blues" and "The Wreck of the Old '97" affirm and contextualize the broader trends. Both songs garnered stylistically diverse recordings across genres, yet they often articulated different racial perspectives on issues like disparities in disaster relief, the perils of technology, and working-class grievance against employers. Disaster ballads thus challenged the record industry's system of racially segregated genres while also allowing for overtly racial insights into a modernizing Jim Crow South.

Dr. Brooks Blevins. Missouri State University. Springfield, MO. "Country in Color: The Gannaway Films of the 1950s"

From 1954 to 1956, Al Gannaway produced more than ninety half-hour films of Grand Ole Opry performers at three different venues in Nashville. They were televised in syndication as Stars of the Grand Ole Opry and later The Country Show. Though broadcast in black and white, the vast majority of the Gannaway films were made on 35mm color film. In the 1960s, segments of these films were spliced into country music "movies", and since the 1980s the Gannaway films have been repackaged into multiple VHS and DVD releases. The high quality of the films and the performances of 50s-era Opry stars at the top of their game have earned the films a devoted following.

This presentation will reintroduce the mostly forgotten Al Gannaway and tell the story of the making of these classic country films in color. In addition to providing an overview of the filming sessions (venues, dates, artists, etc.), the presentation will also explore the role that country music stars of the mid-50s and Nashville's competition with other burgeoning country music cities played in pressuring WSM/the Grand Ole Opry to embrace the new medium of television.

10:45 - 11:00 AM Break

11:00 AM The Charles K. Wolfe Memorial Panel

Oral History of 40+ Years of the ICMC

This year's Charles K. Wolfe panel will reflect on the history of the ICMC—its origins in 1985 in Meridian, Mississippi, evolution, and lasting impact on the careers and lives of those who have helped build it.

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Framed as a shared oral history, conference founder James Akenson and right-hand Mickie Akenson will reflect on the 42-year history of the conference. And Co-chair Don Cusic will also be part of this discussion, and attendees will be invited to reflect on their ICMC memories. Together, we will create a collective conversation about the conference's legacy and its enduring place in the study of country music.

12:00 PM Awards Luncheon

The Chet Flippo Award for Excellence in Country Music Journalism.

Honoree: **David B. Ramsey** *Ain't It a Cold, Cold World? The collected stories of Blaze Foley.*

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

Honoree: *Howdy! The Minnie Pearl Story* by Mary Ellen Pethel & Don Cusic

1:30-3:00 PM

Dr Christian Goering. University of Arkansas. Fayetteville, AR. "We Were Pretty Loose": How the Bill Justis Band in Memphis Unlocked Doors in Nashville."

Bill Justis, most famous for the song "Raunchy," a #2 Billboard hit and the song George Harrison played in his audition to get into the band that became The Beatles, moved from Sun Records in Memphis to work mostly behind-the-scenes as an arranger in Nashville. Working with nearly every major country artist--and many non-country artists--from 1961-1982, Justis was a mainstay in the Nashville music business. This presentation, based on archival research and interviews with original band and audience members, traces the history of the Bill Justis Orchestra from 1951-1963. Beginning with Bill's days in Memphis playing hundreds of dates with his dance band orchestra to his early days writing arrangements for country records at RCA, Monument, Mercury, and other recording studios in Nashville, the roots of jazz and rock carry the story forward. Even after moving to Nashville in 1961, Justis continued to play gigs with his named band on the side and the music and the people involved create a story of mentorship, a flare for the zany and fun, and a significant musical output.

Lydia Hamby. Independent Scholar Musician. Johnson City, Tennessee. "Not Just A Good Ole Boys Club: Studying the Personal, Professional, and Performance Roles of Women in Bluegrass"

This presentation examines gender dynamics in professional bluegrass music, a deeply rooted genre that is still shaped by evolving cultural and industry norms. Using a mixed-methods approach, I analyze quantitative data from eight major festival lineups, alongside qualitative interviews with six professional female bluegrass musicians. The festival lineups analysis reveals that women average only 8.87% of billed performers, underscoring systemic underrepresentation. Qualitative findings, supported by participant observation at Blue Highway Fest, highlight the persistence of gendered

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archetypes such as the “singer girl”, sex appeal, manager, and the presence of tokenism. The goal of this presentation is to connect these findings to larger Conversations about diversity, representation, and sustainability in bluegrass and roots music. By integrating statistical evidence with lived experiences of working female musicians, I aim to illuminate the barriers that limit participation, and propose pathways for more equitable festival programming and industry practices. Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how gendered expectations and norms operate in traditional music spaces and how these dynamics impact both cultural heritage and the future of the genre.

