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Country Music
Journal
2022**

Don Cusic, Editor

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What I Did and Why

by Frankie Staton

On February 18, 1997, I was standing at the Bluebird Caf  looking at the madness around me. Amy Kurland was telling me that no one else could come in or the fire marshal would shut down the place. Local TV stations, the Nashville Network and a film crew from Chattanooga was there to see us. I could see the music critics. Channel 4 was plugging into the sound system to go live on the 6 P.M. news. All of them were there for a group of black country singers who took a stand to bring diversity to country music.

I remember reflecting on the moment I decided to leave my home in High Point, NC to “follow the dream” to see if these songs in my head were really hit songs. Nashville was infectious. I joined NSAI (Nashville Songwriting Association International) and learned a lot. My country song was chosen to play at their Christmas party. I was so excited. But when I got into a publishing house, the man said, “I don’t believe you wrote this.” That is a weird feeling. People would constantly ask me why I wanted to do this. Some said, “It is not about you people.” I decided to find out what our historical significance was in this industry. And I was shocked to find out that we had been here all along.

Let's take a journey through the African American contribution to country music. It was to my surprise to learn about the banjo's presence in West Africa before being popularized in America. The 20th century blues, gospel and country musician, Rufus "Tee Tot" Payne, was born in Greenville, Alabama in 1883. He is best known for being a mentor to Hank Williams Sr. It was his influence that inspired Williams to develop his own sound. Payne remained largely unknown outside of Alabama during his life. Despite this, Williams gave Payne full credit in teaching him how to play the guitar. Williams had searched for Payne later in his life in Greenville, but Payne had died. As a Williams aficionada, I was stunned to learn a black man mentored Williams.

The "singing brakeman" Jimmie Rodgers was influenced by the chants of black people who worked on his father's railroads. He was regarded as the father of country music due to his distinctive yodeling.

Arnold Shultz' father was born into slavery, but his mother was free. At age 14, he worked in Ohio county coal mines while learning guitar and fiddle from his relatives. Ella Shultz Griffin (1883-1989), cousin of Arnold, said Arnold played in the Shultz family band which included the fiddle, banjo, guitar, piano, mandolin, and bass. They were a black family that played country music. They played for people like the former Ohio county clerk. They would play music for weeks at a time. Later Arnold joined the

drummer, Forest Faught's, band. They earned \$3.00 to play from 7:00 P.M.-12:00 A.M.

Arnold continued his day job in the coal mines. He influenced mainstream artists with his innovative playing techniques which included smooth transitions between chords. Historian, Steven Price, notes that Monroe was so impressed by Arnold's smooth transition between chords as well as his blues playing, Monroe studied Arnold's techniques. After seeing Arnold perform, a young Bill Monroe, the Father of Bluegrass, was invited to play. Arnold played fiddle, and young Bill Monroe played guitar. Arnold taught Moses Rager; Rager and Kennedy Jones taught Merle Travis (who, like Bill Monroe, is now a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame) to play the thumb-picking style on guitar; Travis passed the style to Chet Atkins, and millions picked up the style from him. Arnold also taught Ike Everly, father of Phil and Don, The Everly Brothers. Ike also worked the coal mines. Everly brought this style to Mainstream Bluegrass and Country Music. He eventually passed it on to Phil and Don, the Everly Brothers. This Kentucky style was influenced in the music of Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley.

**February 22, 2022, the Pisgah Banjo Company had
a raffle in honor of Black History**

Month to raise money for the Arnold Shultz Fund which supports people of color who are pursuing bluegrass

and traditional music. 1,337 tickets were sold in 2021, raising \$26,740.00. This year the fund has exceeded this amount by \$14,000.00. This scholarship fund also supports several arts foundations. I believe Arnold would be very happy to know how his music has touched countless lives, worldwide. It is the humility, generosity, and willingness to teach others what he had created that is so touching to me. Shultz was always improving on his abilities as a musician and expanding the knowledge of those around him. What a great example of what a true lover of music should be.

Born on December 24, 1929 in rural Seminole County, Oklahoma, Stoney Edwards knew at a very young age that he wanted to sing music. He dreamed of performing on The Grand Ole Opry as a little kid. Stoney made a guitar out of a bucket and a piece of wire and began to write songs. In 1968, Stoney was living in San Francisco. He worked days as a forklift operator in a steel refinery. Stoney played music at night. That year a job-related accident would change his life forever. He got trapped in a sealed-up tank and suffered severe carbon dioxide poisoning. Edwards was sidelined for two years in either a coma, near coma, or bordering insanity. As he got better, he found work in odd jobs and started to sing in Honkey Tonks. One night somebody yelled, “I’m stoned!” He probably was too; hence, he decided to call himself “Stoney.”

Stoney Edwards penned “He’s my Rock”, which was then recorded by Brenda Lee in 1975, and it climbed to number six on the charts. It also charted number two

when George Jones sang it in 1984. “Mississippi, You’re on My Mind” reached number 20 on the country charts. By the early 1980s, Stoney’s career and health had begun to decline. He passed away on April 5, 1997.

Ted Jarrett is a Nashvillian. At an early age his father was killed, and he was sent to live with his grandparents. His step-grandfather had a very violent temper and threatened to punish him because he believed that “only white boys wrote songs, black boys don’t.” At 15, Ted moved back with his mother and worked his way through Pearl High School.

In 1944, Ted was drafted into the military during World War II just as he was about to attend Fisk University. After being discharged from service, Ted came home and went to Fisk. He became a disc jockey for WSOK here in town. He also worked as a talent scout for Tennessee Records. While performing at a club called The Pink Elephant, in 1955 he penned a song called, “It’s Love Baby”, which launched his songwriting career. This was an R&B song that landed at number two on the charts. Later in 1955, country singer Webb Pierce recorded Jarrett’s song, “Love, Love, Love”, which spent eight weeks at the top of the country music charts. In his autobiography, Mr. Jarrett tells of being stopped by the police outside Nashville’s Hermitage Hotel, because they didn’t believe a black man would be invited to the 1955 BMI Awards where he was to receive an award for the song “Love, Love, Love.” In 1957 Jarrett wrote and produced “You Can Make It If You Try” for Gene Allison, which was a number three hit on

the R&B charts in early 1958. This song has been covered many times by such artists as Buddy Guy, Gene Vincent, and the Rolling Stones.

I personally knew Mr. Jarrett. He told me of not being allowed in the Hermitage and how he used a pseudonym, because he feared not getting country cuts if they knew he was black. Then he told me of getting an Elvis cut and seeing Elvis' name in the songwriting credit, and half of his credit was gone. He said, "I never met Elvis, much less wrote a song with him." What an injustice to a songwriter. Must they take *half* the songwriting credit? They have extra streams of income through touring and merch, but the songwriting as well?

Mr. Jarrett mentored the career of Johnny Jones, who toured in front of a backing band featuring the then unknown guitarist, Jimi Hendrix, and bassist, Billy Cox. In 2004 the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum released a compilation album entitled *Night Train to Nashville*, which contained many tracks produced by Mr. Jarrett. This would later win a Grammy. He passed away at age 83 in March 2009.

Otis Blackwell, born in Brooklyn, NY, learned to play piano. As a kid, he used to sit in the movie theatre from morning until night watching cowboy movies. His idol was Tex Ritter. Otis always wanted to write and perform country music. As he got older, he started winning talent shows at the world-famous Apollo, in Harlem, NY. His songwriting career began when he co-wrote the song,

“Fever.” Otis penned hits for Elvis Presley; some of his biggest are: “All Shook Up,” “Don’t be Cruel,” “Return to Sender,” “Handy Man,” “Breathless” and “Great Balls of Fire” for Jerry Lee Lewis. He is credited for writing over 1,000 songs. He also wrote under the pseudonym John Davenport.

Recognized as one of the leading African American figures in early Rock and Roll, Otis was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1991. Otis died of a heart attack on May 6, 2002. Eight years later he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2010 by Carol King. Otis is considered one of the most significant songwriters of the mid-twentieth century. His songs are said to have sold more than 200 million copies. He is a 2022 nominee for the Blues Hall of Fame. What a phenomenal career.

Hailing from New Orleans is none other than Allen Toussaint, a jazz pianist and singer who said that it took him two hours to write the song “Southern Nights”, because he had lived it. This beautiful tribute to the South was recorded by Glen Campbell and charted country, pop, and adult contemporary. Allen said, “It took people quite a while to realize that I’d written it. They probably didn’t know that I wrote ‘Working in a Coalmine’ either.” He died in 2015 on tour in Madrid, Spain. In June of 2021, “Southern Nights” was declared a Louisiana state song by the legislature.

Bertha Bearden Dorsey, famously known as Ruby Falls (after the waterfall in Chattanooga, TN), was from

Jackson, Tennessee. It has been written that in her time she was among the most successful black female country singers. She made the country music charts nine times from 1974-1979. Ruby was voted the Most Promising Female Vocalist in 1975. She appeared on many television shows as well as the Grand Ole Opry. Ruby Falls was encouraged by the careers of Charley Pride and Stoney Edwards. After a commanding performance with the Country Music Radio Seminar in 1976, she started touring with Justin Tubb, son of Country Music Superstar, Ernest Tubb. She recorded on the Fifty States Record Label.

Stella Parton, sister of Dolly Parton, considered Ruby her best friend. Stella introduced Ruby to her agent, Joe Taylor. Every week she would ask Ruby if she got any work. She said Ruby just smiled. Then Stella would ask Joe why he didn't book Ruby. He finally said, "When I tell them that she's a negro, the clubs don't want to book her." In her spare time, Ruby was a secretary for some offices on Music Row. I have met her before. Very briefly, but she was kind to me, just very quiet. Ruby Falls died at the age of 40 from suffering a brain aneurysm. Ernest Tubb said, "She was one of the best friends I have ever had. She made everyone feel good that she was around."

Probably one of the most important examples of the Black Contribution to Country Music would be the life of DeFord Bailey, the very first performer on the Grand Ole Opry. Bailey was an American country music and blues star from the 1920's until 1941. The very first performer

to ever be introduced on the Grand Ole Opera, the first black performer to ever play on that show, and the first performer to have his music recorded in Nashville. A multi-instrumentalist, but best known for playing the harmonica and referred to as a Harmonica Wizard.

Bailey came from the Bellwood Community in Smith County, Tennessee. His Mother died when he was one, and he was taken in by his Aunt Barbara Lou. He contracted polio at the age of three and was bedridden for a year and could only move his arms and his head.

DeFord's style evolved as he listened to the sounds around him. The sounds of the natural world and the sounds of trains traveling through the countryside. He only grew to four feet ten inches tall. On December 10, 1927, he debuted his trademark song, "Pan American Blues" on the WSM Barn Dance. While Introducing Bailey, George D. Hay said, "For the past hour, we have been listening to the Grand Opera, but from now on, we will present The Grand Ole Opry."

On his first recording of a harmonica solo, DeFord played: Guitar, Banjo, Harmonica and the Bones. The Bones are known as the rhythm bones. A folk instrument that in their original form, consists of a pair of animal bones. Wooden sticks shaped like true bones are now more often used. Metal spoons may be used as well. This technique probably arrived in America via Irish and other European immigrants, and has a history of going back to ancient China, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The bones sound

has contributed to Scottish Music, the Blues, Bluegrass, Zydeco, and French - Canadian Music.

It has been said that he was so small that during days of segregation, Roy Acuff would put him in a suitcase and take him to his hotel room.

Bailey celebrated his 75th by performing at the new Grand Ole Opry House in December 1974. He played on the Old Timer's shows until April 1982. He died at the age of 82 years old, two months after his last performance on the Opry. On June 23, 1983, the country music industry celebrated DeFord Bailey as the first African American star of the Grand Ole Opry. The mayor unveiled a plaque in his honor, and a monument was placed at his gravesite in Nashville's Greenwood Cemetery. Bailey's memorabilia were presented to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. This is merely a small sample of the prolific list of black artists who have contributed to country music.

My journey in this town and industry has been one of many highs but mostly lows. I was constantly reminded that I was "different." I couldn't understand why. After all, it was the very people that contribute to the industry of my hometown, High Point, N.C. - which hosts the International Furniture Market - that encouraged me to leave and pursue a real career.

Picking up a third job as a dishwasher during the market, at about 2:00 A.M. my boss said we could take a break and that he was going to get us fresh donuts from his regular job, Krispy Kreme. Everyone works the market to

make it happen for the city. I told my boss that I would play that grand piano that I saw sitting in the hallway. He said, “You can’t play a piano.” I said, “Oh yes I can.” When he got back all the dishwashers were really curious, and I proceeded to play the Sound of Music. From somewhere came a short man. I thought, “I’m Fired.” He came over and said, “I’d like to hire you to play for my showroom. I will pay you fifty dollars a night to play for two hours.” I was making \$1.90 per hour to wash dishes. He asked me if I had an evening gown. One of the dishwashers told me to say no so he could buy me some clothes. I thought that was just plain awful, and said, “Of course, I have a gown.” I was like Alice in Wonderland, the next night on the showroom floor, playing that freshly tuned piano. There are times in your life when you know you are very *unexposed*. So here comes the vice president of Kroehler Furniture Corporation. He said to me, “I heard all about you. We are so happy to have you, you dishwasher.” We were both cracking up! He placed a hundred-dollar bill on the piano. I picked it up, looked at it, and told him that he left his money. I tried to give it back to him, and he said, “You will get a lot of those this week.” Silence. He Said, “Let me get you a tip jar.”

I walked into the music store to buy my Fender Rhodes electric piano. The store clerks wanted to know what I wanted to buy. When I told them that I wanted a Stage Model Fender Rhodes, they wanted to know just how I

thought I could pay for something like that. I pulled out a roll of hundred-dollar bills and left with the Rhodes.

Playing for the market, I met people from all over the world. They asked me to play everything, but they were shocked when I played country music. Every now and then, I'd play an original, and they would say, "Who's song is that?" I would say, "Mine." The furniture buyers and designers started to encourage me to leave and to go somewhere that was in a music capital where someone could hear my songs. I wrote everything. I was intrigued by Barbara Streisand, The Beatles, Henry Mancini, Motown, and the guys burning up those string instruments on *The Porter Wagoner Show*, *Hee Haw*, *Dolly*, and *All Things Country*. I loved the sound of the banjo. I was familiar with Arthur Smith down in Charlotte, N.C.

I made the trek to Nashville. I fell completely in love with this city. The first real person I met was Maggie Cavender. I could listen to her talk all day. I was intrigued with Music Row and how homey and southern it looked. I went back home, worked six more months and saved my money so I could move back to Nashville. I left North Carolina in the summer of 1981. I was willing to do any honest work but was studying the jam sessions around town. I was always sitting in at Robert's on lower Broadway. I loved the feel of the tourists coming in town and getting up to sit in and sing a song. I was also interested in the Nashville Songwriter's Association International, a group of people that met at Belmont College. I was *busy*.

My day job as a salad maker for the brand-new Marriott Hotel kept the bills paid, but I wanted to be a full-time entertainer and songwriter. I got dressed up one night and went to the Captain's Table in Printer's Alley. I had seen Sammy Davis' name on the outside sign about a performance he had there. As I walked down Church Street, the policeman asked me where I was going. I told him to the Captain's Table to sing Loretta. He said, "I am going with you." I replied, "You want to hear me?" At 11:30 P.M. I signed up on the list to perform on stage. I was the very first one to sign the list. The policeman eventually left and said to someone in management, "If you have any problems with her, let me know." Why would they have any problems with me? I'm here for the jam session, for the music! People came and went. I was skipped in line, over and over. I knew this was an important moment in my life, that there are times when even though you don't feel welcome, you stay. So, I just sat there, drinking black coffee. I was determined not to leave. I had to be at my day job at 4:30 A.M. Finally, at 2:30 A.M., they introduced me to the stage to sing. I talked about Loretta and why I came to Nashville, and someone brought a fifty-dollar bill from a man who said he was the mayor. I didn't believe that he was, but it was Mayor Richard Fulton! They called me the next day and asked me if I could come back. Someone had explained to me that I was in a red-light district. I asked them if they knew that I wasn't a hooker. I went back the following night during the dinner show. When

introduced me to the stage to sing, I played a song on the piano. They said, “They need a pianist at the Brass Rail.” I auditioned the next night. One night later my picture was in the window with my name in bold print.

I was really excited about NSAI. No one had ever critiqued my songs before then. It can be frightening. Just because music runs through your head all the time doesn’t mean it’s Grammy material; not until a publisher believes in you, and you start getting cuts. I had been working on a song that I really wanted Tammy Wynette to sing called “Leading Lady.” I presented demo in the workshop, and was chosen to present my song during the Christmas Party. That was major to me. In the interim, a lady heard me humming it to myself while I was making salads and inquired about it; when I told her it was my music, she said I know a publisher that will listen to it. I got my lyric sheet ready, got my little cassette, and decided to find out what this publisher thought.

We walked in, and the man had to go down the hallway to speak with my friend. I started to feel very uncomfortable. In a few minutes, he came back with her. I had the feeling that he was shocked that I was black. He didn’t give me the benefit of sitting at a desk while he listened. We stood in the hallway, and he said, “As long as you are here, I might as well listen.” I handed him my lyric sheet, but he wouldn’t even look at it. He listened to half the song and said, “I don’t believe you wrote this.” I was completely stunned. “You couldn’t write a song like

this,” he said. He ended up being on the board of NSAI, so there he was at the Christmas Party when I played it on the grand piano. We didn’t bother each other.

In NSAI, the writers talked about owning their own home studios and not renting a real studio every time they did demos. I asked the guy next to me how much one costed. He said, “Why would you want to know, you can’t afford it.” I was playing six nights a week in a five-star restaurant, and working five days a week in the hotel. Someone else told me to go to Audio Systems to get it. I walked into Audio Systems with over \$4,000 dollars in my pocket. No one was interested at first; then one man came and asked what I wanted. You can imagine his shock when I told him. When I went back to NSAI, I hired the guy to put it together for me that told me I couldn’t afford one.

I went on to win a talent show among the employees at the hotel, and got my next gig playing there. It was there that I met a man that became my friend and invited me to be a performer on his morning show for ten years. That friend was Ralph Emery.

Because of the morning show, I met many people including Lorrie Morgan, Charlie Pride, Ray Stevens, The Jordanaires, JD Sumner and the Stamps, Minnie Pearl, Steve Wariner, Reba McEntire, (she’d stayed up all night after winning Female Vocalist for the first time). Because of my night gig at the hotel, I met a lot of people: Hank Jr., Faron Young, Charlie Dick, George Jones, George’s best friend, Pee Wee, Lynn Anderson, Lee Greenwood,

Sylvester Stallone, Marie Osmond, Frank Stallone, Kris Kristofferson, Jerry Lee Lewis, and my all-time favorite superstar, Dolly Parton.

There was a man staying in the hotel. Every night he asked me to play, “Jesus is the Answer, for the World Today.” He was there for about six weeks. One evening, he said, “My house is finished, and I’ll be leaving tomorrow. Are you a songwriter?” I said, “Of Course.” He told me to come to see him and to bring a song. I said this is what I’ll bring you”, and played him my song,” Leading Lady.” He said that his secretary was Trish. I thought he was crazy and possibly the janitor, but a few weeks later when I was on Music Row I saw the label and said, “Okay, if you don’t go in there, you’ll never know!”

I went into the office, and sure enough there was a blond lady there. I said, “I guess you are Trish.” I am Frankie Staton. She started yelling, “Steve, here is the girl you were talking about!” He said, “Come on back! What took you so long?” I was sure he had a mop, cleaning the floor. I really didn’t expect much, but I was wrong! He was sitting behind a desk with tons of cassettes in front of him. “Sing that song again! I am putting you on a compilation album.” I was dumbfounded, stunned, shocked beyond words! The album was Trade Secrets, on Mercury/Polygram, a compilation.

The last few weeks had been depressing for me as I had met a songwriter at Ralph’s show, and I asked him to listen to my music to tell me what I was doing wrong. He

sat on the piano bench and said, "If they aren't any good, I'm gonna tell you." I started to play him songs and he said, "You wrote that? Lyric and melody?" He kept asking me to play him more songs, and I kept playing them. He asked me what I was doing that morning, and I said, "just going home." He wanted to take me to breakfast. During breakfast, we talked about music and songs. He kept looking at his watch and then abruptly said, "Follow Me". I followed him to Sony Tree

Publishing. We went upstairs and he asked me to lay down three songs. Just piano and vocals. He said, "I am going to fight for a publishing deal for you." I was in shock. Sitting in the outer lobby, I observed a blackboard that read, "We are looking for songs for Lionel Ritchie, Dionne Warwick, Kenny Rodgers, and a litany of country stars." I thought, "this is how it happens." I had songs for everyone on that list. I knew this is where the greatest songwriters in Nashville were: Harlan Howard, Bobby Braddock, Jaime O'Hara, and on and on and on! Just to be in the room spaced me out beyond words. I was praying to get to play the piano for this songwriter's boss. He was in there about a half an hour, but when he came out, I knew that I wasn't getting signed. He was a broken man. He was weary and said, "Let's go." When we got to the parking lot, he told me that he really fought for me, and that he thought I was already a star, and that I was very talented, but his boss said, "Don't tell me how to do my job. I already have 50

staff writers.” His Boss’ name was Bob Montgomery, and the songwriter was Mack Vickery.

I have learned in life that there are two things you will never forget: people who treat you harshly, and people who treat you kindly. A few years ago, I was in Muscle Shoals touring FAME, and I thought I would stop by the Alabama songwriting Hall of Fame. I was visiting with friends from the UK. The very first gold record I saw had Mack Vickery’s name on it, and I just melted. I was crying like a baby, because I remembered how he took a chance on me.

There were several other publishers that people took me to in an attempt to get me signed, but it never panned out. I continued to play live as much as possible.

I marched with the songwriters one day in Nashville, because the industry had decided to take their names off the videos. Everyone was looking at me with facial expressions that implied, “Who is that?”

My Aunt sent me the story from the NY News and Record about why there wasn’t more diversity in country music. I was shocked that the label heads said that they couldn’t find true black country singers and that most of them were just R&B singers that couldn’t get signed in NYC or LA. I kept reading that story over and over again and decided to challenge it by having the first Black Country Music Showcase in this Nashville. My favorite place was the Bluebird Caf . Amy Kurland was so gracious to give it to us. I chose to have my first show during Black

History Month. Between each act, there were facts given about the black contribution to country music. Our Mantra became “Educate, as well as Entertain.” Most people in the audience were in shock when they learned some of these facts.

The most important thing for me was the integrity of country music, and that there were really good vocalists that *were country* and sang great songs. I listened to their voices and matched them up with songs that I could get from publishing houses. The biggest thing for me was for them to be heard. I wanted them to know what it was like to stand on a stage and to feel like a star, worthy of being accepted in this genre.

Roger Sovine worked with me, and we put together a small writing seminar in the

BMI boardroom. I made sure that there were three publishers in adjoining rooms. They had twenty minutes with each publisher. I rang a bell, and they would go to the next room. I can honestly say that I have never seen a happier bunch of people. There was *joy* in that little conference. I knew it was because they were being *heard*.

We did more showcases and one night when I was playing at a piano bar, I told this man, “I love your hat.” When he left, he said, “Here’s my card, if you ever need anything, call me.” The next day, I looked at his card. He was a strategic marketing manager with Wrangler.

Clothes for our next show! I called him. He told me where to go here in Nashville to get all the clothes I wanted

for my show. When I got there, a man opened the door and said, “What do you want?” I showed him the card and told him what the man said. He replied, “You ain’t getting nothing out of here.” Then, he closed the door. I was really stunned, and I thought this is when you act like you don’t have common sense. I went home and called the headquarters of Wrangler and went completely crazy, telling them how I was treated. I was screaming! They said, “Just stay by the phone.” In about ten minutes, they called me back and said, “Go and get whatever you need for your show.” When I went back, the guy opened the door, and said nothing to me. I was in a place that I didn’t even know existed. There were gold records everywhere, and signs saying, “We Sponsor George Strait”, “We Sponsor Garth Brooks”, etc. I had everyone’s clothing size, and I had popped the trunk of my car and filled my trunk to the top. It dawned on me that things other people take for granted are things that minorities fight for every day.