Jon Sewell. Middle Tennessee State University & Nashville Underground Music Archive “Kindred Type: Country Music Fanclub Magazines and Punk ‘Zines.”

In a 2019 interview with the Guardian, Mark Perry, founder of seminal punk fanzine “Sniffin’ Glue,” referenced the fanclub magazines of “marginalized music, like blues and country” as influencing his own fan-produced publication. As a working-class product of council (public) housing, Perry epitomized the rise of a new method of outsider cultural expression- self-produced (later called DIY for Do-It-Yourself) printed matter from a disadvantaged source celebrating and supporting niche music. In referencing the fanzines of country and blues music, Perry draws unexpected connections to extant fan products in his native England, while also pointing backwards in time to the initial fanclub magazines and newsletters, produced by mostly working class women in the United States in the 1950s and ‘60s. Building on the scholarship of Dianne Pecknold and her examination of “participatory commercialism” in the early days of country music fanclubs, parallels emerge between these seemingly disparate scenes. Similarities in class tensions, and even concepts of access and authority, often unfold on simple yet passionate aesthetics. Placing both punk and country music within the landscape of popular music studies, the archives at the Center for Popular Music provide complementary examples of punk ‘zines, as well as country music fanclub newsletters. Through the use of zine scholarship in communications, cultural studies, material studies, and even graphic design, this presentation examines unexpected similarities across time, space, context, and perspective.

3:00- 3:30 PM Break

3:30 – 4:30 PM

David S. Carter and Dr. Ralf von Appen. Loyola Marymount University and University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. “Click Tracks, Authenticity, and the Decline of Tempo Variability in Country Music.”

A recent study (Carter and von Appen 2025) employed a combination of statistical analysis and evidence from published interviews to demonstrate how tempo fluctuations were gradually minimized from the mid-1970s onward in mainstream popular music, due primarily to the increasing use of click tracks, drum machines, and sequencers. Building on this approach, in this study we analyzed the top 10 country songs from every even-numbered year between 1972 and 1994.

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We found that the biggest country hits gradually adopted the use of click tracks, but lagged approximately five years behind mainstream pop music in this adoption. Click tracks in the late 1970s and early '80s were sporadically used in top country songs, but gradually became more common until by the late 1980s they were the norm. Our empirical analysis of the data is supported by evidence from published interviews with musicians and producers on these top hits.

We discuss potential reasons why technological innovations associated with mainstream pop were adopted more cautiously in country music, with artists seeking to preserve values such as authenticity, liveness, and tradition (Neal 2013; Peterson 1997) even while prizing efficiency and professionalism. By situating questions of tempo and timing within broader discussions of technology, aesthetics, and genre identity, this project contributes both to country music studies and to wider debates on the history of recorded rhythm.

Toni Doman-Vandyke. Independent Scholar. Bristol, Virginia. “Complex Relationships: Contemporary Technologies and Traditional Music of Cape Breton”

With our growing reliance on technologies, both listeners and players have increased access to musical influences outside of their geographic region. The rich traditional music of the Canadian Maritimes has a history that parallels the unique development of various Appalachian music styles from the southern United States, with groups of similar origins settling in each region respectively. Both groups became geographically isolated by mountains, valleys, and islands, resulting in their own distinct development of musical styles. This talk will explore technology's impact on the traditional music community of Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, Canada. Through a series of in-depth interviews, field recordings and media collected in 2024 highlighting various musicians and cultural caretakers, this research documents the music scene in Cape Breton to aid in uncovering how access to outside musical influences is currently shaping the region's traditional music, helping to better understand technology's growing impact worldwide. This timely project aids in our understanding of the relationships between technology and music as we become more interconnected as a global community and highlights technology's role in the preservation and accessibility of these music structures.

4:30 Break

Dinner on your own. No food is allowed in the studio.

6:00 - 7:00 PM – Picking and socializing before the panel if you wish.

7:00 PM Special Conference Event

*Located in Historic RCA Studio B, 1611 Roy Acuff Pl, Nashville, TN 37203
(free parking in back)*

Joyful Protest

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Panelists: Heather Mae and Crys Matthews

Joyful Protest brings together singer-songwriters Heather Mae and Crys Matthews for a powerful exploration of music as resistance. Across generations, music has carried the sound of resistance, giving voice to struggle, sustaining community, and imagining new possibilities. This session engages their songwriting, activism, and the work of Singing Resistance – work that centers joy, hope, and love as essential forces in the fight for change. Blending song and conversation, these artists reflect on their craft and the role of music as a “joyful onramp” to collective action.

SATURDAY 30 MAY 2026

7:30 AM REGISTRATION & BREAKFAST

8:30-9:30 AM

Ben Atkinson. University of Leuven. Leuven, Belgium. “Under Nashville Grey Skies: The Transnational Trajectory of Country Music in the United Kingdom.”

This paper is based on a chapter of the same name, written for an edited collection with ICMC friend Dr Toby Martin (University of Sydney), on country music as a transnational and transcultural phenomenon that has outgrown its American roots. I will trace the history of the UK’s fascination with the country genre from the 1960s, when artists such as George Hamilton IV, Jim Reeves, Johnny Cash and Glen Campbell regularly toured the UK, through the Wembley festivals of the 1990s and toward today’s modern resurgence. Country music is now the UK’s fastest-growing genre, and to mark the centenary of the Grand Ole Opry, London was recently selected as the location for the Opry’s only show ever to be performed outside the US.

The UK’s relationship with Americana has historically inspired a diverse range of artists, from The Beatles and The Rolling Stones to Ed Sheeran, signaling a deeper affinity for the genre’s foundational roots. To tell this story, I have engaged with archival records, fan accounts, and media commentary from UK journalists and radio DJs.

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I will discuss the recent acquisition of the British Archive of Country Music by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and touch upon my own work as the Creative Director of a new UK country music festival, exploring the historical lineage which underpins the current resurgence, characterised by the modern ubiquity of country music-themed events and fashion.

Daisy Innes. University of Wyoming. Laramie, WY. “Legacy, Location, and Luke: the social environment of Wyoming through the life of Luke Bell.”

The West has a narrative of its own, one that holds the importance of community in rurality at its very center, a state like Wyoming with its small population and vast open spaces perhaps best finds its stories and sentiments protected in the poetry of country music.

In this presentation, I will unearth the connections between place and sound and how the culture of the least populated state in America inevitably influences the writing, sound and impact of country music. The life of cult country favourite Luke Bell is one that captures both the joys and failings of life in Wyoming. The legacy he left behind is not only representative of the dreams that are cultivated in a mind too ambitious for a small town, but in the intricacies that complicate a life built for more than the social environment of Wyoming can support.

Although Bell’s life was short, his music, stories and infectious personality are present in the bars, playlists and hidden corners of the Cowboy State – why has Bell remained in the soul of a state so fiercely independent? That might just be because Luke Bell was Wyoming.

9:30 - 9:45 AM Break

9:45-10:45 AM

Dr. Taylor Ackley. Independent Scholar. Kalispell, Montana. “Listening Back and Looking Forward: Old Timey Activism in American Roots Music.”