My shows were the best that I could present. I knew that someday no one would believe it, so I filmed everything with television film. In 2021 *Rolling Stone* said my instincts were right, that I was sitting on a boxed set release, and that yes, these singers were worthy of recording contracts. Eventually, I stopped doing showcases, because I realized that this industry would never help us.

But while the industry rejected us, we were always accepted by the audiences listening to our music. I am very proud of my efforts and those who participated in the

BCMA. I did what I did, because I believed that music transcends color. I knew that we all experienced hardships and challenges in life, regardless of our race.

The Black Country Music Association (BCMA) was the brainchild of Capitol recording artist Cleve Francis who was signed in 1992 and saw his career cut short because of structural and institutional racism in the industry. Francis, a student of country music history, felt that the only way blacks stood a chance in this industry was to form their own organization. With the assistance of Mary Anne Holland, a marketing specialist, Francis formed the BCMA in 1993 as the first trade organization to represent Black country music artists. The goals of the organization were to educate, organize, represent, train and showcase Black talent across America. In 1995 Francis, who was a cardiologist, lost his record deal and had to move back to his home in Virginia so the organization was turned over to Frankie Staton, who was very interested in showcasing Black country music talent. Frankie gathered Black country artists from across the nation to showcase them in Nashville. The complete story of the BCMA is outlined in *Rolling Stone Magazine*. (Francis).

My experiences in Nashville showed me that the country music industry had no interest in me and saw no value in who I was as an American or what my southern story was. I had the feeling that other minorities were being treated the same way. I operated from the side of the artist, the songwriters, and opportunities for both. My

vision was to give those capable artists a home to grow, to be nurtured, and to have a sense of unmovable self-esteem about what they were attempting. My partners in crime were: Wilamenia Cornish, (Who'd just moved here from Baltimore, Maryland, and read about our first showcase in the paper, came and volunteered her time), Norma White, (A journalist for several newspapers in the Black community, and an unbelievable visionary). We were all in sync on the vision, to expose great country talent, with the best songs possible and to showcase them in industry supported venues.

Cleve Francis left Nashville, after convincing Warner Brothers to release a boxed set entitled *From Where I Stand*, a compilation of African American country singers up to that point in history. We continued to build on our momentum and became members of the CMA. We became exhibitors at the CMA Music Festival, attracting a lot of press along the way. However, as we attempted to talk with Music Row executives, it was just a no-go. I even presented what I considered to be our top three singers to the Grand Ole Opry, and Opry Manager Pete Fisher said, "You must be good to sing here."

Wilamenia's husband wanted to move back to Baltimore and Norma died suddenly. I had never been so sad in all my life. Still being ignored by the industry, I went after Russell Simmons from New York City who was instrumental in creating hip hop but had no understanding of country music. I reached out to people across America

for help to no avail. One of our artists was featured on BET's L.A. Live. My son was a student at Montgomery Bell Academy, which was a job in itself. Now with Norma and Wilamenia gone, I was holding down a day job and a night gig as a single parent. I made the decision to close the Black Country Music Association down. It wasn't easy, but I saw no light at the end of the tunnel for us. Fortunately, since I knew that no one would ever believe me, I made sure to record the BCMA story on film.

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My Country Music Story

by Rissi Palmer

Who knew that twenty-two years ago when I began this musical journey that I was making a political statement by just being myself, an eighteen-year-old Black girl from St. Louis, Missouri?

At the time, I didn't see it that way.

My story begins like so many others. I had a dream to sing on big stages and hear my music played on the radio. To see my name in lights. Country music was a big part of the soundtrack of my life. My family listened to Patsy Cline and Aretha Franklin with equal fervor. Encouraged by my first managers, also Black women, to pursue my dreams of country music stardom in spite of the fact that I didn't see myself reflected in the artists (I didn't yet know about the many Black women who came before me, like Linda Martell, Lenora Ross, Ruby Falls, etc.).

My time in Nashville is best summed up by a quote from Charles Dickens: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

I signed my first publishing deal in Nashville in 2000 when I was nineteen. I sang at Tootsie's until the wee hours of the morning and played writer's rounds at the Bluebird Caf . I endured LOTS of rejection, which made me appreciate the big yes moments even more.

All the work paid off in 2008, when I fulfilled a lifelong dream of playing the Grand Ole Opry and became the first Black woman in twenty years to appear on the *Billboard* Hot Country Songs chart with “Country Girl,” “Hold On To Me,” and “No Air.” Unfortunately, disputes with my record label brought it all to a screeching halt and I left Nashville in 2010, feeling largely abandoned by the industry, like an experiment that failed.

Do I believe race is why I didn’t reach the level of stardom I’d hoped for? No. Do I believe that I faced hardships that my peers didn’t because of race? Yes, absolutely.

When I arrived in 2000, no one was talking about race openly. I was told to keep my head down, not talk about it, and let my work speak for itself, so I pretty much did that. That didn’t keep it from coming up, however. I smiled and brushed off what we now called microaggressions on a pretty regular basis. There was a whole meeting about my hair being too much like an Afro. It ended with me taking pictures with a photographer who had no clue how to light Black skin in a wig made of silky Malaysian hair cascading down my back and a short, Jennifer Aniston like bone straight wig. It was a MESS. Luckily, the publicist from the label, Dawnalisa, spoke up and set up a “test” shoot with a photographer who knew the right lighting, using my own clothes, and my own hair. Those shots ended up being the first pictures the world saw of me.

It was apparent that the “appearance” of me was an issue that needed to be figured out from the very beginning of my time in Nashville. My very first meetings with country record labels were sight unseen; a well-meaning insider would take my music, without a picture, and play it for the executives. If they loved it, THEN they would do the reveal. Once I came into the room, the questions would inevitably begin and they were always the same: “We need to figure out how to market someone like her... .” My accent was scrutinized, song choices were suddenly conundrums wrapped in enigmas because how would we ever find songs for “someone like me”... Someone like me. By the end of that first year, I had seen almost all the major labels and was offered a demo deal and lots of “come back when you’ve recorded/written more songs.” None of them took a meeting with me ever again and it would be seven years before I was offered a deal, from an independent record label called 1720 Entertainment.

Music videos were the next place where my outward appearance proved to be a field of landmines. In a meeting with video director Kristen Barlowe about the treatment for my single “Country Girl,” my manager (a powerful white man who, at the time, managed some of the biggest pop acts in the business) tried to convince us that we needed to confront the race thing head on because “everyone would be thinking it anyway.” His suggestions to be “controversial” included me having a huge Black family sitting in a kitchen eating watermelon (yes...watermelon) while a “Big

Mama” cooked for us, me walking into an all-white honky tonk, the natural “record scratch” and awkward silence that would cause, but then being saved by a benevolent white cowboy, and finally, all of this action ending in an all-Black church with a Gospel choir... because, why not? Needless to say, you could hear a pin drop in the room. It was a resounding “Hell Naw” from me, the end of that management relationship, and the eventual creation of the beautiful and representative video (featuring my actual grandmother) that Kristin had originally proposed. The video received airplay on CMT, VH1, and was shown in Apple stores (a little foreshadowing right there...) and remains a fan favorite for its depiction of all shapes, sizes, and colors.

When planning my second video for “No Air,” the debate wasn’t just *my* race this time, it was the race of my love interest. Because “No Air” is a song about heartbreak, it kind of begs for a lover. There was much meeting and conversation about who I should be singing to. Should he be Black or White? What wouldn’t offend the country music fans? I remember vividly wanting a particular Black football player I had been crushing on to be the one I rolled around with in the sand. Though Kristen and I loved that idea, it was ultimately shot down, and I was left rolling and wandering around the beach on my own. It turned out to be a beautiful video but I’m always reminded of all the back and forth and the mess that happened behind the

scenes. This video also marked the beginning of the end for my relationship with the 1720 label.

My radio promotions, marketing, and publicity teams worked so hard for me and my music and it showed. Here we were, this small independent label fighting for airplay along with all the majors. It was an absolute miracle they were able to get “Country Girl” and “No Air” to chart, let alone into the fifties and forties on *Billboard* (to THIS day, Linda Martell is still the highest charting Black woman on the *Billboard* Country Singles chart, making it to the twenties – in 1969). A radio tour brought its own set of obstacles for me. I remember hearing a member of my radio team speak with a certain program director, asking outright what it would take for them to play my music and them firmly responding that they wouldn’t play my music simply because of the color of my skin. I went through what I call “authenticity tests,” where I was asked questions about obscure country music to see if I knew it, or questions about the validity of my country roots, or if I was using country music to get to pop. I can remember asking a white peer if a certain station asked them the same questions and them laughing incredulously and saying no.

Even my relationship with the fandom was fraught at times, providing some really painful and really triumphant moments during this journey. For every “I’m so glad to see someone that looks like me in country music” comment or inbox message, I was called a “Nigger” or “Black bitch” online, in reviews of my first album, in direct messages,

on pages dedicated to bashing me specifically, and hate mail. Letters that looked like fan mail would come to the record label and then be sent to me. I would excitedly open them, only to be confronted with someone's resentment of my Black presence in "their music." I remember being so anxious about it that my publicist Schatzi advised me never to google myself or read the comment section. I still don't to this day.

There is the infamous "box incident" that my close friends and I recall from that time. I had received a package wrapped in a brown paper bag with very scribbled writing on it. My building super sat it right outside my door, which was unusual. The fact that I had been receiving such hateful mail and I wasn't expecting anything at the time left me unnerved by this box. I proceeded to call my friends, my manager at the time, and eventually my neighbor to try to figure out what to do. I poked at it with a broom handle, afraid to pick it up. I seriously thought that maybe someone sent a bomb or something. Eventually, my neighbor came over and helped me open it. It was DVDs I had ordered online and forgotten about. We used to tell that story and laugh. With time, that story has become less funny and more indicative of what was going on behind all the smiles and singing that the public saw from me. I was scared and weary. There are many more stories I could tell like this from that time; being kicked in a crowd while hosting an event, being prevented from walking on stage by a security guard, and so on, and so on.

Looking back, I feel a mixture of gratitude, regret, and relief. Gratitude for 1720's initial belief in me, their investment in my talent, and the staff's hard work. I wouldn't be where I am now if not for the label. Regret for not speaking up for myself sooner, for allowing myself to be treated like a product rather than a person, for not recognizing my worth. Relief that I will NEVER be in that position again, that I will never allow myself to be taken for granted, to be used, or to sell myself short. I focus all these feelings into the artist advocacy work that I do now.

In 2019, the race question had resurfaced thanks to Lil Nas X and "Old Town Road." Articles were being cranked out by Black and white writers who didn't seem to want to look deeper than Charley Pride, Darius Rucker, Mickey Guyton, Jimmie Allen, and Kane Brown for the BIPOC contributions to country music.

I understood them forgetting me, but how could you forget Linda Martell? DeFord Bailey? Lesley Riddle? Ruby Falls? Miko Marks? And the Black Country Music Association? I could go on and on. 2020 marked fifty years since the debut album of Linda Martell, the first Black woman to play the Grand Ole Opry and to chart a song on the *Billboard* Country Singles chart (note: she is STILL the highest charting Black woman to this day). Her album, *Color Me Country*, was the foundation on which all women of color have built their careers.

I knew there were more stories that deserved to be told and preserved...so, with the encouragement of my dear

friend Shellie R. Warren, and a ton of time on my hands thanks to Covid, in March 2020, I began doing interviews for what would become “Color Me Country Radio,” my radio show on Apple Music Country, named in honor of Martell’s groundbreaking album.

My friend Kelly McCartney brought the show to the attention of Apple Music, starting this wild ride. “Color Me Country Radio with Rissi Palmer” debuted August 30, 2020, with the mission of telling stories of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous artists in country and Americana music. My life hasn’t been the same since.

I had no idea that the spring of 2020 would also bring the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd, breaking the already cracked dam of race relations, causing us all to take an unflinching look at all its institutions and how they have been affecting people of color, especially Black people.

It lit a fire under me that said it was time to tell these stories, including my own, and no matter how painful or ugly, it was time for country music to see itself -- complicated and omitted history and all.

In research for the show, I stumbled across so many artists with compelling stories. Artists like Sarge and Shirley West, who, as far as I know, were the first Black husband and wife country music duo. Contemporaries of Pride and Martell, they wrote with Tom T. Hall and toured the South in the civil rights era with a white band, playing regional Oprys. Their music and lives were unknown to me

but thanks to an old issue of *Billboard*, their son Joe West and his beautiful documentary about their lives, “A Song Can Change a Life,” I was soon a fan. Their episode was the first time some of their music had been heard since the 1960s.

Ironically, this was the same month that Maren Morris stood onstage at the CMA Awards and said my name, along with Mickey Guyton, Brittney Spencer, Rhiannon Giddens, and Linda Martell, sparking a renewed interest in all of us.

Stories like the Wests are precisely why “Color Me Country Radio” exists. 2020 and 2021 showed me the power of just simply acknowledging someone. It can change the trajectory of someone’s life.

I also found inspiration in Cleve Francis, a Black cardiologist-turned-country singer signed for a time to Capitol Nashville; and Frankie Staton, a singer-songwriter with an unsinkable spirit. Together, they created the Black Country Music Association. When the industry appeared to turn a blind eye to them, they built their own table, providing artist development through songwriting seminars and showcases for industry tastemakers. Their ingenuity and resilience moved the needle. If they had finances to back up their vision, who knows what else they could have achieved?

It blows my mind how much of this history is easily accessible but barely ever addressed or acknowledged by documentaries, books, and institutions of country music.

With just a few Google searches and emails I figured it out. This is also true with finding artists of color. Trust me when I say there is no shortage of talent out here. Between social media and streaming services, I've found more compelling artists to interview and play than I have episodes for. Artists of color are absolutely thriving on both these platforms between followers and streams, so much so that it would almost appear to be an even playing field there...almost. Most of the artists doing well on these platforms remain unsigned. If millions of streams and reposts won't move the industry, what will? This leads me to believe that there is little care and effort put into changing the narrative and expanding the genre.

As we pass the one year anniversary of the show, I'm absolutely blown away by the many victories and course corrections that have happened: Linda Martell being acknowledged and honored with the Equal Play Award from CMT, the inclusion of six Black women in CMT Next Women of Country, Mickey Guyton's release of "Black Like Me," (a song I never could have imagined being written in Nashville, let alone released) and her subsequent Grammy nomination, activism, and career upswing, the influx of several BIPOC artists into the country music landscape, the many panels and discussions on race, and the completely unexpected inclusion of my show in the Country Music Hall of Fame's 2021 "American Currents" exhibit among them.

On the outside, this could very easily look like problems are being solved and everything is good. However, the work has just begun.

It's not enough for there to be, as syndicated radio personality Bobby Bones said in early 2021, a “vocal minority” fighting for change, this effort will take everyone. I've watched as a few artists found their voices this year, including myself, and used them to speak up about inequities, biases, and injustices within the Nashville system. It takes guts for someone who is currently in the thick of it to speak up and out against it. To all those who have said nothing, or whose activism is limited to simply posting a Black square on Instagram, or “haven't had the time to think about racism in the industry,” it's not ok for you to rely on the work of a few.

Every effective movement in our history happened because there was a belief that all concerned parties were moving as one. The same rules apply here. If you want to be seen as a change agent, BE A CHANGE AGENT. Start with your circle. Who are you employing? Who are you writing with? Who are you working with? How are you looking out for those coming behind you? Are your statements or actions hindering those trying to do the work? Are you only looking out for yourself? If you aren't concerned with any of those answers, then step out of the way of those who are. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “A social movement that moves people is merely a *revolt*. A

movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution.”

What the industry needs is a revolution, not a revolt. It’s not enough to see diversity onstage, it needs to permeate at every level.

And the biggest observation I’ve made is a toxic culture in fandom. I watched Rachel Berry — a Black elementary school teacher and country music fan — in 2020 talk about how much she loved country music but felt unwelcome at shows. There was subsequent outpouring of support from fans and artists only to see in February 2021, Morgan Wallen’s sales skyrocketed after being caught using a racist slur as a “playful” term for a friend.

For me, the hurtful part wasn’t the slur. It was the reaction from fans. I have screenshots of people calling me everything but a child of God for saying it was wrong. They tell us to get over it because “it’s no big deal” and “Black people use it all the time.” The hate is downright demoralizing.

There have been days that take me back to my apartment in 2008, bracing myself to open hate mail, honestly wondering if the work is even worth it. It seems to be a disease of the heart that plagues the whole country, not just country music.

In moments of sadness and exasperation, I think about the good. Initiatives that the Academy of Country Music, Change the Conversation and Nashville Music Equality are taking; the diverse artists I’ve seen take the Opry

stage this year; the amazing work of writers like Andrea Williams, Amanda Martinez, Holly G., and so many others who examine hard truths and ask hard questions; the proliferation of Black country content made from our unique points of view like The Black Opry, the work of my own home team, Apple Music Country and the intentionally diverse and varied programming they offer, and the long overdue inclusion of Ray Charles in the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2022.

I think about the Color Me Country Artist Grant fund that Kelly McCartney and I started in 2020 that has given over fifty BIPOC artists grants to pursue their country music dreams, and all the allies like Brandi Carlisle's Looking Out Foundation, CMT, Newport Folk Foundation, Fiona Prine, Donald Cohen, and all the good folks that give monthly that make that possible. Race should never be the reason someone can't pursue their dreams, neither should money.

This chapter of my life and career is my love letter to every artist whose names we'll never know or are pushed to the margins of history. To every Black or brown child that ever had a dream, only be told they can't or shouldn't aspire to it because of the color of their skin. It's also a love letter to country music, from someone who believes that music built on "three chords and the truth" should include everyone's truth.

Diversity in Country Music

by Don Cusic

Country music in the 2000s is caught between business and sociology.

On one hand, country music is a business and a business must show a profit, so business does what it needs to do to create that profit. That usually involves continuing with what has been tried and true and minimizing risk in an extremely high risk business. On the other hand, there are issues of social justice, equality, cultural acknowledgment and open opportunities that make for a better, more just society. Those two factors are in a continual clash.

To Diverse or Not Diverse, that is the issue. Whether it is more noble to become advocates for diversity and face a sea of troubles or remain locked in what has worked in the past. Diversity in country music is the issue du jour, although country music in the past has faced the issue before, although not to the extent it is facing currently. Country music today is not a pure breed; it is a mongrel. The deep roots are in the British Isles from the seventeen and eighteenth centuries. Along the way, it has been influenced by music from other countries, other cultures, other races and other times.

The history of commercially recorded country music goes back to 1923 in Atlanta when Fiddlin' John Carson

recorded “Little Old Log Cabin Down the Lane” b/w “The Ol’ Hen Cackl’d and the Roosters Gonna Crow.” That recording was a commercial success and record labels discovered a new market. The first commercially successful blues recording came three years earlier, when Mamie Smith recorded “Crazy Blues” and record labels discovered that African-Americans were a market.

The key word here is “market.”

People like categories when they make buying decisions to guide their buying. Business likes categories so they can target an audience for marketing and promotion. The early A&R men in the music industry saw two different categories, which they defined as “Race” and “Hillbilly.” It seemed like a logical, effective way to market records, although it meant that those old recordings of blues and country singers can be misleading because many – probably most – of the musicians had to play a wide variety of music in order to earn a livelihood. A blues artist may have played pop tunes or country tunes or “folk” tunes, but, because labels needed to have them fit into a category, labels insisted they only record blues songs, preferably uncopyrighted.

Although one cannot deny that the United States was a segregated nation during the 1920s and 1930, the labels decision to separate “race” and “hillbilly” was primarily motivated by practical and commercial considerations. “Dividing race and hillbilly records into special series allowed talking-machine companies to target specialized

markets of consumers more effectively with their advertising and marketing campaigns,” stated Patrick Huber. “Moreover, such series also made it easier for the firms’ jobbers (local or regional distributors) and retailers to select from an entire catalogue of several thousand records those releases that would most appeal to their customers.” Huber continues, “This division was, however, premised on the racist beliefs of northern white middle-class executives who assumed, as the folklorist Bill Ivey has written, that consumers select music based upon race’ and that ‘musical style and race are inextricably linked.”¹

From the beginning of the country music industry, African Americans have actively participated, although country records featuring African American artists were not common, constituting only about one percent of the approximately eleven thousand hillbilly records released in the United States before 1933. According to Patrick Huber, “Between 1924 and 1932 black and white artists collaborated at twenty-two racially integrated sessions that produced sixty-nine recorded masters. Additionally, fourteen different African American artists or acts recorded forty-three known selections that appeared on hillbilly records during this same period. Another forty-nine African American musicians participated in the recording of at least 112 masters for the hillbilly recording industry before 1933. These recordings were released, in various series, on a total of 204 domestically issued sides and of these sides, no fewer than 178 of them appeared on hillbilly

records or on records otherwise intended for sale in the hillbilly market.”²

The history of country music shows a lot of influences from Black musicians. “Guitar Rag” by Sylvester Weaver in 1927 became “Steel Guitar Rag” for Leon McAuliffe in 1936. The lap guitar came from Hawaii and that sound became the slide guitar in blues and Rhythm and Blues and the steel guitar in country music. A number of old songs by blues and country musicians were “written” as much as they were “compiled” from sayings used by both blues and country musicians. In Ken Burns’ documentary on country music he names three African-American performers who had a major impact on country music: Lesley Riddle helped A.P. Carter collect songs for the Carter Family (he remembered melodies of songs collected because Carter could not read or write music), Rufus “Tee-Tot” Payne was a street musician in Montgomery, Alabama, who showed Hank Williams guitar chords and Arnold Shultz, a fiddler and guitarist, introduced Bill Monroe to the blues.

During the 1930s, country music blossomed because it was on the radio. There were “barn dances,” or variety shows for a rural audience as well as shows in the early morning or during the day that featured country music while the music of African Americans did not, for the most part, have access to radio. That is why a number of early R&B performers grew up listening to country music; it was heard on the radio but the blues was not. An exception was DeFord Bailey, a member of the Grand Ole Opry, known

for his skill on the harmonica. Bobby Hebb, who later wrote “Sunny,” sang, danced and played the spoons for Roy Acuff on the Opry and during Acuff’s tours.

During the 1940s and early 1950s, Henry Glover, an African-American, was the head of A&R for King Records, owned by Syd Nathan. Glover was a talented producer, arranger and songwriter who produced African American acts such as Wynonie Harris (“Good Rockin’ Tonight),” Little Willie John (“Fever”), Hank Ballard and the Midnighters and James Brown. He also produced country acts the Delmore Brothers, Hawkshaw Hawkins, Moon Mullican, Grandpa Jones and the York Brothers. Glover was co-writer of the classic Delmore Brothers song, “Blues Stay Away From Me.”

To maximize success of a song, Glover took R&B songs and recorded them on country artists and took country songs and recorded them on R&B artists.

Since World War II, there have been African-American performers in country music, the best example being Charley Pride, who became a country music superstar during the 1960s and ‘70s when the white country music audience was not enamored with Civil Rights or integration. Charley Pride was not a Civil Rights activist but he was a transformational figure, someone who made it easier for whites to accept the changes that Civil Rights brought. However, he was not the only African American performer in country music beginning in the 1960s.

Linda Martell was in an R&B group before she started her solo career in country. She was signed to Plantation Records by Shelby Singleton in 1969 and had three chart singles, “Color Him Father” (#22), “Before the Next Teardrop Falls” (#33) and “Bad Case of the Blues” (#58).” “Color Him Father” was a popular R&B and pop hit for the Winstons in 1969 while Martell’s version was aimed at the country market. She also released an album, *Color Him Father*.

There have been a number of African American artists who have had records on *Billboard’s* Country chart.

O.B. McClinton had 15 chart singles between 1972 and 1987 for the Enterprise and Epic labels. His biggest hits were “Don’t Let the Green Grass Fool You” (#37) and “My Whole World is Falling Down” (#36). Ruby Falls had seven chart singles for the States label (1975-1979) but none charted higher than #40. Falls was a co-writer on two of her singles, “”You’ve Got to Mend This Heartache” and “”If That’s Not Loving You (You Can’t Say I Didn’t Try).”

Big Al Downing had 15 chart singles 1978-1989 for the Warners and Team labels. His biggest hit was “Touch Me (I’ll Be Your Fool (Once More).” (#18) and “Mr. Jones” reached #20.