In September 2020, amid the COVID-19 lockdown and nationwide protests against racially motivated police violence, Tyler Childers released Long Violent History, one of the most politically radical albums by a mainstream country artist in recent years. Composed almost entirely of traditional fiddle tunes, the album culminates in its sole vocal track, delivering a passionate message aimed at white, working-class audiences. Childers’ collaborator Dom Flemons stated “These songs are meant to last another hundred years, yet it is supposed to tell a new story about the struggles that lie within our generation. Tyler Childers, placing his fiddle on the wall chose to premiere only one original song where he sings ‘Long Violent History’, a final powerful and poignant statement.” Flemons’ involvement deepens the project’s historical resonance, recalling the early days of the recording industry, when racially integrated string bands were more common, before the segregation of sound theorized by Hagstrom Miller.

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Drawing on practice-based research with old time musicians and organizations in the Northeast and Midwest along with analysis of recent commercial roots music, this paper examines the ways that music provisionally defined by its antiquity can be a site of progressive thought, community building, and activism. Merging recent perspectives in country music scholarship by Royster, Bishop, and Laird with sociological examinations of class and race, I argue that old-time music from Childers and Flemons' commercial collaboration to community-based efforts like the White Oak Roots Weekend offer profound possibilities for reshaping the social role and political impact of traditional music.

Dr. Franklin Bridges. Fairleigh Dickinson University. New Jersey. "A Few Tarnished Country Greats: Revisiting Ween's 12 Golden Country Greats 30 years later."

In July 1996, after four albums defined by stylistic eclecticism and irreverent humor, Ween released *12 Golden Country Greats*—a project that both puzzled and fascinated audiences. Unlike their genre-splicing earlier work, this album was a deliberate immersion into traditional country form, recorded at Bradley's Barn with an ensemble of Nashville's most respected session musicians, including Bobby Ogden, Hargus "Pig" Robbins, and Charlie McCoy, with backing vocals by The Jordanaires. Its sonic fidelity and musicianship align more closely with Music Row's golden era than with 1990s alt-country experimentation, raising questions about intention, authenticity, and parody. This presentation reexamines *12 Golden Country Greats* three decades on to locate its place within the histories of both Ween's idiosyncratic body of work and Nashville's recording tradition. Drawing on discursive analyses of authenticity and irony in country music, it considers how the album negotiates the tension between reverence for professional Nashville craft and the band's outsider ethos. It also revisits the album's critical reception—celebrated by some for its technical and stylistic precision, condemned by others for perceived homophobia and cultural insensitivity—to assess what those responses reveal about evolving boundaries of taste and representation in the genre. Ultimately, this paper argues that *12 Golden Country Greats* occupies a distinctive, if uneasy, position in the late-century country canon: a work that simultaneously honors and unsettles Nashville's musical legacy.

10:45 - 11:00 AM Break

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Scott B. Bomar. Fourth and State. Los Angeles, California. "How Buck Owens Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Rock & Roll"

"I shall sing no song that is not a country song," Buck Owens declared in his widely circulated 1965 Pledge to Country Music. His current album at the time was *I've Got a Tiger By the Tail*, which featured a cover version of Chuck Berry's "Memphis." He was already performing a send-up of The Beatles' version of "Twist and Shout" in his live shows in that era, and would go on to cover songs by Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, and other rock artists. Claiming Bob Wills and Little Richard as his strongest early influences, Buck

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was hardly a country purist. In this examination of his evolving relationship with rock music, I argue that Buck's early posturing about country music's barriers was largely motivated by his complicated relationship with Nashville's music establishment as well as a shift in country aesthetics that was creating a wider debate among fans. A story of insiders, outsiders, market demands, and genre gatekeepers, Buck Owens's struggles to come to grips with the barriers of categorization still has resonance for artists today.

Sandra Cox Birchfield. Independent Scholar. Fayetteville, Arkansas. " The Night the Card Caught Fire: Charlie Rich, John Denver, and the Distorted Truth"