Stoney Edwards had 15 chart records 1971-1980 on the Capitol and Music America labels. His biggest hits were “She’s My Rock” (#20 in 1972) and “Mississippi You’re On My Mind” (#20 in 1975). He also recorded the classic “Hank and Lefty Raised My Country Soul” written by

Dallas Frazier and A.L. “Doodle” Owens, which reached #39 in 1973.

Cleve Francis had four chart records for Liberty 1992-1993, “Love Light,” “You Do My Heart Good,” “How Can I Hold You” and “Walkin’” but none got above #40.

Rissi Palmer had three chart records for 1720 Records 2007-2008: “Country Girl,” ”Hold On to Me” and ”No Air” but none cracked the top 40.

The Pointer Sisters had a country hit with “Fairy Tale” in 1975, which led to them receiving the Grammy for Best Country Vocal Performance in 1975. Anita Pointer did a duet with Earl Thomas Conley, “Too Many Times” that reached #2 on the country chart in 1986.

Lionel Richie had three country chart hits, “Stuck on You,” “Deep River Woman” (with Alabama) and “Deep River Woman” again with Little Big Town.

Duets have been a popular way to introduce country fans to African-American performers. In 1983, Ray Charles with George Jones and Chet Atkins had a top five hit with “We Didn’t See a Thing.” In 1985, Willie Nelson and Ray Charles had a number one hit with “Seven Spanish Angels.” Tim McGraw and Nelly released “Over and Over” in 2004 and Willie Nelson and Snoop Dog released “Superman” in 2011.

Latino or Latinx acts had better chart success than African-Americans. Freddy Fender had 21 chart singles 1975-1983 including four number ones, “Before the Next Teardrop Falls,” “Wasted Days and Wasted Nights” (both

number ones for two weeks), “Secret Love” and “You’ll Lose a Good Thing.” Other hits include “Since I Met You Baby” (#10), “Vaya Con Dios” (#37), “Living It Down”(#2) and “The Rains Came” (#4).

Johnny Rodriguez had 45 chart singles, including six number ones: “You Always Come Back (To Hurting Me),” “Ridin’ My Thumb to Mexico” “That’s the Way Love Goes,” “I Just Can’t Get Her Out of My Mind,” “Just Get Up and Close the Door” and “Love Put a Song in My Heart.” He also had 13 top ten singles.

Rick Trevino had 15 chart records 1993-2007 for Columbia, including a number one, “Running Out of Reasons to Run” and five top tens: “She Can’t Say I Didn’t Cry,” “Doctor Time,” “Bobbie Ann Mason,” “Learning As You Go” and “I Only Get This Way With You.”

Trini Triggs had four chart records 1998-2004; the highest reached #47.

Willie Nelson did a duet with Julio Iglesias, “To All The Girls I’ve Loved Before” that reached number one and won the CMA Award for Best Duo. Nelson and Iglesias also recorded “Spanish Eyes” that reached #8 in 1988.³

Both Fender and Rodriguez sang most of their songs in part-Spanish and part-English. They demonstrated country music’s appeal to the Spanish-language audience, particularly in Texas, but few, if any, Music Row executives spoke Spanish, which limited the signings of Hispanic acts.

CMT has produced “Crossroads,” a show that pairs a country with a non-country artist. Most of these have been

a country artist with a rock or pop artist but Nelly appeared with Kane Brown, Florida Georgia Line and Breland, Trish Yearwood performed with Babyface, Lee Ann Womack performed with John Legend, Travis Tritt performed with Ray Charles, Kenny Rogers performed with Lionel Ritchie and Brett Young Performed with Boyz II Men.

The door has cracked open more in recent years for African American artists in country music. . Darius Rucker, Kane Brown and Jimmie Allen have all had #1 country hits and Rucker has had a string of number ones. At the Country Music Association's Awards Show in 2021, Jimmie Allen won the New Artist of the Year award and the Brothers Osborne won Duo of the Year award after T.J. Osborne came out as gay. Kane Brown and Chris Young won the Best Musical Event and Mickey Guyton was nominated for Best New Artist.

Guyton co-hosted the Academy of Country Music Awards in 2021, which gave her an immense amount of exposure.

Music Row executives have been cautious in signing African American acts because they will be held accountable if the acts don't sell. The success of Charley Pride is a constant reminder that African American acts can sell in the country genre. The executives sociological self says it's the right things to do and they want to be part of the solution and not the problem. But that business self says they shouldn't do it too often because there's no profitable return on investment.

A key factor in the country music industry is that radio is controlled by six companies: Clear Channel Communications, Cumulus Media, Disney, Emiss, Entercom Communications and Viacom. They own 18 percent of all radio stations, but this is misleading. In the 287 markets where those six have invested in radio, they own almost 100 percent of the listeners. There's not much variety in programming; the stations concentrate on a handful of genres. In the early 2000s, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) passed some regulations to rectify this but the court overturned those regulations.

“No music genre is beholden to corporate radio as country music, and no form of music media is as conservative, aesthetically and politically, as corporate radio,” stated Natalie Weiner in her article “Country Music Is Changing, in Spite of Itself.” “Put two and two together, and it makes sense that no genre is more conservative than country music made for the radio – an assembly – line product stuffed with references to patriotism and pickups, built by a massive industry centered in Nashville. That conventional wisdom accounts for the wide swath of people whose response to seeing a video of rising country star Morgan Wallen using the n-word last month was ‘Is anyone surprised?’”

Conversations – necessary and overdue – have begun on “how to make country music more inclusive” which means that “country radio’s sudden sensitivity to outsiders’ perception of the genre is both a step in the right direction

and ultimately self serving—a reflection of how the tectonic plates of the country industry have already been shifting over the past few years.”⁴

The message from mainstream country radio, according to Natalie Weiner “especially in the warmongering George W. Bush era” can be summed up as “If you don’t have anything conservative to say, don’t say anything at all.”⁴

In February, 2021, Morgan Wallen, the hottest, best selling country act was caught yelling the N-word after a night of drinking. In May, George Floyd died after a policeman held his foot on Floyd’s neck. Those two events have framed a discussion on race in country music.

Wallen publicly apologized and was punished by radio, which, for the most part, stopped playing his records and he was banished from awards consideration. It was a rather severe penalty but it send a clear message to the country music community as well as the rest of America: Racism was not to be tolerated or cordoned and if and when it occurs, it will be condemned and there will be a price to pay. And yet, Wallen’s streams increased and sales increased; the public liked his album and continued to demand to hear him. In 2022 he was a guest on the Grand Ole Opry and headlined a sold-out tour.

The Wallen incident put the issue of country music, racism and diversity front and center.

To some, it was just a young guy who got drunk and said something stupid. To others, it crystalized the issue of race in the country music community.

At the end of the year, Wallen's album was the top selling album in the world – ahead of Adele.

The head of Wallen's label, Big Loud, is an African American, Rakiyah Marshall, who was criticized for not condemning Wallen more forcefully. However, while Wallen was a news item for most people; for Marshall and those at the label he was a person who needed help, awareness, support and loyalty to help him overcome a disastrous mistake and learn from it while seeing a much bigger picture of life. Those most opposed to Marshall and Wallen waved it off as succumbing to financial interests.

The issue of People of Color (POC) and the LGBTQ groups being marginalized was brought forward in 2020 and music journalists “wrote about these realities with varying degrees of clarity and urgency,” stated Jewley Hight. “Trade organizations created diversity committees, awards shows doled out appearances more strategically and there were panel discussions galore.” However, “These were often top-down measure whose effects didn't really reach musicians working in grassroots fashion or those struggling to get in the door in the first place.” This left “Black and queer music makers” impatient.⁵

In an article titled “Country music reckons with racial stereotypes and its future,” AP writer Kristin Hall stated “The country music industry has been hesitant to talk about its own long and complicated history with race.” She continued, “Black artists say the industry still needs to address the systematic racial barriers that have

been entrenched in country music for decades” because “Stereotypes that country music is just for white audiences and sung by mostly white males are reinforced daily on country radio, playlists, label rosters and tour lineups.”⁶

Nashville based writer Andrea Williams stated that “white supremacy is embedded in the country music industry.” In the case of Wallen and others, Williams stated that “country music’s race problem has been dealt with without actually dealing with it.”⁷

Jewly Hight with National Public Radio (NPR) attended the Americana Conference in Nashville in October 2021 and noted that outside the official shows at various clubs in the city, there was the “Black Opry House,” which was not on the program.

Hight profiled several musicians and artists who hung out and performed in the house that journalist Marcus K. Dowling rented. “These performers congregated around shared experiences, having each encountered formidable barriers in the way of their aspiration to work anywhere along a continuum of country, contemporary folk and roots music that’s been preserved and promoted as a domain of whiteness,” stated Hight.

Dowling noted that “casual hangs like these are where things happen that further careers” and that when talking with white country artists, “they talk about these amazing experiences they have when they go write a number one hit song about drinking beers while they’re sitting in bars or they’re sitting in houses or they’re just hanging out all the

time.” That was the environment he wanted to recreate at the Black Opry House.

Journalist Marcus K. Dowling wrote about hip-hop, dance and electronic music for years “but couldn’t find opportunities to cover country” although he had been interested in the genre for a number of years. “Being a Black writer in a space which is so demonstrably and overwhelmingly white, when you don’t have a pitch about, say, a Black country artist when you’re trying to write about white artists, you’re oftentimes the least heard or at least wanted opinion,” said Dowling.⁹ After a period of frustration from a lack of opportunities to cover country music, in 2020 doors opened and Dowling began to write for The Boot and CMT.com in addition to other publications.

Musician Lizzie No stated that “I still think that it’s mostly the white artists that are building wealth in this game. I’m still really skeptical until I see more Black and queer artists headlining the big festivals, getting the big label deals.”

Lilli Lewis addressed the ‘there can only be one’ dynamic in country music, stating “there are thousands of others out there in the field.” She stated that “I’ve even been told point blank by record label executives, serving as an executive myself, that Black people in particular don’t have the interest, the knowledge or the passion when it comes to Americana music.”

Lewis owns and operates the indie label Louisiana Red Hot Records and intends to assemble a Country Soul Phone Book to connect underrepresented musicians.

“Some of the work is deliberately remaining outside of the structure,” said Lewis. “And I think that’s mostly because we want to center different values and it’s really difficult to do that from inside. And then, at the same time, you understand that there’s a pipeline inside and if you really want to support these artists, you definitely want them to be able to monetize their work. And that means having some kind of relationship with the pipeline, whether it’s being able to send artists through the pipeline or whether it’s knowing what the pipeline looks like and being able to recreate that on your own terms.”⁸

Holly G., a flight attendant from Virginia and a songwriter, started the Black Opry in April, 2021 “as an attempt to heal her relationship with the genre.” According to Emily Yahr with the *Washington Post*, Holly grew up “loving country music” but recently felt that “a lot of people in the industry probably didn’t share the same values she did. She wondered whether some singers would even want her to attend their concerts.”

Holly was inspired by Rissi Palmer’s “Color Me Country” radio show on Apple Music, which launched in fall, 2020 and focuses on the Black, Indigenous and Latino roots of country music.

University of Ottawa musicologist Jada Watson’s research showed that “a mere 1.5 percent of singers with

songs on country radio were Black or Indigenous artists of color.”

Holly created a website that served as an outlet where she could focus on artists of color, writing about them and boosting their profiles. She hoped those artists could connect with other country music enthusiasts. The response was broad and positive and she received messages from singers and fans who wanted to participate in her venture. Holly “got so many requests for concerts that she had to hire a booking agent” which is how the Black Opry Revue was formed and went on tour.

Although the show and ground work support were positive and encouraging, “there have been challenges.” Yahr noted that “Plenty of people don’t like being reminded that country music has a race problem” Holly G. doesn’t reveal her last name in interviews “because of death threats she’s received for pointing out the racism—and those who turn a blind eye to it—that is still prevalent in the country music industry, even after some Nashville organizations pledged to improve diversity during the nationwide response to George Floyd’s death in police custody in 2020.”

The group has been active on social media, co-writing songs, recording songs together and performing shows.

Jett Holden, a Black gay man, was often told by country music executives that he wasn’t “marketable.” Holly G. brought him into the Black Opry fold. “I didn’t know I needed it until I had it,” he said, “and now I can’t imagine being without it. It’s the most welcoming environment. We

don't care who you are or what you look like, what your sexuality or race is, it doesn't matter. We're there to all share music."

"It feels unfair to me that the artists don't get to just make their art," said Holly. "They have to do all of this extra work to be seen as a dignified human being before anybody even gets to their art. I don't have any, like, musical art to share, so I feel like it's less of a burden for me to do it. And it takes some of the burden off of them if I'm helping create that space."

"The industry has survived so long by keeping us separated," said Holly "Some of the Black artists that have been doing this for a very long time will tell you that when they started, [executives] would pit the Black artists against each other. By creating that division, there was never community. Well, now we have community. And when you have community, your voice is a lot stronger. And when your voice is stronger, people hear you."¹⁰

Just before the CMA Awards Show in November, 2021, the Rosedale Summit was held simultaneously in Nashville and Los Angeles. In Nashville it was held at the National Museum of African American Music and in Los Angeles at the Grammy Museum. The Summit was held to address "the erasure of Black artists from country music's history and whether the industry could be more welcoming to artists of color.

"The issues that plagued country music in 2021 were reflections of what was happening decades prior," stated

reporter Kristin M. Hall. “Two pioneers and activists – Dr. Cleve Francis and Frankie Staton – both spoke about being silenced as Black country artists.” Francis, a heart surgeon who left his career in medicine to pursue a career in country music, “was told that the genre would only support one Black country artist and that was Charley Pride.

Some progress has been made “but much more is needed,” stated the article, which quoted Valerie Ponzio, a Latina country music singer from Texas who said that progress “has yet to extend to writing rooms, where the hit songs are created.”

“I want to see it happening in the Music Row writing rooms,” said Ponzio, “where we are comfortable to bring our stories in a country music setting.”

Ponzio also stated that “white male new country acts in Nashville have a big financial advantage over a new artist who may be Black, Indigenous or Latino. There are so many artists that are funded, but they are all the same type of artist. So surprise, surprise. Who are we hearing making money on the radio?”¹¹

Singer songwriters immerse themselves in “self” – self expression, self-definition and self-revelation – in an attempt to connect their inner feelings, thoughts and life with an audience. An entertainer wants to perform songs that an audience likes. For the first, the focus is the self on stage and what they want to reveal and for the other, the focus is on the audience and what they want to hear. There

are merits to each but, above all, the artist on stage wants to connect with an audience.

That is the issue, particularly when an artist is starting their career. The best thing that can happen to an artist is to have a “hit.” And what is a “hit?” Well, it’s a song that grabs your attention as soon as you hear it and, once you hear it, you want to hear it again and again and then you want to spread the word to your friends to let them know about the song so they can hear it. Then the song catches fire and people all over the map want to hear it again and again and again. That’s not a very scientific, or even sociological, definition of a hit song but that’s the measure in everyday life. No one can really explain it but everyone knows that when it’s a “hit,” it hits you.

This becomes an issue with Black artists who release a song to a primarily white audience. The most successful African American artists — Charley Pride and Darius Rucker — always searched for a hit that a lot of people could relate to. That’s led to the success of other Black artists. The problem is that artists often feel unfulfilled if a song isn’t “authentic,” a favorite word among critics and fans. That authenticity means that the song must be an extension of an artist rather than simply a song that people like and want to hear again. To be “authentic,” the artist must believe that the song represents them, that they and the song are one and the artist believes what the song says. For many critics and fans, an artist is not “authentic” if they don’t write the songs they sing.

That’s a basic reason why most artists want to write—or have a hand in writing (songs are generally written by a group of 2-4 songwriters)—so they can feel a connection to the song. Finances also play a part in that as well because it gives the artist another revenue stream in addition to recording royalties and touring income.

In an interview with Jewly Hight, Andrea Williams stated that “the industry can make a success out of virtually anyone they give proper support to” although “when you come in and you’re not foregrounding your Blackness, when you’re trying to hide and minimize who you are, that also means that you’re likely to come in with an all-white band and hire all-white management and an all-white team that, again, doesn’t create space for other people who look like you. The industry doesn’t just look like this because we don’t have enough Black artists: It’s also because we don’t have Black musicians, songwriters, producers, managers, publicists and on and on.”¹²

Rissi Palmer and Mickey Guyton both faced that dilemma when they released their early recordings. When Guyton released “Black Like Me,” it was an honest expression of her life and feelings and, although it was not a “hit,” it was an important song for Guyton as an artist.

Rissi Palmer’s first release in 2007 was “Country Girl,” whose message is that she “didn’t have to look or talk a certain way to call herself a country girl.”

“I said that I am not white in the first verse,” said Palmer, “and the label was like, ‘No, no, no’ so she

rewrote the lyrics “to make it feel more universal. It was very intentional when I wrote that song to talk about all the women, or all the people, that might not necessarily fit in the box, but are still of the same mindset.”

Palmer was frustrated and disappointed with her lack of success but continues to be involved in country music, hosting “Color Me Country: Radio with Rissi Palmer” on Apple.

People like what they like and they really can’t explain why, although the influence of friends and peers has proven to be a factor. For those who believe that the market is the arbitrator and the best means to sort out what is best and what is to be thrown aside, then the wisdom of the market should prevail. However, remember that the market did not solve the problem of a segregated society; it took government legislation and regulation to get the landmark Civil Rights bills passed.

A factor that is seldom discussed when there is a push for one group or another to receive more attention or more opportunities is that the entertainment industry is a mystical, magical business where many are called but few are chosen. There are factors that go into success—like hard work, drive, persistence and grit—but in the end, one song will be a smash hit while others will fade away. It’s the same with singers—a few will become superstars while others, who seem equally talented and driven, will never reach that level. It’s something that defies logic and cannot

be predicted, but it is part of life in the creative side of the entertainment field.

How do you explain Hank Williams? Johnny Cash? Elvis? The Beatles? There is certainly a connection to an audience, but this is only obvious after an act has succeeded. There are different levels of success, but the success of a song or an act will always remain a mystery wrapped up in a bit of magic.

Many agree that Diversity is a good—even necessary--thing, that it leads to a better society, more creative, more engaging and helps us understand other cultures as well as those who are different. The problem is that human nature shows that we like and trust the people best who look like us, think like us and have similar tastes. That means that it takes a concentrated effort to be “diverse,” it doesn’t just happen naturally and we’d really prefer to slip back into our comfort zone and erect walls to keep those who are different out. It is an ongoing effort and commitment to strive for and practice diversity

A study, “Redlining in Country Music: Representation in the Country Music Industry (2000-2020) was compiled by University of Ottawa musicologist Jada Watson that presented data from two decades of radio play, award nominations and label representation for Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) in the format. The study demonstrated a “deep, longstanding disparity between radio play and awards recognition for white artists in twenty-first

century commercial country music when compared to the BIPOC counterparts.”

The study showed that:

- BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) artist representation—including airplay, CMA and ACM Awards nominations, record deals and charting singles—makes up less than 4 percent of the commercial country music industry;
- BIPOC artists received a 2.3 percent share of country radio airplay in the last 19 years. Nearly 96 percent of that share went to BIPOC men, with women receiving less than 3 percent;
- Only 19 percent of songs released by BIPOC artists received enough spins to peak in the top 50 of airplay charts. Zero songs by Black women reached the top 20 on country radio charts;
- Country radio played 11,484 songs from 2002-2020. Roughly 1 percent of those songs—or a total of 133—were by Black artists.
- 2.3 percent of ACM Awards and 1.6 percent of CMA Awards nominees between 2000 and 2019 were people of color.

Watson told the Nashville *Tennessean* that “The idea that BIPOC artists do not make country music—that they’re not participating in this space—is a myth that’s still perpetuated in this data.”

Watson noted that during the formative years of the country music industry gatekeepers “drew racial lines with

hillbilly records (marketed for rural white listeners) and race records (songs framed for Black audiences)” was a reason that “a gaping racial imbalance exists today.” The roots of the problem is historic because “this industry was founded along musical color lines that excluded BIPOC artists right from the beginning. That white, racial framing has been doubled-down at every turn.”

That system, said Watson, is “still being upheld 100 years later.”

Watson’s research had tended to focus on women in country music but “women of color stand with much to gain from radio airplay. There were 11,484 songs played on country radio from 2002 to 2020 but only 23 were by Black women with Mickey Guyton’s 2015 single, “Better Than You Left Me” the highest-charting single, peaking at 30 on the *Billboard* chart.

The songs by BIPOC women did not receive airplay during “drive time”—the morning and late afternoon hours when more people were in their cars listening to radio—but in the evening or overnight slots with “nearly 44 percent of BIPOC women airplay in the overnight hours.”

Recordings general start in overnight airplay to test their appeal but “this is a form of cultural redlining that avoids investment in Black women by relating their songs to a daypart with anew audience,” stated Watson.

There has been an increased representation by BIPOC artists on radio, starting at 0.5 percent in 2002-2007 to 3.4 percent in 2014-2020 to 4.8 percent in 2020 with Kane

Brown, Jimmie Allen and Darius Rucker accounting for most of that increase. Although there has been progress, “those numbers don’t point to progress if more artists aren’t gaining traction,” said Watson. “This is not progress. This is not diversity.”¹³

The Country Music Association commissioned a study by Horowitz Research that released “Country Music’s Multicultural Opportunity.” The listening habits of Black, Latinx, Asian and white audiences were studied as well as the listening habits of those who don’t engage in country music. It was reported that six in ten U.S. adults listen at least monthly to country music but that drops to five in ten when only non-white listeners were surveyed.

The main reason that Black, Latinx and Asians surveyed gave for not listening to country radio was “Just not that into it,” “Not top-of-mind” and “Can’t relate to the vibe.”

Thirty-seven percent of Black non-listeners told the surveyors that country artists “don’t build POC (People of Color) fans” while roughly one third of all segments said country lyrics were “not relatable.” The non-white segments of the survey (28-32 percent) felt they would not feel safe or comfortable at a live event while 21 percent of white participants agreed.

The core listeners to country have become more diverse with 36 percent of Asians and Latinx and 40 percent of Blacks in that group.

Asked about suggestions for solutions to increase non-white core listeners, “more collaborations between country and non-country artists” ranked first while Blacks felt the country music industry should do “more to celebrate cultural diversity” as well as do “more to address racial/social justice issues and more recognition of the music’s Black Roots.”

The CMA study showed that although the number of People of Color listening to country music is increasing, 20 percent of People of Color attending country music events say they’ve “experienced racial profiling and/or harassment” while 20 percent of white people “say they have witnessed it.”

“Black listeners more frequently reported feeling uncomfortable, feeling that that they stand out due to their race/ethnicity,” the report stated.¹⁶

A partial solution may come from demographics. During the past decade, the multi-racial population grew by 30% while the white population declined by 8 percent. Hispanic and Asian-American populations grew by 20 percent each and the Black U.S. population grew by 8.5 percent.

Projections show that in 2030, whites will be 55.8 percent of the American population, Blacks will be 13 percent, Asians 6.9 percent and Hispanics 21.1 percent. In 2060, projections are that whites will be 44.3 percent, Blacks 15 percent, Asians 9.1 percent and Hispanic 27.5 percent.¹⁴

The Baby Boomers, born 1946-1961, came of age during the Civil Rights Movement when legislation was passed that ended segregation and guaranteed the right to vote, so they remember the historic struggles the nation went through to gain that legislation and those rights. That group was made aware of the inequality between Blacks and whites and the struggle to integrate the population. That generation brought the country a long way—from a segregated nation to an integrated society. Looking back, that was a difficult time but they adjusted and accepted an integrated world that their parents had resisted. This generation took the first steps towards diversity.

Gen X is about 21 percent of the country, smaller than any other age demographic. They grew up with high divorce rates and a general lack or an adult presence in the childhoods and teenage years. They are the “latchkey” of “middle child” generation.

Millennials, born 1980-2000, are 80 million strong and, although they are profiled as being civilly and politically disengaged and less concerned about helping the larger community than GenX (born 1962-1981), on the positive side they are supportive of gay rights and equal rights for minorities and receptive to new ideas and ways of living. They are adapting quickly to a world undergoing rapid technological change.

Generation Z, the 41 million born 1997-2012, will soon become the largest group of consumers and were raised on the internet and social media. They are digital buyers

and most are ethnically diverse. This group comprises 27 percent of the American population and almost half are minorities. These young people are social justice warriors, particularly interested in inequality and Climate Change. They are the most racially and ethnically diverse group.

The majority of Gen Z supports social movements such as Black Lives Matter, transgender rights and feminism. They had their own cell phone before they were 12 and spend as much of their time on their phones than older generations spent watching TV.

Gen Alpha, born during the early 2010s, is potentially the most transformative generation, growing up with technology since birth.¹⁵

Those demographics show progress and change and the potential for a new world.

Looking back, there has certainly been change and progress. As Dr. King once said, “The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. Change takes a long time but it does happen.” However, for those who are ready now, it is “if not now, when?” Change over the long haul is great for history books, but we live in the here and now.

African-Americans have had to demand change. They demanded that Civil Rights laws be passed, they demanded voting rights and they demanded an integrated society. The story of African-Americans in the United States is a history of demands. A demand to be respected, to be accepted, to be given opportunities, a demand to not be denied

what others have received. A demand for social justice, for equality and a demand to be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. Without those demands, nothing would have been achieved. Now African Americans demand that they be accepted as part of country music. And why not? Studies have shown that country music has been a hard door to crack open for African Americans.

Country music has always been diverse but critics say it hasn't been diverse nearly enough. The same criticism has been leveled against the United States. Racism has been — and continues to be — a force holding African American and other minorities back. However, demographic trends seem to be moving in a positive direction.

The question arises: Will a music originally marketed to a white, southern audience be “country music” if it is fully “diverse?” Will country music’s historically white audience abandon it if it is “diverse?”

Country music has always followed the market and presented music that appeals to a broad audience and Country Music has the widest demographic of any genre — it reaches people aged six to sixty-five. The conclusion has to be that there will always be a country music even if it will not be exactly like the music of our past.

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Lucille Starr

A Canadian Pioneer of Lasting International Renown

by Linda J. Daniel

Introduction

The hauntingly sad sound of a single horn introduced the song sung in both French and English. It was 1964, a year in which the British Invasion and a group called the Beatles were having unparalleled success topping the charts. Then along came a song that was totally unique and a singer whose voice touched people around the world. A melancholy tune about lost love sung by a woman whose chillingly heartfelt interpretation hit a universal nerve.

The singer was Lucille Starr, a bilingual artist with a powerful voice and a dynamic personality, best-known for “The French Song” (“Quand le soleil dit bonjour aux montagnes”) which became an international hit. She was the first Canadian female to sell over a million records (Daly and King). In 1987 Starr became the first female vocalist inducted into the Canadian Country Music Association’s Hall of Honour (Brown 71). Two years later, the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame honoured her as one of its 25 inaugural inductees, the only other women

being Myrna Lorrie and Marg Osburne (*Canadian Country Music ...*).

Starr received high praise from those in the music business. Herb Alpert of A&M Records stated unequivocally: “To my ears, Lucille Starr has one of the most naturally beautiful voices in the world. She sings with a unique ease and lyrical grace that make her special.” As the first singer to record Billy Sherrill’s “Too Far Gone,” he asserts “... I’ve been in love with her voice ever since. Her interpretations are full of warmth and compassion. Her style remains unequalled” (*Lucille Starr ... Liner Notes*). Another Canadian Hall of Fame inductee, Sylvia Tyson, who has performed and recorded with Starr, described her as “simply the best female country artist Canada ever turned out, with an extraordinary voice and great stage presence – so full of energy” (Jennings, B23).

Beginnings

Lucille Marie Raymonde Savoie was born in St. Boniface, Manitoba on May 13th, 1938 (“Starr, Lucille.”). The family moved briefly to Windsor before settling in Maillardville, British Columbia, near Coquitlam (Jennings), a community as equally francophone as that of her birthplace (Brown 70). She was the only child of Aurore and Gerald Savoie, who worked as a labourer and millwright at a mill on the Fraser River. Lucille went to

school at Our Lady of Lourdes and attended the nearby Roman Catholic church (Hawthorn).

In an interview with Andrea Warner of *CBC Music*, Starr recalls her very first appearance on the stage as a young girl. The older children were putting on a play at the St. Boniface church and Lucille had wanted to join them, but her mother would not allow it. When the play started, much to the surprise of her mother and aunts who were sitting in the audience, there was Lucille, up on the stage, dancing her heart out, all dressed up, including makeup. She was so proud of herself! When they got home, her mother wanted to know where she had found the clothes she was wearing. Lucille said, “Well, I went down the street and I asked some people if I could borrow some things.” This caused her mother great embarrassment because people would think the family had to ask for handouts. Starr laughs, “However, Mum never forgot that when I said I wanted to do something, sing or whatever, she’d better let me. And that’s how I really started.”

Lucille was exposed to a variety of music growing up. While her mother liked classical music, her father played the fiddle and loved country and “old time” music. Lucille’s only formal training came from singing with a classical choir called Les Hirondelles [The Swallows] (Starr) who performed at weddings and social events in Maillardville (Hawthorn). Nicholas Jennings of *The Globe and Mail* states that as “The young Lucille’s interest in music deepened,... one day the teenager boldly walked into

a radio station and expressed interest in singing solo on air. Local trio the Rhythm Pals, in studio at the time, provided accompaniment and were impressed with her talent” (B23).

Influences

Starr was influenced by Kitty Wells and Jean Shepard. As two of the first women to have success breaking into the country music business, they were unique because it was always men who seemed to “get all the breaks” and have all the hits. In those days, Starr explains, “Women on the shows were what we called ‘fillers’... and these ladies came along and had tremendous hits and opened the door for a lot of other women artists to be recognized as people who could sell records” (Starr).

While still liking and performing many kinds of music, Lucille says she sings country because it is “comfortable” and the lyrics are easy to understand. Although her recordings include a variety of songs, it is country music that contains “the basics and it’s the basics that keep us going.... They come right to the point” (Ibid.).

Early Career

Still a teenager, Lucille met Keray Regan and his younger brother, Bob, “who lived up the hill on Blue Mountain Road and were already writing and recording their own songs.” In an interview with John P. McLaughlin of *The Province*, Starr recalls: “Bob would sing with his sister

and I would be humming and things and Keray noticed. ... He said, ‘Lotus’ – he always called me Lotus – ‘You’ve got a beautiful voice.’ He was recording at the time and he wanted a girl to sing [‘I Don’t Think I’ll Trust You Anymore[’] so I sang my first recording with Keray Regan. He gave me my first chance. It got released and did well, it got good airplay.”

The first time Lucille sang publicly with Keray Regan’s group, she describes as a catastrophe. It was in a little place in British Columbia called Hope, the irony of which still causes her to chuckle four decades later, and it was snowing. Keray Regan’s two back-up singers who had sung on his record were not there, so he asked his sister and Lucille to fill in. When the song finished, Lucille started to leave the stage, as planned, but try as she might, she couldn’t. The heel of her shoe had become lodged in a knothole in the floor. Lucille held onto his sister’s hand as she kept wriggling, trying to release her high heel. Keray kept looking at her as if to say, “Get off! Get off!” But she wasn’t leaving without her shoe. Finally, the tip of her heel came off and she was able to exit the stage. “And that was the beginning of it. ... The song was ‘I Don’t Care If You Go a Little Further’ – well. ... That was the beginning of it. It was embarrassing but it was exciting, and it was snowing, and it was in a town called Hope. What a perfect place! It just came to me now. There was ‘hope’ for me after all.” She adds that she also sang with several other groups and musicians (Starr).

The Peace River Rangers originally consisted of Keray Regan, his younger brother, Bob, and sister, Fern. When Fern left to marry, they were looking for a vocalist and Lucille Savoie “fit the bill.” “With her attractive good looks, ... and Lucille’s unmistakable vibrato” she was a welcome addition (Kettner 2). Starr recalls performing with the group in Canada in the fifties and, as Canadian artists, explains how difficult it was to be compensated fairly. For example, a Toronto club offered to pay them only half as much as what an American group was getting “and I knew that we were certainly as good as that group.” So, they decided to change their name from the Peace River Rangers to the California Pioneers and were hired at twice the pay. “... I couldn’t get over that. And, of course, when we all got out of the club, we started to giggle. We thought that was pretty funny – that the owner didn’t remember, thank goodness – because we had just changed the name to something that sounded American” (Starr).

Also at that time, Canadian radio stations were playing mainly American records. Starr says: “... you’d come in with your records and you were lucky to get them played. ... When I went to the States it was because we didn’t have as many opportunities in Canada. That was later to come. And a lot of Canadian artists were moving to the States to hone their craft and to get some better breaks.” However, she states adamantly, that she always maintained her Canadian citizenship and considered herself a Canadian (Ibid.).

Lucille was invited to become female vocalist of the Keray Regan Band. She and guitarist/vocalist Bob Regan were a prominent part of the group and after several years of gaining experience and fans across Canada, they formed their own show. The duet began recording and produced several country/pop records which were successful in both Canada and the United States (Cunningham). According to Larry Delaney of *Country Music News*, "... the duo quickly established themselves as a much-in-demand country act, working the club circuit across Canada and having major chart successes (1).

Rockabilly

Lucille and Bob moved to California in the fifties, seeking better opportunities, and toured through the States as "Bob & Lucille." The duo signed with Hollywood's Ditto label. Their first release in 1959 was "Eeny Meeny Miney Moe" and "Demon Lover," Ditto 121 (Kettner 2). Dave Schroeder of *The Rana Review* describes the high quality of this record: "Lucille attacks the song with growls and squeals, her impeccable timing driving the song forward; Bob contributes some wild guitar. It's a rockabilly classic, much sought after by collectors" (25). The equally snappy "What's the Password," "The Flirting Kind," and "The Big Kiss" followed. These records, too, are described as "rockabilly classics" with "Starr's bopping, high-hiccup vocals and Regan's stinging guitar breaks" (Oermann). In

the seminal *Finding Her Voice, Women in Country Music 1800-2000*, Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann state that the popular act of The Collins Kids was merely a “junior version of the Bob and Lucille rockabilly team” (197).

Rock 'n' Roll Pioneers

Klaus Kettner of Hydra Records cites Starr as “one of the most outstanding voices” of the few female “rockin’ interpreters” of the fifties, alongside better-known singers such as Wanda Jackson, Brenda Lee, and Janis Martin (2). Bufwack and Oermann cite these women as the pioneers of rock ‘n’ roll. Fighting against the social norms of the day, which usually included getting married and being a mother, they asserted themselves, expressing their feelings through music. They became “the first generation of country stars entertaining on the most revolutionary innovation of the era, television. Wanda Jackson and Brenda Lee on *Ozark Jubilee*, Lorrie Collins and Lucille Starr on *Town Hall Party*, Bonnie Lou on *Midwestern Hayride*, and Jo-Ann Campbell and Janis Martin on *American Bandstand*” (204).

Coming from a strict Catholic up-bringing, Starr states that she never had a problem with being a “rocker.” She explains, “I was doing what came naturally, ... I didn’t know what I was not supposed to do so I always danced around: I was doing what was later called the twist. It was just a natural thing: I always loved to move around a lot and I still do. One of my records was very risquй for the

time. My mother said, ‘I can’t possibly play this for the parish priest!’ It was called ‘Demon Lover.’ That was a no-no” (Starr qtd. in Bufwack and Oermann 196).

More tours followed. In 1961, “financed by the owner of a nightclub they were appearing at in Minneapolis,” the duo released a “rocked up” version of The Carlisle’s “No Help Wanted” (Schroeder 25). Released on Sona 1156, “it failed to click and so they continued on with live appearances.” In addition to touring the States, they returned frequently to Canada to play and help Keray with some of his recording sessions (Kettner 2).

Gaining Recognition

Soon Lucille’s “powerful voice, unique style and energetic stage presence” were catching the attention of those influential in the music industry in Los Angeles. A&R pioneer, “Uncle” Art Satherley, Hollywood “Tailor to the Stars,” Nudie, and singer/songwriter, Dorsey Burnette, were all instrumental in helping Lucille and giving her advice (Cunningham).

“Uncle” Art Satherley

Along with Ralph Peer, “Uncle” Art Satherley is recognized as one of the pioneers of artist & repertoire (A&R), “a combination of traveling talent scout and record producer.” He played an important role in the recording of early country music performers, often taking his

recording equipment with him out into the field, adapting “warehouses, hotel rooms and vacant buildings into makeshift recording studios” (Country Music Foundation 110). Carson Robison, Vernon Dalhart, Cliff and Bill Carlisle, and Roy Acuff, as well as blues artists such as Ma Rainey and Blind Lemon Jefferson were some of the artists he recorded (Scherman). Satherley was awarded the first “Pioneer Award” by the Academy of Country Music in 1968 and he became an inductee of the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1971 (McCloud).

Starr recalls, “[Satherley] heard me sing somewhere and he decided ... he wanted to start a television show called *Country America*, so he approached us. ... I sang ... a Hank Williams’ song, ‘Cold, Cold Heart,’ and ... ‘I’ve Got a New Heartache.’ [Satherley] said, ‘When you sing that, you have a tear in your voice.’ ... My personal life was not good at that time, and it wasn’t for a few years, but that, in itself, helped to put the sadness in my sad songs” (Starr).

Satherley not only helped Starr professionally, but also on a personal level. Starr remembers that when her son was very young and she had to go to an audition, “these very wealthy people would say, ‘We’ll look after Robert while you go.’ Like I’m up in Beverly Hills and like Uncle Art Satherley has my little baby on their rug and they’re going to look after him while I go to an audition. I mean that was just ... I mean that just wasn’t done. It was marvellous, the help that was given me” (Ibid.).

Nudie

Through Satherley, Starr became acquainted with Nudie, the famous Hollywood “Tailor to the Stars,” who would also help advance her career (*Canadian Country Music ...*). “Nudie Cohn (or Cohen) brought flash and sparkle to the western-wear costumes that became synonymous with country music from the 1940s through the 1960s. He created unique clothing for the biggest stars of popular music from Hank Williams to Elvis Presley (George-Warren).

Starr states, “In the beginning, all my clothes were made by Nudie, the tailor, a great tailor I adored this man. He was the type of tailor who was – ah – ‘out of this world.’” His clothes were very expensive but if he saw an artist whom he thought had talent, he would give them a break. She and Art Satherley, who was representing her, went to Nudie’s office and he told her, “... you have a lot of talent and you’re going to make it. Your eye teeth are too long, and your hair isn’t right’ ... something about that ... but he said, ‘We’re going to dress you in a way that you will be different.’” He made Starr four outfits including the boots and everything for a mere \$1500, clothes (now in the Canadian Country Music Association’s Hall of Honour and the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame) that would normally have cost several thousand dollars each, even back then. If he believed in you, he wanted to help. “He was just marvellous” (Starr).

Personal Appearances

Ralph Hicks of The California Country Music Association gave “Bob & Lucille” the name “The Canadian Sweethearts” (Cunningham). Lucille and The Canadian Sweethearts appeared weekly on four Los Angeles country music television shows: *Country Music Time*, *The Country Music Hour*, the *Spade Cooley Show*, and ABC-TV’s *Country America* show, where for two years they were featured performers. “This exposure plus their continuing recordings led to appearances on the *Grand Ole Opry*, Disneyland’s Theater, and Knott’s Berry Farm Stage in Los Angeles (McCloud). “It was also during this time that Lucille experienced her first major performance tour, when the duet was invited to tour throughout the U.S. and Canada with three of the most renowned country music artists: Hank Snow, Wilf Carter and Little Jimmy Dickens” (Cunningham). She also made appearances on *Hullabaloo*, *Shindig*, *Chicago Barn Dance*, *The Ralph Emery Show*, and *Nashville Now* (Aboriginal Music ...).

Herb Alpert

Through the Marty Landau booking agency, Starr met Dorsey Burnette who already had several hits like “Tall Oak Tree” and had written several tunes recorded by Rick Nelson. He introduced her to Herb Alpert (Delaney 1). Alpert and Jerry Moss had just formed A&M Records and in 1963 both Lucille and The Canadian Sweethearts

signed with the Los Angeles label (McCloud). The duo's debut album with Alpert was called *Introducing the Canadian Sweethearts* and was a mix of country, folk, and pop covers including a few originals by Regan. "But Mr. Alpert had bigger designs for the singer with a distinctive vibrato, and a new stage name: Lucille Starr. Mr. Alpert produced her solo debut album featuring a yearning French ballad called *Quand le soleil dit bonjour aux montagnes*, renamed *The French Song*" (Jennings). Lucille's recording of "The French Song" in 1964 changed everything (Schroeder 25).

The French Song

"[I]t was Lucille's first album on A&M, produced by Herb Alpert and including The Tijuana Brass musicians, which brought Lucille true international acclaim. The album was entitled, 'The French Song', and the title cut became a smash hit on music charts around the world, followed by numerous other hits from the same album and subsequent albums" (Cunningham).

When speaking with Larry Delaney, Starr explains how her mega-hit came to be called "The French Song":

"Actually the song was renamed to that title ... because Herb Alpert couldn't handle the original title which of course was the opening line of the song [*Quand le soleil dit bonjour aux montagnes*]. He would say, 'I don't care if I can't understand the words ... I know this is a hit.' And I recall Dorsey

being so helpful in that first session – he would be in the studio helping Herb produce the session and he'd tell me – 'C'mon Lulu (he called me that all the time) – C'mon Lulu, you can do it. Come on Lulu'. I was actually crying, [at the time, Lucille was going through a difficult period in her personal life] and he was settling me down ... 'C'mon Lulu, you can do it' ... and out of that came a million seller. I'm so grateful to Herb and wonderful Dorsey for their support and confidence back then. They were so understanding." (1)

The Spectator's Susan Beyer writes, "It is said that the day she cut her biggest selling hit ... she was sobbing. It was the sob heard round the world as the recording made Lucille Starr the first Canadian woman to ever cut a million-selling song" (B3).

Starr's mother called Lucille to see how the song was doing and her daughter told her, "I don't know, we haven't heard anything for two weeks." Then her mother replies, "'Well, it's a good thing you changed your name, so nobody'll know [a] Savoie didn't make it!'" (Starr qtd. in Warner). "It didn't do anything for six weeks, and then it started selling and hasn't stopped since, When it became a hit I couldn't do anything wrong in the United States, It has allowed me to travel all over the world. Sometimes when I do the song every night I get tired of it but the audience, they are entitled to hear it. If I didn't

have that song I wouldn't have what I have today" (Starr qtd. in Scowen).

Before "The French Song" became a hit, Starr had been on tour with Hank Snow and once asked him what it took to become a star and how many hits you would need to have. He looked at her very seriously and said that if you get the right song, "one could do it" but that "it's rare" (Starr). "Being the first solo [Canadian] female at the Grand Old Opry? That was a distinction made possible by touring with Hank Snow. 'Hank Snow was very helpful to a lot of people, actually,' [Starr] says, 'A lot of folks don't know that. But Hank helped a lot of people and I was one of them'" (Starr qtd. in Warner). For her debut appearance, she wore a yellow dress with a black crystal necklace and sang "Freight Train" (Warner).

While Herb Alpert would become "the hottest thing on the entertainment scene" with the Tijuana Brass, "it would be Lucille Starr who would be the first to bring 'Gold' to A&M Records with her hit, 'The French Song'" (Delaney 1). She says, "That felt good. I felt like I had arrived and I thought, well that's as far as that's going to go, I've done well, I've made my parents proud, and I always wanted to do that" (Starr qtd. in Warner).

Who does she think she is?

Starr loves mixing the sound of a horn with fiddles and guitars, like she did when she recorded with Herb Alpert.

She explains how unique that was at the time: “I was doing country music with the Tijuana Brass.” Her recording of “Crazy Arms” included horns, “which was not all that acceptable in country music at that time because it was ahead of its time.” It was only after Johnny Cash and the success of his song “Ring of Fire,” which included horns, that country music came to accept it. Starr recalls being told of a Disc Jockey in Bakersfield who heard the horn in “Crazy Arms” and said, “Who does she think she is?” and literally broke the record. But they would never tell her who he was. “[T]hen Cash comes in with “Ring of Fire” and, Starr adds defiantly, “He had enough horns to start a ranch.” Starr feels the DJ was being prejudiced: Cash was from Nashville, Starr from Canada (Starr).

International Acclaim

Starr’s first solo album, *The French Song*, (see *Appendix A*), “brought her international acclaim when songs ... began soaring up record charts around the world. At one point, Lucille’s recordings occupied five of the top ten positions on the music charts in South Africa, where she was the top-selling artist, and three of the top fourteen positions on the music charts in Holland, where ‘The French Song’ held the #1 spot for nineteen weeks” (Aboriginal Music ...). The song “ultimately sold more than seven million copies” around the world and launched Starr’s international solo

career. In South Africa, her album with Regan was retitled *Lucille Starr: South Africa's Sweetheart*" (Jennings).

Represented by the Marty Landau Agency in Hollywood, Lucille shared its roster with stars such as Marty Robbins, Brenda Lee, and Eddy Arnold. She performed regularly at "The Hollywood Bowl, The San Francisco (Cow) Palace, The Seattle Opera House, extensive engagements in Las Vegas, concert halls, major fairs and festivals throughout Canada and the U.S." (Cunningham). Worldwide tours included Belgium, Guam, Holland, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Okinawa, the Philippines, South Africa, and Taiwan (McCloud).

Other Hits

"The Canadian Sweethearts were Canada's most popular country duo of the era" (Photo ...). They had several internationally successful records on A&M including: "Don't Knock on My Door," "Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes," "Freight Train," "Hootenanny Express," "I'm Leaving It All Up to You," and "Looking Back to See." "Don't Knock on My Door" reached #1 in Canada with "Looking Back to See" charting at #2. "Hootenanny Express," written by Lucille and Bob, won a BMI Writers' Award (Cunningham).

Lucille also achieved international hit status as a solo artist with "Colinda," "Crazy Arms" (a superb cover of the Ray Price classic), "Jolie Jacqueline," "Sukiyaka," "Yours,"

“Wooden Heart,” and a bilingual version of Peggy Lee’s “My Man,” [Lee being one of Lucille’s favourite singers] (Delaney 1). “While in Los Angeles Lucille also performed the singing and yodeling parts for ‘Cousin Pearl’ in the popular sitcom *The Beverly Hillbillies*” (“Vancouver ...”). Lucille’s first top 10 Canadian country hit as a solo artist was *The French Song* album’s “Crazy Arms” (Oermann).

Epic

In 1967 Lucille and The Canadian Sweethearts began working with the famous Nashville producer Billy Sherrill for the album *Side by Side: Pop & Country* and, in 1969, Lucille’s solo album *Lonely Street* (Jennings). The Sherrill-written “Too Far Gone” (Epic-5-10205-H) reached #1 on the Canadian *RPM* Singles Chart on October 21, 1967. “Cajun Love” (Epic-10421-H) was #1 in Canada on June 16th, 1969 (*RPM* Database). “From 1967 till 1970 other Epic recordings followed: “Is It Love,” “Let’s Wait A Little Longer,” “Hello Sadness,” and “Send Me No Roses” (Kettner 6).

Dot

Lucille Starr and Bob Regan moved to Dot in 1970 (Kettner 6). “Subsequent solo and duet recordings were produced on the DOT Records label in Nashville, with good chart placings for several songs, among which were: ‘Dream Baby’ and ‘I’m Only A Woman’” (Cunningham).

“Dream Baby” (Dot-17327) on Quality appeared on the Canadian *RPM* Singles Chart on Feb. 14th, 1970. “Sock It to Satan” (Dot-17367) on Quality charted on Feb. 13th, 1971 (*RPM* Database). *Say You Love Me* (A&M SP-4100) was reissued as *The Canadian Sweethearts* (A&M SP-4106), and as *Lucille Starr with Bob Regan* (2-SP-9015) in 1975 (“Starr, Lucille”).

Canadian Television Shows

Listed in the *Toronto Star* are some of the Canadian television shows on which Lucille Starr performed from 1971 to 1989: the *Ian Tyson Show* with Bob Regan (1971: A46); the *Ian Tyson Show* with Mike Newsmith (1972: A30); *Comin’ Up Country* with Tim Daniels and Julie Lynn (1978: 59); the *Tommy Hunter Show* with Murray McLauchlan and Dallas Harms (1979: 70); *Country in My Soul* with Dallas Harms (1982: J41); *Tommy Hunter* with Roger Miller, Vern Gosdin, Ray Price, and Roni Sommers (1984: 71); *Tommy Hunter* with T.G. Sheppard, Hank Snow, Boots Randolph, and Cousin Clem (1985: 40); *Tommy Hunter* with George Jones, Sylvia Tyson, and Roger Whittaker (1989: 21); the *Tommy Hunter Show* with Jerry Reed, the Osborne Brothers, and Lacy J. Dalton (1989: 26).