In 1975, a clearly impaired Charlie Rich made headlines when he pulled out a lighter on live television and burned the card naming John Denver the 1975 CMA Entertainer of the Year. The story that circulated for decades was that Rich was protesting Denver for not being "country enough," and that the incident cost Rich his career. This story is flawed. This presentation provides new interviews and sources to the conversation to clear up fallacies that have tarnished Rich's legacy. For the years that followed, Rich strongly denied he was protesting Denver, with Rich's own son adding that the presentation was the result of a punchline combined with alcohol gone wrong. Rich, who had a history of publicly self-medicating his anxiety with alcohol, sometimes with disastrous results, began his music career performing jazz and jump blues, his true loves, before transitioning over to country. Before the 1975 incident, Rich openly embraced country music crossing over to different genres. For that very reason, he was targeted by at least one member of the Association of Country Entertainers (ACE), which formed in 1974 in protest of the CMA handing out awards to crossover country artists, with Rich being one of them. Contrary to common belief, the incident didn't cost him his career. Afterward, he continued to have No. 1 country hits and Grammy nominations before going into semi-retirement.

12:00 LUNCH

Sundry and Door Prizes

1:30-3:00 AM

Tim Rakowitz. Middle Tennessee State University. "From a niche genre to ruling the Hot 100: Country Music's Crossover Surge (1990–2024)"

This presentation explores the rise of country music on the Billboard Hot 100 from 1990 to 2024, drawing on original research conducted for my master's thesis. Through a comprehensive analysis of the Billboard Year-End Charts of each year, combined with streaming demographics and expert interviews (including Beverly Keel, Robert K. Oermann, and Dr. Jada Watson), the presentation maps how country music has expanded from a regionally rooted genre into a commercially dominant and globally visible format.

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

Central to the talk are exclusive visual charts that identify key trends in country's crossover success: shifts in artist gender representation, label concentration, songwriter and producer dominance, and genre-blending collaborations. These charts, along with audio examples, form the backbone of the presentation and offer a clear, data-driven view of country's mainstream evolution.

The analysis identifies three primary drivers: (1) production innovations that blend country with pop, hip-hop, and rock aesthetics; (2) the growing influence of non-country producers and writers within Nashville's studio system; and (3) the democratizing impact of streaming platforms, which have eroded radio's gatekeeping role and enabled wider exposure.

By spotlighting figures like Joey Moi, Dann Huff, and Ashley Gorley—as well as breakout acts like Morgan Wallen, Shaboozey, and Post Malone—the presentation shows how country's transformation is strategic, multi-layered, and likely to endure.

Ultimately, this presentation argues that country music's growing chart presence is not a fluke but a result of long-term shifts in sound, infrastructure, and audience identity.

Dr. Mike Longan. Valparaiso University. Valparaiso, Indiana. “Kasey Chambers's cover of Eminem's "Lose Yourself": A Geographer Reacts.”

The video of Australian country artist Kasey Chambers's performance of “Lose Yourself” by rapper Eminem has spawned countless reaction videos on YouTube by commentators who admire her virtuosity. In this presentation, I react to both the video and an in-person live performance of the song to demonstrate a geographical framework for analyzing popular music. The framework considers music as representation, performance, and experience. It identifies places represented through music and sites of performance. The framework also locates music relative to genre, space, and identity and considers how music produces relational social space. Chambers's cover recontextualizes and relocates “Lose Yourself” in terms of genre, gender, and nationality. The cover is surprising, not only because it is sung rather than rapped, but also because it shifts genre at least twice, making it difficult to locate in a conceptual genre space. The juxtaposition of Chambers's identity (an Australian woman who grew up on the remote Nullarbor Plain) with Eminem's (an American man from the city of Detroit) bridges socio-spatial distance and suggests a commonality of human experience. Finally, witnessing Chambers perform “Lose Yourself” in person, at a 2025 show in Chicago, highlighted ways that musical performances make use of and produce relational space. The performance matched or exceeded the emotional intensity and authenticity of the one represented in the video. Witnessing Chambers sing “Lose Yourself” in person demonstrated the degree to which the authenticity of the recorded performance was not singular and spontaneous, but rather skillful and practiced.