Anything But “Sweethearts”

Starr’s worldwide success with “The French Song” only exacerbated the tension in a marriage that was already

troubled. Lucille and Bob were anything but “sweethearts.” Although they continued to perform as a duo until the mid-70s and appeared on television programs like *The Ronnie Prophet Show* and *Hee Haw*, she once described her marriage as a “living hell” (Hawthorn). But due to contractual commitments, Ms. Starr had no choice but to continue touring and recording with Mr. Regan (Jennings).

When A&M re-signed Starr while dropping The Canadian Sweethearts, the marriage became even more strained. Schroeder states, “She was in a curious, though not uncommon position: the dominant focus of the stage act was Lucille, yet as a woman (and Bob’s wife) she was expected to play a minor role in business and career decisions. ‘But I always had too big a mouth,’ she laughs” (Starr qtd. in Schroeder 25).

Starr tells Warner the intense pressure she was under within that marriage, trying to maintain a successful career while, at the same time, being undermined by someone seeking to sabotage it:

“The man I was married to at the time did not like [me being more successful than he was], He would do everything he could to make sure that I wasn’t going to get ahead. ... Every time a good break would come in, he wouldn’t tell me about it. So then people thought that I didn’t want to listen to the bookers. I wanted out, but nobody seemed to

know. But eventually I had the courage to go on my own, and it all worked out for the best.”

Returning to the Stage

“The Canadian Sweethearts’ finally divorced in 1977” (Oermann). “By the late 70s, after several years of emotional ups and downs, Lucille prepared a return to the stage.” Bryan Cunningham, an oil executive from Sarnia, Ontario, had become her husband as well as her manager and “she was determined to re-establish herself as a major recording artist” (Delaney 1).

Lucille describes her second marriage to Bryan Cunningham as “The greatest marriage in the world – this marriage is what I thought, as a very young girl, marriages were supposed to be.” In addition to her son, she also has a stepson and stepdaughter with Cunningham. She relies on her husband for emotional support, saying, “He’s just the nicest man. And, on top of that, he’s good-looking” (Starr). Married in 1978, “A female singer could ask for no greater support and affection than Cunningham lavishes upon Starr ...” (Beyer B3).

“Starr continued to enjoy a solo career until she was diagnosed with polyps on her vocal cords and temporarily lost her voice.” In 1981, a decade after her last recording, she went to Nashville to begin a new chapter in her career (Jackson). Starr’s first solo album was entitled *The Sun Shines Again* [*Le Soleil Brille Encore*] (SCRA-79) with the

single “Power in Your Love” charting on Oct. 31st, 1981 (*RPM Database*) “released after her recovery from vocal cord polyps” (“Starr, Lucille”). “She sang regularly on Ralph Emery’s morning TV show” and appeared on the television show *Nashville Now* as well as performing on the Grand Ole Opry (Oermann).

The next time she appeared on the Canadian *RPM* charts was with the single “The First Time I’ve Been in Love” (Cardinal-R9020) from the album *Back to You* (RSP-159) on Quality on May 28th, 1988 (*RPM Database*). The song reached #1 on the Cancountry charts, with the title track, “Back to You,” reaching #6. In 1989, “Pepère’s Mill,” a song co-written and recorded with fellow Hall of Famer, Sylvia Tyson, reached #5 on the Canadian charts (McCloud).

In 1989, a one-hour television special called *Lucille Starr – Neige et Magie* was taped in Canada and shown on the French network across the country (Cunningham). *Sweet Memories* (Disky DCD-5149) was released in 1991, in addition to the bilingual *Chansons d’Amour/Songs of Love* (Intersound) (“Starr, Lucille”). Starr’s popularity continued and she was in demand for appearances in Europe, the headliner for many events, including a 17 date multi-country tour in April and May of 1991 (Cunningham). Throughout the nineties, Starr toured from her base in Nashville (Oermann).

More Releases

The Canadian Sweethearts, Bob & Lucille, Eeny Meeny Miney Moe was released in 1998 on Hydra Records, produced by Klaus Kettner (see *Appendix B*). It includes many of their early rockabilly songs. In 2004, *Side By Side: Pop and Country/Lonely Street* on Collectors' Choice Music combines cuts from their Epic Records sessions (see *Appendix C*). The promotion for the CD reads:

Lucille Starr and her husband, Bob Regan, were already big stars in Canada as the Canadian Sweethearts when Epic brought them down to Nashville in the late '60s to record with the legendary Billy Sherrill. We've collected the two albums Lucille made in Nashville for Epic, one with Regan [Side By Side ...] and one solo [Lonely Street] and added eight bonus single sides for a total of *29 tracks*!

They refer to Starr as “quite possibly the greatest female country singer ever to emerge from Canada” (*Side By Side ...*).

Awards and Accolades

On June 12th, 1964, Lucille Starr achieved her first Gold Record in Canada for “The French Song” and “has been credited with being the first Canadian female artist to achieve gold record sales.” Her success also “earned

her membership in Europe's Phonogram Records' 'Gold Record Club'" (Cunningham).

Due to her many successful recordings, Lucille was the first female to be honoured with Holland's prestigious "Golden Tulip Award" (*Canadian Country Music ...*). In 1965 she was asked to be the "Grande Vedette" ("Great Star") of the country's international, star-studded show called the "Grand Gala du Disque," held in Amsterdam. She headed a talent line-up which included Vera Lynn, The Supremes, and The Everly Brothers, some of the hottest acts of the day. Previous headliners had been stars of the highest calibre such as Barbra Streisand and Frank Sinatra (Delaney 1). The show's program was called "Grand Gala Starr" in Lucille's honour (McCloud).

In 1988, a "Homecoming" for Lucille Starr was sponsored by the City of Coquitlam, British Columbia, to acknowledge her accomplishments (McCloud). As "the result of a lot of pressure by Starr's fans," an official City of Coquitlam Proclamation declared a street, Lucille Starr Drive, named in her honour. The date for the dedication was Starr's [50th] birthday, May 13th. The country star received congratulations from both provincial and federal politicians ("Coquitlam ..."). It was a two-day event organized "by volunteers in her parish to honour a local who made good and not only continued to speak French but sang it for the world's enjoyment" (Hawthorn). The event was "done up right" and included a 1200-seat dinner in the local arena. Seated at the head table were Lucille, her mother,

Aurore Savoie, and her husband, Bryan Cunningham (Brown 1988).

As previously noted, in 1987 Starr became the first female inducted into the Canadian Country Music Association's Hall of Honour and one of the Country Music Hall of Fame's inaugural inductees in 1989. According to *Billboard*, in 1996 Starr was inducted into the American Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum's Walkway of Stars along with Suzy Bogguss, Toby Keith, and the band, Sawyer Brown (Flippo 32).

In 2005 the Aboriginal Music Hall of Fame made Lucille Starr an Honourary Inductee, one of its five inaugural recipients. Awarding her this honour, they stated:

It is not commonly known that this international star has roots in Manitoba as she was born in St. Boniface, Manitoba. Her family tree roots back to a time when the Red River served as an important trading route for the M̄tis First Nations. Although Lucille herself is not Aboriginal, her unique mix of French and English songs became very popular within Manitoba's Aboriginal community. The M̄tis people within the Red River region were particularly inspired by her music. Lucille's first international hit, 'The French Song', was also recorded by the popular Quebec band, 'The Mighty Mohawks.' (Aboriginal Music ...)

A musical stage play about the songs and life of Lucille Starr called *Back to You* debuted in 2010. Written by Tracey Power, the show toured across Canada. It was while researching Mary Pickford, another notable Canadian woman, that Power discovered Lucille Starr and fell in love with her passion and the joy in her voice. After learning about the singer's journey from Lucille Savoie to Lucille Starr, Power thought her life and career would make a powerful theatre production. She explains:

“Lucille was one of Canada’s pioneers in the music industry. She played right across the country and at a time when there were no laws about Canadian content, and she did what she needed to do to be heard as an artist, on radio and TV. At that time it meant moving to the States. She was a survivor, one half of a musical duo [who] then had to learn to go it alone. A singer who lost her voice and had to find it again.” (Power qtd. in Warner)

After speaking with Lucille on the phone, Power was even more convinced that Starr's story needed to be told and her career celebrated (Warner).

Conclusion

“An internationally-renowned artist, Lucille Starr has thrilled audiences all over the world with her unique voice, vibrant personality and dynamic stage presence” (Aboriginal Music ...). But most remarkable of all, Starr was

able to accomplish all that she did during an era in which “such success was generally considered to be beyond the reach of Canadian artists.” Her “pioneering achievements and international status” need to continue to be recognized and celebrated by all those in the Canadian music industry (Cunningham, *Country Music News*). We owe a huge debt of gratitude to a very special performing artist who helped open the doors and pave the way for other women who would follow.

Eventually Lucille started having health issues and her ability to perform became limited (Jennings). On September 4th, 2020, Lucille Starr passed away in Las Vegas, Nevada (Daly and King) at the age of 82, a country queen and a trailblazer for all women in music. “Her husband, Bryan, the love of her life, was her devoted caregiver to the end” (Jennings).

When asked what had given her the most enjoyment and satisfaction in her music career, Lucille Starr replied:

“The fans. They’re the bloodline. You can be very sad about something or very ill, and you’re backstage thinking, ‘Oh, Lord, will this day ever end?’ You know, the music starts, and you get out there and, I mean you see that audience and they applaud – it will give you goosepimples from head to toe. ... And they don’t let you down. They’re always there. Especially the country fans. They stay with you.... You’re not a flavour of the month with them, you’re forever.” (Starr)

Lucille Savoie, the little girl who so desperately wanted to perform with the older children in the church play, eventually became Lucille Starr, an internationally renowned singer. Through her own sheer grit and determination, in addition to her outstanding talent, she went on to perform on stages around the world, to the sheer delight of all her fans. Lucille Starr is a female pioneer of Canadian women in country music, or any kind of music one chooses, and her contribution to Canada's musical herstory will remain in our collective memories forever.

Appendix A

*The French Song**

The French Song

Dominique

La Vie En Rose

In a Little Spanish Town

Colinda

Crazy Arms

Sukiyaka

Wooden Heart

Release Me

Jolie Jacqueline

Yours

My Man

Gone

My Happiness

Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes
Freight Train
I'm Leaving It All Up to You

*A&M Records of Canada Limited

Appendix B

*Bob & Lucille, The Canadian Sweethearts, Eeny
Meeny Miney Moe**
Teen-age Boogie
Lost
When You Say I Love You
Vibratin
Hen House Rock
Eeny Meeny Miney Moe
Demon Lover
The Big Kiss
What's the Password
No Help Wanted
The Flirting Kind
The French Song (When The Sun Says
Goodnight [sic] To The Mountains)
Freight Train
Wayward Wind
Looking Back to See
I'm Leavin' It Up to You
My Happiness

Tarantula (Instr.)
Heartaches by the Number
Highland Lassie (Instr.)
Crazy Arms
Colinda
Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes
Hootenanny Express
Jolie Jacqueline
Rocky Mountain Special
Love
Don't Knock on My Door
Teen-age Bogie
Eeny Meeny Miney Moe

* **Hydra Records, Germany**

Appendix C

*Side By Side-Pop & Country/Lonely Street**

Track Listing:

Heartaches By The Number – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
Looking Back To See – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
I Love You – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
Have I Told You Lately That I Love You – (with
The Canadian Sweethearts)
Are You Mine – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
True Love – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)

Winchester Cathedral – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
I Said My Pajamas (And Put On My Prayers) – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
Canadian Sunset – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
Side By Side – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
Lonely Street – (with Lucille Starr)
Too Far Gone – (with Lucille Starr)
Missing You – (with Lucille Starr)
If I Give My Heart To You – (with Lucille Starr)
Who’s Gonna Stand By Me! – (with Lucille Starr)
Searching (For Someone Like You) – (with Lucille Starr)
Hello Sadness (Bonjour Tristesse) – (with Lucille Starr)
Cajun Love – (with Lucille Starr)
Someone Up There Still Loves Me – (with Lucille Starr)
Full House – (with Lucille Starr)
Cry Cry Darlin’ – (with Lucille Starr)
I Don’t Trust Me Around You – (with Lucille Starr)
More Than Money Can Buy – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
Let’s Wait A Little Longer – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
Before The Next Teardrop Falls – (with Lucille Starr)
Too Lonely Too Long – (with Lucille Starr)
Is It Love! [sic] – (with Lucille Starr)
Hey Sue! – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)
You Were Worth The Wait – (with The Canadian Sweethearts)

***Collectors' Choice Music**

Partial Discography

As The Canadian Sweethearts:

Singles

<i>Freight Train</i> 1963	<i>Don't Knock On My Door</i> 1966
<i>Hootenanny Express</i> 1964	<i>Let's Wait A Little Longer</i> 1968
<i>Looking Back To Sea</i> [sic] 1965	

Albums

CANADIAN SWEETHEARTS 1964	SIDE BY SIDE 1967
---------------------------	-------------------

As Lucille Starr:

Singles

<i>The French Song</i> 1964	<i>Power In Your Love</i> 1981/82
<i>Too Far Gone</i> 1967	<i>The First Time I've Ever Been In Love</i> 1987/88
<i>Is It Love?</i> 1968	<i>Back To You</i> 1988
<i>Say You Love Me</i> 1968	<i>Rock Steady Love</i> 1989
<i>Cajun Love</i> 1969	<i>Just The Way We Were</i> 1989/90
<i>Dream Baby</i> (with BOB REGAN) 1970	<i>Ecstasy</i> 1990
<i>The French Song</i> (Reissue) 1970/71	<i>Crazy Arms</i> 1990
<i>Sock It To Satin</i> [sic] 1971	<i>Hello Sadness</i> 1991
<i>The Sun Shines Again</i> 1981	<i>Heartless One</i> 1992

Albums

THE SUN SHINES AGAIN 1981	SWEET MEMORIES 1990
---------------------------	------------------------

THE HITMAN 1982	CHANSONS D' AMOUR 1991
BACK TO YOU 1988	

*Rick Jackson, *Encyclopedia of Canadian Country Music*

Recommended Albums

1. *The French Song* (A&M) (1965)
2. *Lucille Starr* (double) (A&M)
3. *The Sun Shines Again* (SCR)
4. *Lonely Street* (Columbia)
5. *Back to You* (Quality Canada)
6. *Say You Love Me* (A&M)
7. *Side by Side* (Columbia)
8. *Songs of Love* (Intersound)
9. *Mississippi* (Koch International)
(McCloud)

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Si Siman and the Ozark Jubilee: Getting and Keeping the First Continuous Live Country Music Show on Network Television

by Kathryn Ledbetter

According to Bill Malone, the *Ozark Jubilee* was the “king of the televised barn dances.”¹ Yet the *Jubilee*’s importance as the first continuous live country music show on network television, and the first to feature major country artists, is otherwise overlooked in scholarly histories of country music, and Si Siman’s role as the producer who started or developed the careers of many *Jubilee* performers is merely a passing reference. Because of Siman and his partners, the *Ozark Jubilee* created an industry of musicians, songwriters, artists, and recording studios in Springfield, Missouri that challenged Nashville as ground central for country music during the 1950s.² The music business was in the midst of a “radical reshuffling of the established order,” noted Diane Pecknold: “That it developed in Nashville was a natural outgrowth of the musical and managerial talent that converged around WSM and the *Grand Ole Opry*, but this was not the only probable outcome. Music scholars

point out that several other cities, including Chicago and Cincinnati, were equally well placed at the end of World War II to become Music City USA.”³ However, no competing cities had a continuous network country music television show, and Si Siman was the driving force behind the show’s success. The journey was an arduous, but exciting adventure.

Siman knew television was in his future as far back as 1947, when he saw his first TV set in Chicago. Training in advertising prepared him for marketing and producing radio transcriptions during the 1940s, but it was too early for training in television production, because it was too early for television in Springfield, where Siman worked at KWTO radio in nearly every department in the station. Siman worked with his colleagues in a partnership company called RadiOzark that could manage contract negotiations and plan future investments.⁴ By 1952 they were developing a new show called the *Ozark Jubilee* on the road and on local radio with the hopes of someday taking it to television, but Springfield didn’t have a television station yet. They didn’t have long to wait. The first station, CBS affiliate KTTS TV, went on the air in March 1953, and ABC affiliate KYTV followed in October. By December, the *Ozark Jubilee* and other shows featuring KWTO talent were common on local television. Experiments in local television could demonstrate that the show had been tried and tested when Siman and his partners tried to convince ABC to sign the *Ozark Jubilee* later in the year.

RadiOzark reviewed a long list of potential stars suitable for headlining a network country music television show. Siman estimated that they considered at least fifty other artists for the job. Tennessee Ernie Ford seemed like a good fit. A warm personality and a few top ten hits recommended Ford for the headliner position, including “Shotgun Boogie” (1951), “Mister and Mississippi” (1951), and “Blackberry Boogie” (1952). Red Foley’s name kept coming up for a possible choice, but the partners worried about Foley’s domestic problems and status with the *Opry*, but his star shined much brighter than Ford’s. He had a solid performance history on radio shows, including the *National Barn Dance* in 1930. He helped to establish the *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* in 1939 and emceed the *Prince Albert Show* on the *Grand Ole Opry*’s NBC radio broadcast from 1946-1953. More importantly for future *Jubilee* prestige, Foley had a slew of hit records, starting with a 1941 recording on Decca titled “Old Shep.” A stream of other Decca hits followed, including “Tennessee Saturday Night” and “Smoke on the Water.” He had three million-selling records in 1950: “Just a Closer Walk with Thee,” “Steal Away,” and “Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy.”

When Foley resigned as emcee of the *Prince Albert Show* in 1953, he had a lot of personal problems, including the suicide of his second wife in 1951 under suspicious circumstances involving Foley and another woman. He also had a drinking problem. It was not the image the *Opry* wanted to portray. Siman said Foley had an assortment of

personal issues under the umbrella of “political problems” at the *Opry* and concluded that Red simply needed a career boost: “I think Red at this point had outgrown the *Opry*. When you’ve gone to the top of the bottle, like cream does,



there isn’t anyplace else to go.”⁵ In late 1953 Siman and RadiOzark decided to try Red Foley again for a series of open-ended transcriptions. RadiOzark partners assigned Siman the task of talking to Foley in Nashville about performing for their various music interests. He had been to Berea College in Kentucky and met Foley’s family, and the team thought it might warm Foley to the idea of

coming to Springfield. Siman had a broken leg from sliding into second base during a KWTO Statics baseball game, but his wife Rosie drove him to Nashville where he hobbled into the Andrew Jackson Hotel for a meeting with Foley, who was feeling bad from having his teeth pulled. According to Siman: “We invited a third partner in to join us, his name was Jack Daniels, and I didn’t have any pain and Red didn’t have any pain.”⁶ They spent two days in the Andrew Jackson Hotel talking about future opportunities.

Foley's wife Sally was evidently present at one of the meetings and afterwards told him: "Honey, when Si talks he could sell you the Brooklyn Bridge." After several hours of negotiation, she said, "Honey, what a wonderful person he is. As long as the *Opry* is going to just pay [union] scale, let's gamble, if you think you can better yourself." She thought Siman was a "go-getter."⁷ On February 20, 1954 he signed an agreement with RadiOzark to do 156 open-ended radio transcriptions, and another one with RadiOzark's new booking agency Top Talent, Inc. to handle a long-term series of personal appearances.⁸ Foley traveled to Springfield from Nashville, followed by his *Prince Albert Show* band, including recording artists Grady Martin, Tommy Jackson, Jimmy Selph, and Bud Isaacs. His first stage show appearance on the *Ozark Jubilee* in Springfield was at the Shrine Mosque in April 1954.

Trade publications took notice of the flurry of activity in the Ozarks. *Billboard* announced the deal with Foley on April 17, 1954 and noted additional negotiations for a half-hour radio show as well as a "half-hour television film series to be produced and syndicated by RadiOzark," marking their entry into the television production business.⁹ The *Billboard* article observes that "Move is the first step in a campaign on the part of RadiOzark and other country and western interests in Springfield to build the city into a folk capital."¹⁰ It suggests by its reference to RadiOzark that the organization formed to handle the *Ozark Jubilee* television show, Crossroads TV Productions, Inc., was not

yet fully formed by this time, but plans to move from radio to television were in full swing, although Siman insisted that they were trying to “stay away from television and stay on the radio” as much as they could.¹¹ He claimed that a live television show was not yet in the works: “this was just a natural course of events transpiring, that why not add television to the radio and have both?”¹² Nevertheless, they were soon ready to put the show on television, keeping a half hour for a radio-only portion. The news was out about Foley’s plans with RadiOzark, and artists began moving to Springfield for opportunities offered by a live TV show.

The two best-selling country artists at Capitol Records, Jean Shepard and Missouri native Ferlin Husky, were considering a move to Springfield on the heels of their 1953 hit, “A Dear John Letter.” At nineteen years old, Shepard was the youngest female artist to have a No. 1



country single, an honor she held for 20 years. By 1954 Shepard felt the duo was “waning in popularity” and decided to go her own way: “I asked Ferlin whether he was going to head to Springfield or to Nashville to try out for the *Opry*. If he decided to stay in Springfield, then I would go to Nashville. He came to Nashville and I

moved to Springfield.”¹³ Shepard and Husky did sign on to the roster for radio transcriptions by RadiOzark and joined Red for two tours. Billy Walker came from the *Louisiana Hayride* to become a member of the *Jubilee* and recommended it to his friend Willie Nelson, who eventually came to Springfield for an audition but was turned down for lack of experience. He ended up working as a dishwasher at Aunt Martha’s Corn Crib restaurant for a short while to get enough money to go back to Texas. He was in Springfield long enough to meet *Jubilee* performer Shirley Caddell, who became one of his future ex-wives.

Siman established a publishing company named Earl Barton Music after meeting BMI executives Bob Burton, Bob Sour, and BMI president Carl Haverlin on a train from Los Angeles to Kansas City. They told Siman that BMI did not have an affiliate in Missouri, encouraged him to start a publishing company, and volunteered to show him how to do it. Earl Barton publishing company was in place just in time to publish its first hit, “Company’s Comin,” written by Springfieldian Johnny Mullins for a young artist Siman brought to town from West Plains named Porter Wagoner.



One of the last adjustments needed before the *Jubilee* could seek a network television contract was a bigger studio. KYTV was too small for a television show on the scale of the future *Ozark Jubilee*. Foster, as president of Top Talent, Inc., took a six-year lease with Fox for possession of an old, unused theater named the Jewell. They had to completely remodel the place to make room for necessary studio equipment. Part of the expense involved getting enough electricity in the theater to originate a television show. They had to purchase lights and install a “poor man’s camera,” a large mirror hanging from the ceiling. A camera pointed toward the mirror would look like an overhead shot and provide a new angle. The technique was often used with square dancers on the show. They also had to have a place to build sets for each week’s show, so they rented a building across the street from the Jewell to use for a workshop. Most importantly, they had to get a staff of around 80 people ready to go, including directors, musicians, and writers. The number increased to 150 after about two years on the air.