Chris Richardson. Zero to 180. Silver Spring, Maryland. “The Intersection of American Country Music and Jamaican, Ska, Rocksteady, Reggae, and Dancehall”

The fondness within Jamaican culture for American country & western music runs much more deeply than has generally been acknowledged. This “unlikely” linkage between U.S. country and Jamaican popular music encompasses over two hundred recordings that span half a century, going back to the year of Jamaica’s independence. This presentation will note the range of country songs that have been recorded by Jamaican vocalists, along with a broad array of backing ensembles employed by the many independent producers who help justify the reputation of Kingston, the country’s recording capital, as the “Nashville of the Third World.” Conversely, recordings of top American country artists on RCA, Capitol, and Columbia, among other labels, have enjoyed distribution in Jamaica since ska’s birth in the early 1960s. Which songs and artists have particularly endured in Jamaican culture will also be examined.

3:00 - 3:15 PM Break

3:15 – 4:30

Olivia Beaudry. Middle Tennessee State University. “The Story of Red Dirt Music: An Interactive Map and Timeline Perspective”

This presentation will combine works from Michael Longan, Andy Bennett, and Travis Stimeling on music scenes with music generations works from Fred Bartenstein to study the Red Dirt music scene of Stillwater, Oklahoma. Known for producing acts like Cross Canadian Ragweed, Jimmy LaFave, Wyatt Flores, and Garth Brooks. The college town of Stillwater is just beginning to be recognized as the birthplace of Red Dirt music. Using interactive online resources from Knight Labs to showcase the scene and its generations, this presentation will also inform fellow researchers and educators how to think about presenting their works in new ways or allowing creative students to present projects using interactive timelines, maps and virtual image comparisons.

LaDawn Lee Fuhr. Arkansas State University. Jonesboro, Arkansas. “Six Degrees of Triad Records: The Musical Powerhouse That Shoulda Woulda Coulda-But Didn’t”

Triad Records is a little known and long forgotten musical collaboration between three musical powerhouses:

- Phil Walden, founder of Capricorn Records in Macon, Georgia, and an architect of Southern Rock
- Buddy Killen, record producer, publisher, and record producer
- Chips Moman, studio owner, producer, songwriter, engineer, musician, and vocalist

On March 15, 1984, Triad Records was formed by this musical threesome and in less than a year, it was abandoned. Between these three men, they had enviable musical resumes and successes. Their vision was to connect the sounds of Nashville’s songwriting traditions, the soul roots of Memphis, and the Southern rock heritage born in Macon. Poised to be another big hit for the trio, Triad Records was a record label, publishing company, and had national distribution through MCA Records. So, what happened?

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

This presentation will explore the tragically short-lived collaboration of three dynamos that should have resulted in Grammys and hits. This power trio could have had literal and figurative recording gold with this endeavor. Instead, Triad Records ended in conflict and confusion, with fine creative endeavors diluted or lost in the process. Robert Duvall's lost album was a casualty. A released album by Jessi Colter is no longer available. New material by frequent Chips Moman collaborator, BJ Thomas, unreleased; and so much more. Triad Records is a musical whodunit, and I will spin the tale, along with some tunes, and provide clarity on this creative conundrum.

**Dr. Charlie Dahan. Middle Tennessee State University. "I Am Resolved":
The Long Road to the Birthplace of Country Music Museum"**

In 1927, Ralph Peer of the Victor Talking Machine Company recorded two weeks of sessions in Bristol, Tennessee/Virginia that launched the careers of Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family and earned the label "the Big Bang of Country Music." Yet the effort to commemorate this history stretched across decades and was marked by false starts, competing visions, and community divisions that revealed how difficult it was to transform heritage into a permanent presence.

This paper traces that uneven journey, from the 1971 monument dedication and the short-lived Appalachian Music Museum to later efforts like the Grand Guitar and a small museum in the Bristol Mall. Tim White's downtown mural proved pivotal, making Bristol's role in country music both visible and accessible, and it helped spark renewed interest in placing a museum in the heart of the city rather than on its outskirts. After years of debate, financial struggle, and organizational splits, the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance pressed forward with plans for a permanent downtown facility. The eventual merger with the Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion festival helped provide the momentum and resources to complete the project.

The opening of the Smithsonian-affiliated Birthplace of Country Music Museum in 2014 underscores how public art, local politics, and live music culture together shaped a cultural institution equal to the weight of its history.

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."