Now that the partnership of Foster, Cox, Mahaffey, and Siman had a booking agency, a publishing company, a network *Jubilee* radio show, and a sizeable theater, they needed a company that dealt exclusively with TV production, so they formed Crossroads TV Productions, Inc. As with Earl Barton, Top Talent, and RadiOzark, each of the partners owned 25% of the company. Siman always used “we” when talking about decisions made for the show,



but there was very little to do with the *Ozark Jubilee* that he didn't have his hand in. In late 1954, Crossroads was ready to pursue a network television contract, but nobody on the staff knew how to begin the process. KWTO VP Les Kennon called one of his contacts at ABC radio for suggestions about who to approach for a television show. According to Siman, Kennon's contact "asked lots of questions about things like how much experience we had. The answer was we didn't have any."¹⁴ The first trip was a get acquainted meeting with network officials. However, the next trip to New York brought two millionaires, Foster and Cox, and three worker bees, Mahaffey, Kennon, and

Siman, to meet with the president of ABC and his entire programming department. According to Steve Eng: “This was the first year ABC-TV had enjoyed much success . . . Now here came Si Siman the poker player, with Red Foley as his trump card. Red already had thirty-nine country hits, nearly all Top 10, plus thirteen pop hits. He was also a radio star. ABC went for it.”¹⁵ Their pitch to the network was fictional in some ways. Siman explained: “We were just rationalizing in our own mind that there’s not that much difference in a successful radio show and a television show format. We would follow what success we’d had with syndicated radio and make a blueprint of it for television.”¹⁶ They had already pioneered it at KYTV and figured they would depend on the stations engineers, technicians, and other people’s talents to pull them through any problems.

In spite of experiments with local television, they had little else to recommend themselves, according to Siman: “What we did have was some film clips and the most vivid imagination that you’ve ever dreamed of . . . We didn’t have any equipment at all, to speak of.”¹⁷ They had a story to tell because the *Jubilee* had been locally tested with great success, and they had a good salesman in Si Siman: “We told them how great it would be if they were the first network to do a regular country music show on network TV coast to coast. I think our biggest selling point was we’re not talking money. If we have a good show, you’re going to give us money, and if we have a bad show we’re gone. So we won’t argue about money.”¹⁸

The partners returned to Springfield with a verbal agreement from ABC to begin airing the *Ozark Jubilee* television show on January 22, 1955.

The procedure for getting the contract was more intense. Siman felt like he was signing his life away. Lengthy discussions and negotiations between ABC and Crossroads attorneys finally resulted in a signed contract that was later renegotiated by Siman many times on many trips to New York. It had a short-term, two-week cancellation possibility for six years. It wasn't a great deal for Siman, who managed to talk his banker into giving him a \$25,000 unsecured loan for his part of the \$100,000 startup investment in the show. "Had the show been cancelled the first year I would have been bankrupt, and ABC would probably have murdered me," Siman quipped.¹⁹ Cox and Foster would not be harmed, but Siman and Mahaffey would be ruined. When Siman brought the contract home for his wife Rosie to co-sign, she didn't want to do it because the contract was worth more than their house. However, Siman told her that if they didn't have the cameras, they didn't have a show, and Rosie conceded.

The partners bought three television cameras at \$25-35,000 each, leased the theater, and bought all the equipment that they couldn't rent from KY3. About two weeks later the network called to cancel the show because of transmission problems out of Springfield. There were no coaxial cables or microwave facilities, and the polarity was such that transmission could come in, but it couldn't go

out. Siman explained the problem in simple terms: “we can suck but we can’t blow.” A little technical issue wouldn’t stop them. RadiOzark partner Lester E. Cox had helped the University of Missouri get a television station, and it was on the St. Louis to Kansas City cable line. Springfield’s KYTV could broadcast the *Jubilee* from KOMU in Columbia until AT&T installed network cables and reversed the polarity. It was a very expensive project for AT&T. Luckily, they did not understand that ABC could cancel at any time with a two-week notice. Siman compared the entire effort to a group of hillbillies playing poker at the hundred-dollar table. In the meantime, he met with ABC executives and planners about the show several more times in New York.

RadiOzark offered Red Foley another contract, this time for his services as star of the ABC-TV version of the *Ozark Jubilee*. The terms of the contract varied according to whether or not the network program had commercial sponsors. Today the idea of a television program without commercials is reserved for public affairs programming, but sponsorship was relatively new in the early 1950s. A new program might begin on a sustaining basis to attract sponsors as it became more popular. Foley’s fee for such an option would be a minimum of \$350 for a one-hour weekly show. With advertising, his fee was \$750 for the same show. On March 10, 1956 *Business Week* claimed that the *Ozark Jubilee* operated for its first nine months without a national sponsor: “During that period, ABC sold local spots at 15-min. breaks . . . [then] Whitehall Pharmaceutical Co.

took a half hour. A few weeks later, American Chicle Co., sponsoring Beeman's Pepsin Gum, bought a share of the half hour."²⁰ The sustaining fee provided a window of relief before major sponsors signed on for the entire show.

The Ozark Jubilee Goes Coast to Coast

The *Ozark Jubilee* network television show debuted on ABC as scheduled on January 22, 1955, but for thirteen weeks the entire cast and crew had to take a bus from Springfield to Columbia to do the show from KOMU. Siman explained the grueling routine of taking the show on the road: "We would get on a bus at KWTO at 4 o'clock in the morning, go to Columbia, begin rehearsing for a show that we'd been rehearsing for that week, and get up there and go on the air at about 6 o'clock in the evening or 7, and do the show. After the show was over we'd go back to Jeff City to Adcock's Cafe and have something to eat, come back to Springfield on our chartered buses, and by the time we got back home it would have been a 24 hour period. . . . Most people would just say, if you can't do it, you just can't do it."²¹ After resolving the polarity problem, the *Ozark Jubilee* moved into its new television home on April 30, 1955 at the newly refurbished Jewell Theater located a half block off the most traveled highway in the nation, Route 66.

Crossroads threw a big grand opening party upon moving into the Jewell. Missouri governor Phil Donnelly

proclaimed it “Ozark Jubilee Day” across the state. The mayor of Springfield attended the show, along with St. Louis Cardinals baseball star “Stan the Man” Musial, Tennessee governor Frank Clement, and “lots of ABC-TV brass,” according to a *Springfield Daily News* columnist who pronounced the *Jubilee* as “a major ‘first’ for Our Town,” noting that, “What with its TV rating rising higher and higher with each network telecast, Jubilee officials see the program as one of the city’s major tourist attractions.”²² An estimated 12 million viewers each week would be viewing the hour-long network portion of the *Jubilee*. The KY3 outlet would also carry local portions of the television show before and after the network feed. A full two and a half hours would be heard on KWTO radio.

Tickets were \$1 and could be purchased by mail, but the *Ozark Jubilee* became so popular that they were sold out a year in advance. Crossroads could not control the tickets. Springfield motels, hotels, and tour bus companies were buying them for customers who used their services. The *Jubilee* “focused attention on the Ozarks like you’ve never known,” recalled Siman. “The tour buses all wanted to route themselves through there, because the price for a ticket to the *Jubilee* was most reasonable . . . it was a major shot-in-the-arm to the tourist industry of the Ozarks.”²³ There were often 35 or 40 states represented by the license plates around the Jewell Theater. Smiling faces in the audience held up signs during the broadcast to show off their hometowns. People fought over tickets, souvenir

programs, and other items sold at the *Jubilee*. Merchants from the entire region cashed in on the *Jubilee*'s popularity by using the *Jubilee* name to advertise their products.

Because of the *Ozark Jubilee*, Springfield, Missouri became the third most important origination point for programming on network television outside New York and Los Angeles. Their overall budget was \$5,000 per half hour at first. The cost varied from week to week, but it eventually averaged \$10,000. Crossroads was more concerned with staying on the air than making big money. From the network's perspective, country music was a new, inexpensive programming option that could be placed in a competitive time slot and serve specialized audiences.²⁴ Crossroads money came from ABC television network, and the network made its money from the advertisers through ABC's various agencies or their own sales department. However, Crossroads partners could never count on a steady stream of money. The budget for each show varied with its length. When the show went from a half hour to an hour, the figure doubled. When it went to two and a half hours, the budget increased again. ABC network reps called with the monthly schedule and dictated the show's length from week to week. However, Crossroads could never count on the schedule or the budget. Both were fluid. They prepared for the maximum air time but sometimes got preempted by special programming such as an awards show. Sometimes Crossroads used the network bypass to record performances on kinescope for future use.

The *Ozark Jubilee* went on KYTV from the Jewell Theater and on the radio, with or without the network feed.

The mailbox was the *Jubilee's* most immediate indication of success. Viewers sent 25,258 cards and letters from 45 states after the first show, according to Foley's announcement on the *Jubilee*. The producers installed a real mailbox on the set with piles of letters flowing out onto the floor to demonstrate the show's popularity. They averaged 6,000 letters a week.²⁵ Siman had to hire part-time workers to sort through the supply of letters. He attributed the show's success to luck and good timing: "I think they



were starved for country music on television. They say if you want to be successful, just find a need and fill that need. I think that's what we did.”²⁶ Siman loved television from the first time he saw one in Chicago. He said: “There was a time when I was even pleased to look at snow on television.”

In June 1955 *Billboard* proclaimed that “Hillbilly music TV shows have more friends than anybody.”²⁷ According to ABC the show had the “largest male television audience in the U.S., 28 percent more per-set viewers than the average of all prime time shows, and the largest per-set U.S. television audience, 3.40 persons . . . By early 1956, the *Jubilee* had earned a 19.2 Nielsen rating and American Research Bureau (ARB) estimated its weekly TV audience to be as high as 9,078,000.”²⁸ The *Jubilee* faced dangerous competition with the *Grand Ole' Opry* on television in its first year. The *Opry* managers weren't interested in TV at first, thinking it was a passing fad. However, they did originate a Ralston Purina show from the Ryman Auditorium every fourth Saturday on ABC television network for 11 months beginning October 15, 1955. For almost a year the *Opry* pre-empted one hour of the *Ozark Jubilee's* 90-minute ABC network show one Saturday a month. When the ABC contract with the *Opry* expired, it was not renewed. Nevertheless, the *Ozark Jubilee* and Springfield, Missouri continued its rivalry with Nashville as a mecca for country music fans. On January 10, 1957 the *Springfield Leader and Press* reports that the *Jubilee* “has displaced ‘Grand Old

‘Opry’ as the ‘best country music show’ on TV, in the opinion of 756 TV critics polled by TV Today and Motion Picture Daily.”²⁹ For a time it appeared that the *Jubilee* and Springfield were winning.

Syndicated urban columnists and reporters often used hillbilly vernacular to describe the *Jubilee*. For example, Charles Mercer wrote from New York: “A fellow who galloped in from the Ozarks the other day reported that the city of Springfield, Mo., used to be noted for butter, eggs and country music. Now, says he, it’s noted for country music, tourists, eggs, and butter.”³⁰ A 1955 *TV Guide* article about the *Jubilee* is titled “‘Tain’t Hillbilly, Neighbor! It’s ‘Country Music’ That’s Making a Splash on TV.”³¹ Gossip columnist Earl Wilson came to Springfield to attend the *Jubilee* and commented, “Down in the catfish country, I got some good news for Jackie Gleason and Perry Como. They needn’t worry about their TV rating battle here because many Ozark folks don’t watch either one of them.”³² Variety, wholesome family entertainment, and country music made the *Ozark Jubilee* popular with viewers, and advertisers loved the *Jubilee* because it reached more people for less money. A list of sponsors included Dickies Workclothes, Roloids, American Chicle (Dentyne and Clorets), Regal Pale Beer, Carter’s Pills, Dristan, and Johnson’s Wax.

Daily Work of the *Jubilee*

When they started with television, Siman and his partners aimed at getting the best talent for the most amount of money they could afford. Staff musicians earned union wage, \$75 a show. Recording artists on major labels had a better chance for hit records and better distribution, so they could negotiate pay, depending on their status, for amounts anywhere from \$100 to \$1,000. Legendary guitarist Merle Travis came to the *Jubilee* for \$100. One of Patsy Cline's contractual arrangements combined \$175 for transportation and \$100 for her performance. Rates increased with an artist's popularity and success with hit records.

The production team had the same routine seven days a week and every week of the year during the life of the *Ozark Jubilee*. Mondays were planning days when Siman met with the production staff. He was first in the chain of command as the executive director, followed by Mahaffey in charge of payroll. Then came the director (Bryan Bisney), Bill Ring and Slim Wilson (alternating between assistant director and music director), and script writer Don Richardson (later with Bob Tubert).³³ Bisney had final script approval. The meetings also included floor director Fred Rains, set designer Andy Miller, KYTV manager Carl Fox, chief engineer Dennis White, and band leader Slim Wilson. The group had a lot of fun, and it became a family unit, according to Siman. They had nicknames for each other: Rains became "Freddy Floor," Mahaffey was

“John Payroll,” and Siman was “the Sergeant” in charge of detail.

Advertising people from ABC-TV or ad agencies came to Springfield to rehearse commercials on Wednesdays or Thursdays. A music rehearsal also occurred on Thursdays. A walk-through of the show was scheduled for Fridays and Saturdays, with a final music rehearsal at about 10 a.m. on Saturdays. Artists were not always in town on Fridays because of personal appearances. Towards the end of every show, Siman got a call from someone at ABC to critique the broadcast. They noted the mistakes, while also complimenting the crew for what worked. A memorandum would follow, with detailed instructions about staging, lighting, makeup, costuming, and other details. After the show Siman would take the guest stars, ad agency people and their clients for dinner and a little party with Foley. Sunday morning he would get a group of staff members together and start shuttling people off to the airport. Monday morning he would be back in the weekly meeting starting up with a new show. “So, shoot, you talk about a busy day . . . I was going around the clock. I don’t think I would be alive if I’d stayed on the show for twenty years. It’s just too nerve-wracking and too much involved and too many problems,” he said.³⁴ The routine continued for 52 weeks a year without a break.

The *Jubilee* program followed a general pattern. Three or four production numbers would be done by Foley. The show would begin with an up-tempo, good-feeling song

by him to keep the audience excited and happy. The last number was always his song of inspiration. Guest stars might join Foley in a duet or an up-tempo or a play on comedy during the course of the show. Siman aimed at building a crescendo with every unit up until the ending number.³⁵ The team worked through program concepts, choreography, dialogue, flow, and procedures. They created transitional devices Siman called “cow catchers” to billboard what or who was coming next on the show.³⁶ “Rather than just put a name up, we might do a little piece of them doing something,” to attract attention and bring the viewer into the next hour. Examples might be a clip of Gene Autry riding his horse Champion, a comedy bit, or film clips of sunsets, flowers, or water running over rocks. The technique sounds familiar, or maybe a bit corny to today’s television audiences, but Siman claimed that it was original to the *Jubilee*.

Initially Siman and his team tried to create specific themes for each week. If the talent booked for a show leaned toward a western style, they might plan to have a real chuck wagon on the set. Eventually they learned that having a theme would narrow the field of performers who wanted to do something new and different because there weren’t enough themes. At that point, they started emphasizing integration, where individual acts could be tied together with transitions. They were learning how to create a smooth production. When a guest star signed up for the show, Siman asked for the songs he or she would be

doing on the show so that the team could plan an efficient schedule and the band could work through song selections before formal rehearsals with the artist.

The production team worked on shows three weeks ahead to avoid problems when the show went live. “But it never happened. We were never ready. We always had problems” when the cameras went on, said Siman.³⁷ “They’d be putting makeup on Red Foley and he’d still be rehearsing lines, or something was wrong with one of the songs and we were trying to work with the guest stars that were there,” he recalled.³⁸ Anything could happen on live television. Siman found it very exciting and realized that mistakes could sometimes turn into assets because they made the guest stars more human to audiences. Regardless of advance preparation, anything might interrupt the plan. They might have to substitute someone on the show for illness or performance schedule conflicts. The shift might mean sets had to be redone on certain songs or an act. The show’s pacing could slow down for whatever reason, causing it to run short on time. The show ended, whether they were ready or not. They just quit.

One time Red Foley and Ernest Tubb fell backwards off a bench during a *Jubilee* show. The audience went into hysterics, while Siman panicked and “about had cardiac arrest in the control room.”³⁹ But Foley and Tubb simply got up and acted like nothing had happened. It was funnier than routines planned by comedy acts. Another show featured a cowboy-and-Indian routine with Foley

and Tex Ritter where a suction cup arrow was supposed to hit the wall beside Ritter's head. The aim was bad, and the camera had to be adjusted to show where the arrow did hit and stick. "It broke everybody up, and they started laughing and just ruined the effect that we had on the show," recalled Siman.⁴⁰ After the scene, Ritter said "I'll tell you one thing. That ain't the way I shot that six-shooter."⁴¹ Apparently the crew didn't learn their lesson, because on another show he was in the middle of singing "High Noon" when a vacuum cup arrow intended to stick in a board stuck on him instead.

Siman loved the spontaneity of it all. The performers were reaching more people in a moment than in personal appearances in their entire life, and it kept his team on their feet. He said, "You know, when you're reaching 25 or 30 million at one time, a boo-boo is a real boo-boo, and we had them. We had lots of them. I could write a book on things that happened."⁴² Nothing could be taken for granted with the cast, as well as with the equipment. For instance, a slide projector had an electrical short and burned the power supply during the opening night at the Jewell Theater. They used the projector to introduce a commercial or a promo, and then commercials would appear as a film chain on a longer 35 or 16 millimeter film projector. As smoke filled the control room, engineers put out the fire. One of them ran a couple of doors down the street, found a tractor battery in storage, and wired it up to the slide projector. The show carried on. When it was

over, ABC called and complimented Siman on the show. He responded: “Well, I’m sure glad you liked it, because we fed it to you on a piece of barbed wire.”⁴³ He never explained the reference.

Foley and His Fans

Red Foley was the *Ozark Jubilee*’s greatest asset. Fame as a country music recording and performing star attracted viewers, advertisers, and network executives to the show. *Broadcasting Telecasting* magazine claimed that “Red Foley is to country music what Louis Armstrong is to jazz.”⁴⁴ However, it was Foley’s warmth and casual demeanor that people found personally attractive. When asked what they remember about Red, his *Jubilee* colleagues repeatedly



described him in terms of his authenticity, selflessness, and easygoing nature. Porter Wagoner said that what he learned from Foley influenced the rest of his career and stated that “He could communicate with an audience as well as anybody I’ve ever known. He taught me how to speak to an audience.”⁴⁵ Norma Jean said she was blessed “just to know him.”⁴⁶ Brenda Lee claimed that, “Without him, his kindness and his belief in me, I never would have had the career I’ve had. There’s no question in my mind about that. He’s the one who opened the door and unselfishly nurtured me during what I now realize was the most pivotal moment of my childhood career.”⁴⁷ Siman said “nobody ever had a better friend than Red Foley.”⁴⁸ Jean Shepard was also thrilled to work with Foley and thought he was the “ultimate entertainer.”⁴⁹ One time he wanted her to do a duet on the *Jubilee* that he had recorded with Kitty Wells titled “One by One.” She recalled: “I told him I couldn’t sing in the same key Kitty did. He insisted. Well it was just too high for me. Right at the end of it—I was so embarrassed—my voice broke. Red just put his arms around me, right on television, and he laughed and said, ‘Don’t worry about it, sweetheart, it lets them know that you are human.’”⁵⁰

Jubilee publicity director Don Richardson recalled his six years with Foley on the show: “Chain-smoking Camels, worrying his tongue over an upper plate that never seemed to fit right and smoothing back his hair with the heels of his hands, he was a good audience in any conversation. A

companionable sort who laughed louder than anyone at Bill Ring's jokes in the office, who teased Si Siman over a highly touted guest singer on the *Jubilee* who went sour on the air, who intently lived every impassioned moment of Ralph Foster's play-by-play account of landing a big fish two days ago in Canada. Red exhibited a puppydog affection for those he liked."⁵¹ The entire staff and some locals knew that Foley had problems with alcohol. Maxine Brown of the Browns said that "it was a well-kept secret among all the entertainers because we all loved him so much."⁵² However, it wasn't much of a secret to the Springfield community. Siman dealt with Foley the same way he dealt with everybody else, by working with him as a unique person with unique problems: "Well, let's face it: he had an alcohol problem. And if you don't understand putting up with that, then you might as well get out of the business . . . Because if you're doing anything like we were doing, where you're dealing with hundreds of people, you're going to have beaucoup problems."⁵³

Gossip around Springfield kept track of *Jubilee* stars who frequented local bars, as did Richardson in his diary: "Webb [Pierce] loaded tonight at Rendezvous, arguing with Faron Young."⁵⁴ Pierce sought treatment for alcoholism at Springfield's Burge Hospital in 1960. Gene Autry was also on the *Jubilee*'s list of entertainers to corral. Siman claimed that the *Jubilee* staff would "keep a little posse on their trail. We had the Springfield Police Department subsidized to the extent of being our buddies for how important the

show was to this area. So we generally knew where all the principals were at any given time during Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, when we were in the big rehearsals on commercials and the show.”⁵⁵

Siman had to deal with a wide difference in personalities on the set. Many performers had never been on television and didn't understand movement and complications introduced by television cameras. They came with what they wanted to wear, but glittery costumes lit up the cameras and others had to be reconsidered or color-coordinated. Stripes were especially problematic. Guitars that glistened had to be sprayed to dull the shine. The network required makeup, but some performers didn't like makeup or the look it created. The biggest problem was choreography. Most country performers didn't know what to do with their hands without a guitar. Siman fought against having a stand-up radio show on television. If a song was particularly upbeat, it was difficult to get the artists to do anything besides stand in front of a microphone and sing. Siman viewed himself as a mediator, who could negotiate with the *Jubilee* talent and let them know they were wanted and welcome on the show. He wanted them to feel comfortable with adjustments that might make them look better on camera. The production team's bottom line was to display the performers at their best, but he acknowledged that at least a couple of them left with hurt feelings.

Siman explained: “To do television, it's kind of like getting on an airplane. You may not know the pilot, but

you're trusting your life to him. In television, unless you're an expert, which I've yet to find one, you necessarily need to put yourself in the hands of the producers and the directors and the writers, because they do this for a living."⁵⁶ If there was a problem on the set, decisions had to be made immediately by Siman as the executive producer, his director Bryan Bisney, and the floor director, Fred Rains. If there was a script problem, writers Bob Tubert and Don Richardson would be called in, according to Siman: "We pinpointed whatever the problem was. We weren't shot-gunning. We'd nail it down and make a decision and go with it . . . This is not something you can do tomorrow; it has got to be now . . . we tried to be as nice as we could be, but sometimes you can't. So it wasn't always easy."⁵⁷

Siman had a lot of experience with talented people and viewed them as "round like an egg": "They have so much talent that they protrude in an odd direction. If you don't understand that, then you don't understand talent and you're going to have a hell of a time getting along with them. It's not like one average person talking to another average person. You've got to be so careful not to hire an artist and then try to tell them how to paint the picture . . . To have them understand, you have to understand."⁵⁸ Siman learned that "You don't treat people equally, because they're not equal. Where one may be very eccentric, another may not be. One may be totally offensive, and others are not. . . . Some people you can just order around; other people, you've got to figure out how to

get it done so it doesn't sound like that.”⁵⁹ He didn't always get it right, but he felt that he had enough experience to make suggestions that would help artists accomplish what they wanted.

Dancing with the Network and Other Challenges

Keeping artists happy was not the only problem that Crossroads TV Productions had with the *Jubilee*. Springfield was not an airline hub, and the airport was small, so it was hard to get in and out of town. Traffic was also a significant concern. The streets of downtown Springfield became very crowded with tourists on Saturday nights before and after the shows, and parking was difficult to find. With tourists in town from dozens of states, as well as hundreds of local towns in the region, traffic congestion could be a nightmare. They also had union problems, as well as advertising agency executives who wanted to control too much of the show's content. Siman had his hands full as producer of the *Ozark Jubilee*. The show ran 52 weeks a year, with no summer break or seasons. He had to keep three shows going at a time: “the one that we're buying talent for that's coming up three weeks from now, the one we're building sets for that's coming up two weeks from now, and the one that we're in production on that's coming up Saturday night,” he said.⁶⁰ When he wasn't planning shows, he was dealing with clients, advertising agencies, talent, and artist managers. “You inherit other people's

problems whether you want them or not.” He might get a two-week vacation, but it would be consumed by phone calls about problems on the show. If he left town, it would be for a business trip in Nashville. Even camping and fishing trips became occasions for courting sponsors or entertaining out-of-town executives and artists.

Siman’s biggest problem was keeping the network interested in the show. Country music was just not good enough for ABC-TV executives. Siman regularly fought and won battles over network cancellation, but the network people in New York never seemed to understand the *Ozark Jubilee*’s appeal for people in the rest of the country, although the *Jubilee*’s musical variety was much less traditional than shows such as the *Grand Ole ‘Opry*. Siman had a broader understanding of country music as a thoroughly American genre: “When I say country music I mean the country of the United States, not just the bare feet and hayseed stuff south of the Mason-Dixon line. We include music from the Canadian Rockies, sea songs from the Atlantic Coast, southern spirituals, western cowboy songs. It could be called mongrel music—it comes from all parts of the country.⁶¹ That included early rock ‘n roll and rockabilly performances from Carl Perkins, Bobby Lord, Wanda Jackson, Brenda Lee, and Sonny James. Nevertheless, the executives never “got it,” no matter how many trips Siman and his partners made to New York.

Continuing problems with Foley contributed to ABC’s final cancellation of the *Ozark Jubilee* and began as early

as April, 1957 when the IRS first filed tax liens against him for \$270,000 in unpaid income taxes from 1948-1957. Four separate liens had been filed by August, 1958. The word was out about Foley, and sponsors got jittery. Siman said “they might have bailed out if our team hadn’t put a measurable amount of effort saying we know the guy’s innocent and he’s going to be proven innocent . . . in show business, there’s no such thing as bad publicity.”⁶² Siman was convinced that Foley was incapable of what the IRS charged. He had witnessed Foley’s casual attitude toward money and his inefficient skill for bookkeeping. The first trial ended with a hung jury. The IRS retried Foley and on April 24, 1961 he was acquitted of income tax evasion charges. Foley received a refund of \$79,555 for sums collected during the long process, but by then the damage was done.

The last show at the Jewell Theater was September 24, 1960, after its 298th consecutive week on the air. The *Jubilee USA* radio show would continue, but even that soon went off the air. It was the end of an era. *Jubilee* performers used the show name to market themselves in personal appearances for the next ten years. For at least a year after the *Jubilee* ended, Crossroads turned away orders for 150 to 300 *Jubilee* tickets a week from fans who didn’t know of its cancellation. Crossroads issued certificates of thanks to the *Jubilee* cast and crew in recognition of their talents, patient understanding, and warm cooperation. The certificates also expressed hope for an opportunity to reunite “the greatest

cast and crew in television.” Siman didn’t know what they were going to do, but he wanted to keep the team together. As he told a local reporter: “Country music has a place today on network TV . . .It may not be the *Jubilee*, but there’s going to be a country music show on the network from someplace.”⁶³ As the community grieved over its loss and its revenue, Siman considered possibilities. His first thought was more negotiations with ABC in New York after other 13-week network contracts expired. A second



idea was to syndicate previously filmed programs. The third was to come up with another show for another network.

On May 12, NBC-TV brought multi-million-dollar mobile units to Springfield in two large buses and parked them outside the Landers Theater to produce the first regular color network show ever presented outside New York or Hollywood and the first network country music television show in color, named the *Five Star Jubilee*. The show featured five country music stars in alternating weeks: Rex Allen, Tex Ritter, Snooky Lanson, Jimmy Wakely, and Carl Smith. It was the first network country music television show in color. Crossroads formed a new company called Tele-Color to produce color television shows such as the *Five Star Jubilee*, with plans for other shows. As with the *Ozark Jubilee*, producers had technical issues getting the show on the air. An RF signal interference from KTTS radio station across the street disrupted the television picture from the Landers. For two weeks the show had to be taped for re-broadcast at 1:30 each morning until technicians could arrive from New York to fix the problem.

The *Five Star Jubilee* did not lack star quality. Performers included Roy Acuff, Jimmy Dean, Flatt and Scruggs, Minnie Pearl, Ray Price, Faron Young, and many others. The affiliation with NBC looked like a success. Crossroads owned the theater, had a staff of 80 people, and “everything was going to be just fine” until NBC withdrew their color cameras to broadcast the 1961 World Series.⁶⁴ The sponsors got shaky again, and NBC didn’t renew its contract. That

was the end of the *Five Star Jubilee*. Crossroads was left with the Landers Theatre and all the production equipment not owned by NBC. Tele-Color went to work filming the ABC *Wide World of Sports*. However, they didn't make the connections to stay in television, so the team began to fall apart. The *Jubilee* staff and performers wandered away into the Ozarks and beyond, looking for other opportunities, and Siman started a new career as a music publisher in Springfield. His record as a publisher is as successful and interesting as his life producing the first live network country music television show.

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Hardrock Gunter: Country's Missing Link to Rock 'n' Roll

by Tim Dodge

For several decades popular music historians have explored and debated the origins of rock 'n' roll. Determining what was the first rock 'n' roll record is something of a fool's errand although many have tried. Frequently named candidates include "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley (1925-1981) and the Comets (Decca, 1954), "That's All Right" by Elvis Presley (1935-1977) (Sun, 1954), "Rocket 88" by Jackie Brenston (c. 1928-1979) and his Delta Cats (Chess, 1951) itself actually an adaptation of Jimmy Liggins's (1918-1983) 1947 (Specialty) "Cadillac Boogie," to name only a very few. Part of the problem is determining when rock 'n' roll really began. Was it in the mid-1950's when the seemingly new music took over the airwaves to the delight of teenagers and the dismay of their elders? Was it in 1951 when Ohio disk jockey Allen Freed (1922-1965) started calling the rhythm and blues records he was playing on Cleveland's WJW "rock and roll?" Was it as far back as 1922 when Trixie Smith (c. 1890-1943) recorded the mid-tempo minor-key "classic blues" titled "My Man Rocks Me (with One Steady Roll)" on the Black Swan label? A good case can be made for any number of

lively hot blues, hillbilly, Western Swing, jazz, and even gospel records made before World War II.

Part of the problem is defining rock 'n' roll. A simplified but largely accurate definition was supplied by the great blues singer and electric guitarist Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield, 1915-1983) who declared, "The blues had a baby and they called it rock 'n' roll." However, a closer look at (and listen to) the music indicates that this is a bit too simple: it leaves out the significant contributions made by hillbilly or country musicians. Perhaps the definition presented by bluegrass scholar Neil Rosenberg addresses it best: "A synthesis of pop, rhythm and blues, and country and western, sold to a market consisting of teenagers who, for the first time, had disposable cash."⁶⁵

A number of country recordings coming from the sub-genres of Western Swing, honky-tonk, and hillbilly or country boogie point the way to rock 'n' roll. The Tune Wranglers' good-time double-entendre "Red's Tight Like That" from 1936 (Bluebird) features two extremely hot banjo solos by Red Brown (Joe Barnes) that sound like full-blown rock 'n' roll two decades early in a wonderful reinvention of the original blues hokum "It's Tight Like That" by Georgia Tom (Thomas A. Dorsey, 1899-1993, ironically, soon to become "the father of gospel music") and Tampa Red (Hudson Whitaker, c. 1903-1981) recorded in 1928 for Vocalion. The Maddox Brothers and Rose, recorded some truly wild numbers featuring virtuosic electric guitar, fiddle, and mandolin playing,

spirited singing, loud whoops and falsetto laughter, and sly verbal interjections during the late 1940s and early 1950s as can be heard on such recordings as “Mean and Wicked Boogie” (4 Star Records, 1947), “Move It on Over” (4 Star Records), a frenzied remake of the lively 1947 Hank Williams (1923-1953) hit record on M-G-M; and “Shimmy Shakin’ Daddy” (4 Star Records, 1950) to name a few. Tennessee Ernie Ford’s (1919-1991) “The Shot Gun Boogie,” a major country hit on Capitol from 1950, is rock ‘n’ roll that happens to include some hot steel guitar and a rural theme.

Perhaps lost in the shuffle after more than seventy years is Hardrock Gunter whose 1950 “Birmingham Bounce” (Bama) is a contender for one of the more influential pre-1954 country or hillbilly recordings that clearly points the way to rock ‘n’ roll. However, as will be seen, Gunter was no one-time flash in the pan country artist who simply dabbled in early rock ‘n’ roll or who soon disowned it as did George Jones (1931-2013) who recorded several excellent rockabilly numbers under the name Thumper Jones such as “Rock It” and “Heartbreak Hotel” (yes, a convincing remake of the Elvis Presley hit) in 1956 for Starday. Gunter did indeed record more conventional country music all along but for at least a dozen years after “Birmingham Bounce” he continued to develop as a rock ‘n’ roll artist moving from country or hillbilly boogie to rockabilly to actual rock ‘n’ roll.

Sidney Louie Gunter, Jr. (1925-2013) was born in Birmingham the son of Sidney Louie, Sr. and Ola Mae Gunter, the oldest of three sons. His interest in music was fostered by the Christmas gift of a guitar when he was eight years old. An early musical influence was Goebel Leon Reeves (1899-1959) known as the Texas Drifter whom Gunter heard on the radio. Reeves performed hobo and cowboy songs, based in part, on his real-life experiences as a hobo.⁶⁶ An even greater musical influence was Hank (Herbert) Penny (1918-1992), like Gunter, a native of Birmingham. Although originally based in the Southeast, Penny was best known as a Western Swing artist from the late 1930s onward. During Gunter's formative years Penny performed live on WSB in Atlanta before leaving first for Cincinnati, Ohio, and then in 1945 for Los Angeles.⁶⁷

By age 13 Gunter formed his first group, the Hoot Owl Ramblers, and performed at talent shows in the Birmingham area before joining Happy (Eugene) Wilson (1918 or 1919-1977) and the Golden River Boys. Wilson was very active on radio stations in the Birmingham area including WAPI. It was during his time with Happy Wilson that Gunter received his nickname of "Hardrock." It had nothing to do with his musical style but rather was due to the hardness of his head. While loading the trunk of a car in preparation for a gig in Atlanta, the trunk lid fell down on Gunter's head. Unfazed by the blow of the heavy lid, Gunter simply continued loading instruments and stage clothes which prompted Wilson and his bandmates to dub

him “Hardrock.”⁶⁸ Nick Tosches states that the nickname came from a local slang term for miners as “hardrocks” but this seems unlikely as Tosches, also inaccurately, lists Gunter’s birthdate as 1918 instead of 1925 and claims he stopped working as a miner in 1939.⁶⁹ No other sources refer to Hardrock Gunter as a miner although Birmingham certainly was in a region known for both coal and iron mining and had a thriving steel industry at the time.

World War II interrupted Gunter’s budding musical career as he and many other musicians of his generation either joined the armed forces or were drafted. Gunter’s wartime service, 1943-1945, was distinguished: he was a prisoner of war in Germany and he also attained the rank of first lieutenant.⁷⁰

Gunter returned to Birmingham after the war and, after first reorganizing the Golden River Boys, before establishing his own group, the Pebbles, in 1948. He soon became a popular presence performing in area honky-tonks, theatres, and clubs, and also a booking agent for other popular music artists. Hardrock Gunter enjoyed some success on Birmingham’s WAPI radio station. In 1949 television came to Birmingham via WABT-TV and Gunter began hosting a daily program. Aimed primarily at children, the program featured Gunter employing hand puppets designed to resemble country artists, for example, Ernest Tubb (1914-1984), that would perform while Gunter simultaneously played a record by the artist.⁷¹ The puppet television program reflects a playful almost silly side of

Gunter that would reappear in some of the novelty country records he made over the years.

Hardrock Gunter made musical history at his very first recording session. In 1950 Manny Pearson, owner of a local record label, Bama Records, encouraged Gunter to record a session. Bama was such a small-scale operation that it had no office or recording studio thus necessitating the use of the WAPI studio.⁷² Gunter and his group, the Pebbles, had three songs ready to record but needed a fourth. Consequently, Gunter hurriedly composed “Birmingham Bounce” on the short car ride to band pianist Huel Murphy’s residence for rehearsal. It is interesting to note Gunter’s own assessment of his musical orientation because much of his recorded legacy directly reflects his expressed sentiments: “I didn’t like out ‘n’ out hillbilly music. I wanted something with a beat. I guess my biggest influence at that time was Hank Penny. Man, I couldn’t get over him. I tried to copy him, right down to his flattop Martin guitar.”⁷³ “Birmingham Bounce” certainly qualifies as “something with a beat.”

“Birmingham Bounce” consists of Gunter both singing and rhythmically speaking in alternation with a hot musical solo by one of his band members. Huel Murphy’s boogie woogie piano provides a lively introduction and undergirds the entire recording and gets one of the brief featured instrumental solos. Notable solos also feature fiddler Billy Tucker and steel guitarist Ted (Samuel) Crabtree (1929-2006). Issued on Pearson’s Bama label the record was

instantly popular, however, Gunter's original recording never made the country music (or other) charts. Paul Cohen (1908-1970), an executive with the Decca record company, approached Manny Pearson about leasing "Birmingham Bounce." For unknown reasons Pearson was uninterested. Cohen's response was to quickly engage major country star Red (Clyde) Foley (1910-1968) to record his own version. Thanks to Foley's star status and Decca's superior promotion and distribution operation, Foley's very good remake hit the country charts reaching the number one position in May 1950 and also reaching number fourteen on the pop charts.⁷⁴

The phenomenon of cover records was actually common practice during this era, so it is not surprising that other artists in addition to Red Foley covered Gunter's "Birmingham Bounce." What may be unusual was the large number of covers and the fact that several of these covers were made by artists with little or no connection to country music. Over twenty covers were recorded in rapid succession.⁷⁵ Among the more intriguing were two rhythm and blues efforts and an unlikely one from a big band. Pianist and singer Amos Milburn (1927-1980), who was at the peak of his career with major R. & B. hits such as "Chicken Shack Boogie" (1948, Aladdin) and "Bad, Bad Whiskey" (1950, Aladdin) recorded a saxophone and piano-driven version for Aladdin with his studio group, the Aladdin Chickenshakers in 1950. Jazz vibraphonist, percussionist, and band leader Lionel Hampton (1908-

2002) and his Orchestra recorded a truly swinging big band version on Decca in 1950 featuring two different male vocalists who took turns singing different lines interspersed by fairly extensive jazzy instrumental solos. Tommy Dorsey (1905-1956) and his Orchestra also recorded a truly swinging big band version (1950, RCA Victor) but most of the instrumental portions bear little resemblance if any to the melody heard on Gunter's original. Trumpeter Charlie Shavers (1920-1971) shouted out the lyrics in a bluesy voice, a still relatively rare example of African American and white musical collaboration on record. (The white Tommy Dorsey should not be confused with the African American Thomas A. Dorsey, 1899-1993, the former blues pianist and singer known better as "the father of gospel music").

Despite seeing his original version of "Birmingham Bounce" crushed by Red Foley's much more successful cover, Gunter could not have been too unhappy since he, as composer, held the copyright to the song, thus making him eligible for royalty payments. Ironically, Gunter would end up recording for Decca (Foley's label) in 1951 since Bama went out of business attempting to frantically press more copies of "Birmingham Bounce" while the record distributors for Bama dawdled in making their payments to Bama Records.⁷⁶ Small independent record companies such as Bama could, perversely, face financial ruin if a record suddenly became too successful unless they contracted with a larger company to distribute the successful record since the larger record companies were

better able to withstand delayed reimbursement payments from distributors and also were in a better position to pressure laggard distributors for reimbursements.

In the meantime, before Bama went out of business, Hardrock Gunter made a few more recordings in 1950 including the superb “Gonna Dance All Night,” which even more than “Birmingham Bounce” is a harbinger of rock ‘n’ roll. It starts off with a rhythmically spoken introduction where Gunter makes reference to “Birmingham Bounce” before embarking on a similar but even more rocking song structure. Once again there are hot instrumental solos from Murphy on piano, Crabtree on steel guitar, and Tucker on fiddle but this time Murphy’s rolling boogie woogie piano is even more prominent. In “Birmingham Bounce” Gunter refers to “rockin’” more than once but in “Gonna Dance All Night” he actually uses the phrase “rock and roll” several times in the rhythmically spoken refrain, “First you listen to the rhythm. Then you shuffle yo’ feet. We play an old-time boogie just to make things right. We’re gonna rock and roll while we dance all night.” It should also be noted the drums played by Bobby Summers are more propulsive and prominent than those heard on “Birmingham Bounce.” Almost no information is available concerning Huel Murphy, whose boogie woogie piano was such an integral component of “Birmingham Bounce” and “Gonna Dance all Night.” A website concerning Huel’s slightly more famous brother, Chuck (1922-2001), states that both Huel and Chuck, while growing up in Decatur,

Alabama, developed an interest in the piano, inspired by their piano-playing mother.⁷⁷ Chuck recorded a handful of country boogie numbers including “Who Drank my Beer (While I Was in the Rear)?” (Coral, 1952) redone more famously by New Orleans bandleader, trumpeter, and Fats (Antoine) Domino (1928-2017) collaborator, Dave Bartholomew (1918-2018) (1952, Imperial) and “They Raided the Joint” (Bama, 1951), a remake of trumpeter and singer Hot Lips (Oran) Page’s (1908-1954) original (1945, Continental) that featured both his boogie woogie piano and vocals. Chuck Murphy later became a minister.

Gunter continued to record lively proto-rock ‘n’ roll as he moved from the Bama to the Decca label in 1951. Among these recordings one finds the appealing “My Bucket’s Been Fixed” (a wonderfully bluesy response to Hank Williams’s 1949 M-G-M recording, “My Bucket’s Got a Hole in It,” the most famous of several remakes of the original African American blues number recorded by Tom Gates and His Orchestra on Gennett in 1927.⁷⁸ Other lively numbers include “Hesitation Boogie,” and “Dixieland Boogie.” While most of his recordings were originals (some self-composed) or in the public domain, he, in turn, covered a major rhythm and blues hit by Billy Ward (1921-2002) and the Dominoes, the somewhat notorious double-entendre “Sixty Minute Man” (1951, Federal).

The Dominoes were an outstanding and very successful rhythm and blues vocal group that enjoyed a number of R & B hits in the early 1950s, many exhibiting a strong gospel

influence, before veering off into much more of a pop music direction after the mid-1950s. Two famous alumni of the group include tenor lead Clyde McPhatter (1933-1972) who founded the Drifters after leaving the group in 1953 and then enjoyed a major career as a solo artist after leaving the Drifters in 1954, and Jackie Wilson (1934-1984), the operatically-voiced tenor lead who succeeded McPhatter in 1953 before, in turn, leaving in 1957 to enjoy a major solo career as a rock 'n' roll and soul singer. On "Sixty Minute Man," however, the lead was taken by the bass singer, Bill Brown (1926-1956) whose insinuating and rich bass tones effectively delivered lines such as "There'll be fifteen minutes of kissin'...and fifteen minutes of blowin' my top" as he promised his female listeners, urging them "if your man ain't treatin' you right, come up and see old Dan." The record hit the number one position on the R & B charts in May. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, considering the rather obvious sexual connotations and the socially conservative era, "Sixty Minute Man" reached the number seventeen position on the popular music charts in August, an indication that a lot of white people had a favorable opinion of this record too.⁷⁹ Although "Sixty Minute Man" did not make the country charts, it proved to have some popularity with this audience too. The York Brothers recorded a fairly tame version for King in September 1951 and Hank Thompson (1925-2007) and the Brazos Valley Boys were performing it as is evident from radio broadcasts of 1952 available on the Flyright label.⁸⁰

Hardrock Gunter recorded his version of “Sixty Minute Man” together with Roberta Lee (1922-?), a singer active in the 1940s and 1950s, whose recording career covered a variety of styles including pop, country, jazz, and rhythm and blues somewhat in the mold of her more famous contemporaries Kay Starr (Catherine Starks, 1922-2016) and Ella Mae Morse (1924-1999). The musical collaboration on “Sixty Minute Man” is appealing. The use of both rhythm and electric lead guitar plus Gunter’s Alabama-accented vocals definitely make this a country record. It is more of a jovial collaboration than a suggestive performance with Gunter and Lee trading verses and occasionally ending each other’s verses. However, it is not hard to imagine the more erotic message that might have been transmitted in live performances with revealing glances and body language.

Gunter’s musical career was once again interrupted by military service, likely because of the Korean War. It does not appear he went to Korea, but Gunter was recalled to active military duty for close to two years. With an ear obviously open to African American popular music, one wonders if he heard the Four Barons’ 1950 Regent recording, “Got to Go Back Again,” where the deep-voiced lead laments being recalled by Uncle Sam so soon after World War II to the military that he didn’t “have time to break in my 88,” a reference to the powerful new Oldsmobile model.

Emerging from military service at the end of 1952 with the rank of major, Hardrock Gunter eagerly resumed his musical career. Over the next two years Gunter went back and forth changing jobs between WWVA in Wheeling, West Virginia as program director and WJLD in Birmingham, Alabama before returning to WWVA in 1954 where he would remain for the next decade. Gunter's recording career was somewhat desultory during 1953 and 1954, but it is interesting to note that Sam Phillips (1923-2003), proprietor of Sun Records, took an interest in Gunter and proposed a recording session in Memphis. Gunter was too busy to make the trip, but he did record two songs at a local radio station studio on tape which he sent to Phillips who released them on Sun. One was an imaginative remake of "Gonna Dance all Night" and the other another Gunter original, "Fallen Angel."

The new version of "Gonna Dance All Night" starts off with a stuttering reverberating flash of steel guitar before Gunter chimes in with his cheerful, lively semi-spoken verses. Unlike the original 1950 version, the piano, this time played by Alvin Tunkle, is not as prominent and the solos are more of a jazzy accompaniment rather than the rolling boogie woogie employed by Huel Murphy. Something new is the use of a saxophone played by Charlie Duke for a short, but definitely rock 'n' roll, solo. Ted Crabtree, who played steel guitar on the original 1950 version, provides a lively and distorted solo near the end.

“Fallen Angel” is a more conventional country record. The melodious regretful romantic ballad is taken at a brisk tempo. Once again, though, the new element of a rather lively saxophone solo played by Charlie Duke, is an attractive addition even though somewhat atypical. A different song entirely, it seems likely both the title and the theme were inspired by Kitty Wells’s (Muriel Deason, 1919-2012) big 1952 hit, “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels” (Decca), itself a response to Hank Thompson’s 1952 hit, “The Wild Side of Life” (1951, Capitol).

A fascinating example of Gunter’s continuing development as a rock ‘n’ roll artist is his wonderful live version of “Columbus Stockade Blues,” sadly, not released until 1999 but recorded at some point between 1955 and 1960.⁸¹ The song itself is fairly old, originally recorded in 1927 by Darby and Tarlton featuring Tom Darby (1891-1971) on guitar and Jimmie Tarlton (1892-1979) on slide guitar with both men supplying vocals. This melodious song concerns the prison located in Columbus, Georgia with the protagonist expressing ambivalent feelings about his predicament. At times, the lyrics portray a stoic acceptance about the permanent loss of his woman to another man in the free world: “Believe me, darling, I don’t mind” but at others revealing a more complex, even heartrending sentiment: “Last night while I lay sleeping, I dreamed I was in your arms. When I woke, I was mistaken. I was peeking through the bars.” Darby and Tarlton made several dozen good to excellent recordings, primarily for

Columbia, often featuring a sweet yet bluesy sound.⁸² The duo is probably best known for another prison song, the flipside to “Columbus Stockade Blues,” which was “Birmingham Jail.”

Gunter’s live performance several decades later is particularly innovative in its use of a male vocal group backing. While not exactly doo-wop, the vocal group accompaniment is definitely of that nature and exhibits a strong gospel influence, especially as it swings into a repeated riff over which Gunter sings the verses. Almost certainly the backing vocal group was white, considering the likelihood this was a live performance somewhere in the south, perhaps West Virginia, but in terms of style and sound, this definitely could have been an African American group.

A fascinating musical commentary on the dual musical identities of Hardrock Gunter as a country artist and a full-fledged rock and roller is “I’ll Give ‘Em Rhythm” recorded for the King label in 1955. It alternates between Gunter shouting the blues accompanied by a frantic saxophone and Gunter singing country accompanied by more conventional stringed instruments. The lyrics reflect the dilemma felt by a number of country artists as they faced the commercial onslaught of rock ‘n’ roll. After the hard rockin’ introductory verse (“Rhythm! Rhythm! Rhythm with a solid beat!”) and blasting saxophone, Gunter abruptly changes musical gears and sings in a very rural style, “I was raised out in the country and I picked

my old guitar...” declaring how much people enjoyed his music until, “But now they’s something wrong. They just don’t like my song.” As Gunter notes, “Now they want rhythm! Rhythm with a solid beat!” and abruptly goes back to shouting the blues accompanied by a scorching saxophone. Although a novelty record that probably did not sell much (it did not chart), “I’ll Give ‘Em Rhythm” is an astute commentary on the seemingly sudden eruption of rock ‘n’ roll in the mid-1950s. Of course, Gunter and a number of other country artists had already prefigured rock ‘n’ roll and were, at least, partially responsible for the younger generation’s demand for “Rhythm! Rhythm with a solid beat!”

At least a couple of other country or country-oriented artists employed a similar approach even if not so obviously commenting on the changing musical trends. Wanda Jackson (1937-), from Oklahoma, started out as a teenage protégé of Hank Thompson before landing a recording contract with Capitol Records in 1956. One of her first records was the appealing “I Gotta Know” which, like Gunter’s “I’ll Give ‘Em Rhythm” alternates between an almost stereotypically country ballad and hot rockabilly. The unlikely theme of “I Gotta Know” is a young woman’s frustration with her boyfriend’s greater interest in dancing than in romancing: “I gotta know if our love’s the real thing, where is my wedding ring?” The record reached a respectable number fifteen position on the country charts in October.⁸³

Slightly more subtle in regard to the apparent confusion or schizophrenia about identifying as country or rock ‘n’ roll is the exciting “Rock and Roll Baby” by Eddie Jackson (1926-2002) and his Swingsters on Fortune. The record is, essentially, rock ‘n’ roll throughout but there is an alternation between the parts identifiably influenced by country with Jackson’s vocals backed up most audibly by accordion and guitars and the blaring saxophone parts that are unambiguously rock ‘n’ roll. Each time the arrival of a sax solo is announced by a repeated accordion riff. The lyrics relate how Jackson loses his date to another man who knows how to dance to rock ‘n’ roll. However, Jackson watches the dancers to learn how to dance and things end happily: Man, you oughta saw that look on her face when I started a-rockin’ at a hepcat’s pace.”

Gunter made another appearance on Sun in 1956 with “Jukebox, Help Me Find my Baby.” This rockabilly recording listed as by Hardrock Gunter and the Rhythm Rockers was originally issued that same year on Cross Country, a tiny short-lived record label located in Lodi, New Jersey. (There appears to be some disagreement as to whether Cross Country was located in Wheeling, West Virginia, where Gunter resided at the time or New Jersey. According to the January 7 issue of *Billboard*, the label was established in Garfield, New Jersey).⁸⁴ “Jukebox” is an interesting record: spare rockabilly featuring Gunter on acoustic guitar plus persistent but light percussion while Gunter beseeches the jukebox to, indeed, help him locate

his errant baby. According to the main Gunter web site, Sam Phillips of Sun took an interest in the Cross Country record because it was doing well on Midwestern radio, and arranged to lease it. However, Phillips thought the original was too long and edited out 20 seconds which featured Gunter performing an imitation of a string bass with his lips during an interval between verses. Gunter blamed this deletion by Phillips for the record's lack of commercial success: "Without the novelty parts the record fell flat."⁸⁵ Actually, the record still sounds great even without the novelty imitation bass. The obscure rockabilly singer, Tommy Mitchell, recorded a version for Mercury also in 1956, sounding somewhat influenced by Elvis Presley, especially, his repetition of the word "baby" that reminds one particularly of Elvis's version (Sun, 1955) of "Baby, Let's Play House," originally recorded in 1954 by bluesman Arthur Gunter (1926-1976) on Excello.

Hardrock Gunter's recording of "Jukebox, Help Me find my Baby" also made use of the echo-effect on his vocals, a recording technique prominently used by Sun on many of Elvis Presley's recordings in 1954-55 and also employed by RCA Victor on some of Presley's early hits, notably "Heartbreak Hotel" and "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You" in 1956. Gunter would take the echo-effect to an extreme in his 1958 "Boppin' to the Grandfather's Clock" (Island) recorded under the name Sidney Jo Lewis. The echo-effect covers all of Gunter's vocals from the spoken introduction to the semi-sung "bip bop boogie"

refrain where things sonically almost go off the rails. The musical accompaniment is quite interesting consisting of Gunter on acoustic guitar performed much in the style of Johnny Cash (1932-2003) rhythm guitarist, Luther Perkins' (1928-1968) utilization of a "boom-chicka-boom" type rhythm. Oddly enough, this guitar technique on Gunter's record sounds very much like Jamaican reggae music about a dozen years early.

Along with recording both more conventional country fare plus the occasional novelty, Hardrock Gunter's evolution as a rock 'n' roll artist culminated in his exciting Starday recording, "Hillbilly Twist," in 1962. This was one of, literally, dozens of attempts by various popular music artists seeking to capitalize on the massive success of Chubby Checker's (Ernest Evans, 1941-) recording of "The Twist" (Parkway) which reached the number one position on the popular music charts twice, first in August 1960 and then again in November 1961.⁸⁶ It also hit big on the rhythm and blues charts at number two in August 1960 and number four in December 1961.⁸⁷ The original version of "The Twist" was recorded by Hank Ballard (John Kendricks, 1927-2003) in 1958 for the King label. Ballard's original version did respectably well at number sixteen on the R & B charts in April 1959 and then reaching number six in July 1960, the latter position surely in the wake of Chubby Checker's massively successful remake.⁸⁸ Ballard's original reached number twenty-eight on the pop charts in July 1960.⁸⁹ Chubby Checker's remake was actually very

similar to Hank Ballard's original. Ballard's version was a touch bluesier but otherwise it was a nearly identical recording.

The Twist became something of a dance craze. Some of the more successful attempts to latch on include Joey Dee (Joseph DiNicola, 1940-) and the Starlites' "Peppermint Twist" (Roulette, 1961) and "Twist and Shout" by the Isley Brothers (Wand, 1962), originally recorded by the Top Notes (Atlantic, 1961); Chubby Checker even capitalized on "The Twist" with "Let's Twist Again" (1961, Parkway) which reached number six pop in June 1961 and number twenty-six R & B in July 1961.⁹⁰ Even the noted Trinidadian calypsonian, the Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco, 1935-), recorded the delightful "Calypso Twist" (Mace, 1963).

Gunter's "Hillbilly Twist" is a lively number featuring a vocal duet with Gunter's baritone voice contrasting to Buddy Durham's (? – 2005) higher but not quite tenor vocals. In addition to singing, Durham contributes significantly with his fiddle playing, an integral part of this record's sound. "Hillbilly Twist" starts off with ringing electric guitar and vigorously beaten snare drums with Gunter and Durham declaring, "Everybody's doin' it. They doin' the hillbilly twist...Now when the fiddler starts to fiddlin' everybody does the twist like this." Durham takes two lively fiddle solos and at this point the record strongly resembles modern Cajun dance music although Durham was from West Virginia, not Louisiana. Later, Gunter gets to demonstrate his guitar chops when they sing, "Twist

to the guitar” and he launches into a strong single-string solo that would not have sounded out of place on a surf music record as well. Unfortunately, this enjoyable dance record like the somewhat comparable rockabilly-flavored “Southern Twist” by George Darro [sic] (Nationwide, 1962) ended up as one obscurity among many in an attempt to cash in on the twist craze.

While Hardrock Gunter continued making recordings into the 1960s and a smaller number in the early 1970s, “Hillbilly Twist” in many ways is the culmination of his development as a rock ‘n’ roll artist. Most of these later records were either fairly conventional country (or remakes of earlier country records first recorded by others) and also the occasional novelty.

While he never gave up music, Gunter found true financial success with his insurance selling company moving to Colorado and later Arizona.

As is so often the case, it was European enthusiasts of American roots music who “rediscovered” Hardrock Gunter. In this case, Gunter was engaged to perform at the 1995 International Rockabilly and Rock ‘n’ Roll Meeting held in Munich. Also featured there was Wanda Jackson. Gunter continued to perform at both American and international programs over the next twenty years while still running his insurance business for much of this time. Hardrock Gunter died in 2013 at age 88 of pneumonia.

Where does Hardrock Gunter fit into the history of country music and what is his significance?

Aside from his landmark recording of “Birmingham Bounce” as a pioneering example of early rock ‘n’ roll, Gunter’s recordings of the early 1950s are prime examples of the sometimes overlooked sub-genre of country music referred to as hillbilly boogie or country boogie. In his excellent study, *Before Elvis: The Prehistory of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, Larry Birnbaum describes hillbilly boogie as “the basis for the rockabilly style of the 1950s” and traces its first recorded origins to (Quilla) Porky Freeman’s (1916-2001) exciting jazzy bluesy guitar work on “Porky’s Boogie Woogie on Strings” performed as a member of (Joyce Wayne) Red Murrell’s (1921-2001) Rhythm Boys on the Morris Lee label in 1944.⁹¹ This is an exciting instrumental number featuring stringed instruments with Freeman’s guitar the most prominently featured. It sounds quite modern and would not sound out of place on a rockabilly playlist a decade later.

Another prime early example of Hillbilly Boogie is Arthur “Guitar Boogie” Smith’s (1921-2014) hot instrumental, “Guitar Boogie,” recorded in 1945 for Super Disc. If anything, this is an even more exciting string-based instrumental than “Porky’s Boogie Woogie on Strings” yet it did not hit until rereleased on M-G-M in 1948 in response to the second Petrillo music recording ban and following Smith’s similar “Banjo Boogie” which hit number nine on the country charts. Three months later “Guitar Boogie” reached number eight.⁹² This recording proved to have enduring popularity and, in fact, Smith

rerecorded it more than once in ensuing years. Frank Virtue (Virtuoso, 1923-1994) and the Virtues recorded a very exciting remake on Hunt in 1958, updating it with the addition of percussion and a Duane Eddy-like (1938-) twangy electric guitar. The Virtues' version reached number five on the popular music charts in February 1959 and number twenty-seven on the R. & B. charts in April.⁹³ Smith's lively 1955 M-G-M recording of "Feudin' Banjos" did not chart but a 1972 remake by Eric Weissberg (1939-2020) and Steve Mandell (1941-2018) did hit the charts (number two pop, January 1973 and number five country, February 1973) thanks to its prominent use in the troubling Warner Brothers' hit film, *Deliverance*.⁹⁴

Although one might consider Hillbilly Boogie to be falling somewhere between Western Swing and Rockabilly, it was more of an overlapping sub-genre with these two forms of country music that also was contemporaneous with the rise of honky-tonk. All three forms of country music were noticeably influenced by African American blues and jazz and, of course, the African American influence was present in country music from the very beginning. Pamela Foster, among others, asserts that the vernacular music of the South, prior to the segregation of music into white (hillbilly) and black or "race" (blues, jazz, and gospel) by the recording industry in the 1920s and 1930s, was, largely held in common and was not distinguished by racial division.⁹⁵

The Hillbilly Boogie phenomenon was at its height roughly between 1945 and 1954 but was, in some ways, already prefigured by Johnny Barfield's (1909-1974) 1939 Bluebird recording, "Boogie Woogie." This had nothing to do with the lively swing band instrumental of the same title recorded in 1938 on Victor by Tommy Dorsey, itself an adaptation of the influential 1928 "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie" recorded by Clarence "Pinetop" Smith (1904-1929). Rather, Barfield's recording features a slow but intense Hank Williams-like bluesy drive featuring Barfield on acoustic guitar singing laconically about "a new dance and it cain't be beat. Call it the Boogie Woogie..." Seven years on the Bullet label later Barfield updated it as "Doin' the Boogie Woogie" with a faster tempo, some different lyrics, and the addition of wonderful steel guitar playing. Charline Arthur (1929-1987) incorporated some of Barfield's verses into her 1950 Bullet recording, "I've Got the Boogie Blues," another nice example of hillbilly boogie.

Despite the use of the word "boogie" in, literally, dozens of hillbilly boogie recordings, the actual use of boogie woogie piano was not a prerequisite as the previous examples by Barfield, Smith, and Freeman can demonstrate. The word "boogie" or "boogie woogie" also was not necessarily a prerequisite either. A good example is Little Jimmy Dickens's (1920-2015) "Hillbilly Fever" (Columbia) that reached number three on the country charts in 1950.⁹⁶

Perhaps the most successful example of a hillbilly boogie hit record is the exciting “The Shot Gun Boogie” by (Ernest) Tennessee Ernie Ford (1919-1991) on Capitol that reached number one on the country charts in December 1950.⁹⁷ It attracted a number of covers by country, pop, and at least two rhythm and blues artists. Ford recorded several other intriguing hillbilly boogie records with the word “boogie” in the title between 1949 and 1952.

Hardrock Gunter’s initial foray was, of course, “Birmingham Bounce.” It did include some actual boogie woogie thanks to the excellent piano playing of Huel Murphy. Until being drafted again into the military in 1952, Gunter recorded several excellent examples of hillbilly boogie including “Gonna Dance All Night” and “Dixieland Boogie” to name only a couple.

As hillbilly boogie morphed into and was absorbed by rockabilly in the mid-1950s Hardrock Gunter certainly held his own and modernized his approach accordingly. He even, indirectly via tape, recorded for Sun shortly before Elvis Presley ignited the rockabilly/rock ‘n’ roll revolution in 1954.

As described above, Gunter continued to adapt to and record full-blown rock ‘n’ roll later in the 1950s and was fully up to date for 1962 with his “Hillbilly Twist.”

This article has focused almost exclusively on the rock ‘n’ roll aspects of Hardrock Gunter’s substantial musical career. It should be noted that alongside his development as a rock ‘n’ roll artist, Gunter was also an authentic country

artist who recorded a number of more conventional or straightforwardly country records including remakes of Hank Williams's "Cold, Cold Heart" and "Your Cheating Heart" (both on Gee Gee, 1961). He also indulged a penchant for novelty records, some fairly silly, such as "Dad Gave my Hog Away" (Bama, 1950) on which he mock-weeps or "Whoo, I Mean Whee" (Emperor, 1957), and even a version of the slightly naughty "The Freckle Song" (Bronjo, 1958). The latter, first recorded by nightclub/pop artist Larry Vincent (1901-1977) in 1946 on Pearl features the repeated verse, "She's got freckles on her BUT she is nice." Several other artists recorded "The Freckle Song" including Hank Penny in 1947 (King) as well as the rhythm and blues vocal group, the Four Vagabonds, on Apollo also in 1947. Gunter's early television success on Birmingham's WABT-TV television show featuring puppets and country records also illustrates the humorous side of Hardrock Gunter.

While Gunter remains one of many artists with a claim to recording one of the first rock 'n' roll records before that major popular music genre was recognized, he deserves to be remembered for more than "Birmingham Bounce." For the next dozen years he continued to develop and explore what became known as rock 'n' roll unlike some other country artists who abandoned rock after one or two hits or who merely dabbled in it as an experiment on the side. Although Gunter found little commercial success after "Birmingham Bounce," he created a corpus

of country-flavored rock ‘n’ roll that is worth exploring and savoring., Hardrock Gunter’s rock ‘n’ roll was lively, fun, and exciting. In his words, “I wanted something with a beat.”⁹⁸

Endnotes

1 Notes

2 Malone and Laird, 315.

3 A substantial history of the Ozark Jubilee written by its director Bryan Bisney is available on Wikipedia. A complete set of Ozark Jubilee programs is available for viewing on You Tube. Bisney’s scheduling notebooks are digitized and available in the Bryan T. E. Bisney Collection at Missouri State University: <https://digitalcollections.missouristate.edu/digital/collection/Bisney>. Many thanks to Tom Peters, Director of Library Services at Missouri State University, for administering these valuable resources. Thanks also to Ozarks historian Wayne Glenn for his role in acquiring the collection.

4 Pecknold, 66.

5 Siman, KWTO station manager Ralph Foster, millionaire investor Lester E. Cox, and financial manager John Mahaffey were partners who formed several companies to assist Ozark Jubilee production and artist needs.

6 Qtd. in Eng, 85.

7 Grosshart, Americana.

8 Qtd. in Eng, 87.

9 Glenn, 195. Jubilee historians offer different versions of Siman’s meeting with Foley and its purpose. The most common story is that Siman went to Foley specifically to get him on the Jubilee network television show. Interviews with Siman suggest a more gradual process. He claims that

their main purpose in approaching Foley was first to sign him up for transcriptions and performances in Springfield. The idea of making Foley the headliner on a network television show, at least in preliminary negotiations, came shortly after he moved to Springfield, according to Siman.

10 “Foley Signs With RadiOzark,” 16.

11 “Foley Signs with RadiOzark,” 16. Trade publications during the early 1950s often referred to country music as hillbilly or folk music. By the mid-50s it was country or country & western, and then country.

12 Rumble, September 19, 1989.

13 Rumble, September 19, 1989.

14 Shepard, 79.

15 Grosshart, Americana.

16 Eng, 87-88.

17 Rumble, September 21, 1989.

18 Rumble, September 19, 1989.

19 Grosshart, Americana.

20 Grosshart, Americana.

21 “Hillbilly TV Show,” 31.

22 Grosshart, Americana.

23 “The Spectator,” 30.

24 Rumble, September 21, 1991.

25 Silverman, 162.

26 Dessauer, 154.

27 Rumble, September 21, 1989.

28 “’Ozark Jubilee’ Hits ARB Top for May TV,” 22.

29 “Ozark Jubilee,” Wikipedia.

30 “The Ozark Jubilee,” Springfield Leader and Press, 5.

31 Mercer, 3.

32 “Tain’t Hillbilly, Neighbor!,” 10.

33 Wilson, “It Happened Last Night.”

- 34 Siman brought Richardson to Springfield from Grand Rapids, Michigan after receiving his creative query letter about the job. Richardson wrote “I always heard that if you wanted to get an answer and get it quick, you go direct to the horse’s mouth. Dear Horse’s Mouth:” Siman loved Richardson’s approach and hired him to write George Morgan Robin Hood Flour Show transcriptions. Richardson later transitioned to television with Siman. After the end of the Jubilee in 1960, Richardson was instrumental in giving theme park Silver Dollar City its name and had a successful career in Branson as a publicist for the park.
- 35 Rumble, September 24, 1991.
- 36 A fascinating record of planning Jubilee shows is available in Bisney’s scheduling notebook, digitized by Missouri State University for the Bryan T. E. Bisney Collection: <https://digitalcollections.missouristate.edu/digital/collection/Bisney>. Many thanks to Thomas A. Peters, Director of Library Services, for administering this valuable archive.
- 37 A cow catcher is a frame at the front of a train designed to throw things or animals off the track. In Si’s reference it would mean a tease of what was coming after a break.
- 38 Grosshart, Americana.
- 39 Grosshart, Americana.
- 40 Grosshart, Americana.
- 41 Rumble, September 23, 1991.
- 42 Rumble, September 23, 1991
- 43 Rumble, September 21, 1989.
- 44 Rumble, September 21, 1989.
- 45 “Tin Pan Alley in the Ozarks,” 35.
- 46 Undated, unpublished interview with Porter Wagoner.

- 47 Undated, unpublished interview with Bob Tubert, Doc
Martin, Vic Willis, Speedy Haworth, Norma Jean, and
Bentley Cummins.
48 Lee, 27.
49 Rumble, September 24, 1991.
50 Shepard 81.
51 Shepard, 82.
52 Richardson, 17.
53 Maxine Brown, 112.
54 Rumble, September 24, 1991.
55 Richardson, Diary, April 1, 1960.
56 Rumble, September 24, 1991.
57 Rumble, September 24, 1991.
58 Rumble, September 24, 1991.
59 Rumble, September 24, 1991.
60 Rumble, September 24, 1991.
61 Rumble, September 24, 1991.
62 “Rural Music Rocks Too,” A16.
63 Rumble, September 21, 1989.
64 “The Death of TV’s Jubilee,” 41.
65 Grosshart, Americana.
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Moon of Kentucky,’” *The Southern Quarterly* Vol. 22,
No. 3 (Spring 1984), 66.
67 Fred Hoeptner, “Goebel Reeves” in Paul Kingsbury,
ed. *The Encyclopedia of Country Music: The Ultimate
Guide to the Music* (New York: Oxford University
Press, 1998), 435.
68 Ken Griffis. “Hank Penny” in *Ibid.*, 412.
69 Jim Dawson and Steve Propes. *What Was the First Rock
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and “Hardrock Gunter” <https://hardrockgunter.com> .
Accessed May 2021.

- 70 Nick Tosches. "Hardrock Gunter: The Mysterious Pig-Iron Man," *The Journal of Country Music*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1985), 37.
- 71 "Hardrock Gunter" <https://hardrockgunter.com> . Accessed May 2021.
- 72 Ibid. and Dawson and Propes, *First Rock 'n' Roll Record*, 70.
- 73 Andre Millard. *Magic City Nights: Birmingham's Rock 'n' Roll Years* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2017), 37.
- 74 Dawson and Propes, *First Rock 'n' Roll Record*, 70
- 75 Joel Whitburn. *Joel Whitburn's Top Country Singles 1944-1988* (Menomonee Falls, Wis.: Record Research, Inc., 1989), 101 and Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn's Pop Memories 1890-1954: The History of American Popular Music* (Menomonee Falls, Wis.: Record Research, Inc., 1986), 162.
- 76 "Hardrock Gunter" <https://hardrockgunter.com> . Accessed May 2021; Dawson and Propes, *First Rock 'n' Roll Record*, 71; and SecondHandSongs (website): <https://secondhandsongs.com/work/54899/versions> Accessed November 30, 2021.
- 77 Dawson and Propes, *First Rock 'n' Roll Record*, 71.
- 78 TIMS: This Is my Story: Chuck Murphy (web site): https://tims.blackcat.nl/messages/chuck_murphy.htm Accessed December 2, 2021.
- 79 SecondHandSongs (website): <https://secondhandsongs.com/work/112478/versions> Accessed December 2, 2021.
- 80 Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn's Top R & B Singles, 1942-1988* (Menomonee Falls, Wis.: Record Research, Inc., 1988), 124 and Whitburn, *Pop Memories 1890-1954*, 128.
- 81 econdHandSongs (website): <https://secondhandsongs.com/work/61984/versions> Accessed Dec. 2, 2021 and Flyright

- L.P. 948 Hank Thompson and the Brazos Valley Boys – Radio Broadcasts 1952 (1997).
- 82 See Hydra Records C.D. BCK 27108 Hardrock Gunter: I’ll Give ‘Em Rhythm (1999).
- 83 Tony Russell, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 293-295.
- 84 Whitburn, *Top Country Singles 1944-1988*, 149.
- 85 See “Cross Country Label Formed in N.J.,” *Billboard* (January 7, 1956), 16.
- 86 “Hardrock Gunter” <https://hardrockgunter.com> . Accessed May 2021.
- 87 Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn’s Top Pop Singles 1955-1986* (Menomonee Falls, Wis.: Record Research, Inc. 1987), 94.
- 88 Whitburn, *Top R & B Singles, 1942-1988*, 83.
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- 90 Whitburn, *Top Pop Singles 1955-1986*, 32.
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- 92 Larry Birnbaum. *Before Elvis: The Prehistory of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), 221.
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“Country Music and the Souls of White Folk,” 45-77
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⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

The Real McCoy

Tracking the development of Charlie McCoy's playing style

by Mikael Bäckman

Charlie McCoy was a member of the *Nashville A Team* during their heyday of the 1960s and 1970s. McCoy's more than 14 000 documented sessions are likely to make him the most recorded harmonica player of all time (Field 138, Goldsmith 165). Kim Field states that McCoy is "one of the most influential and widely imitated harmonica players ever" (139). McCoy is also acknowledged as playing a key role in establishing the Nashville Number System as a notational standard in Nashville recording studios (Stimeling 92). However, his playing style has not been properly analyzed.

This paper charts, through my thematic analysis, the various strategies and concepts which constitute McCoy's playing style. My narrative starts with McCoy's initial music studies, both formal music training and informal learning, followed by his experiences in the studios of Nashville, and concludes with an analysis of McCoy's playing style. The main topic of this paper concerns McCoy's influences, how he shaped his playing style. I will also briefly discuss how influential he himself has been and continues to be. My analysis of McCoy's playing style is based on my quite

extensive transcriptions of McCoy’s first 13 albums as a featured artist, as well as selected recordings from his subsequent output and recordings where McCoy’s role is that of a session musician. In order to confirm my analysis, I conducted an interview with McCoy himself as well as interviews with fellow country harmonica players Mike Caldwell and Buddy Greene. Analyzing my interview with McCoy, I found a number of themes that emerged when he was describing his own playing style. Caldwell and Greene confirmed my analysis by relating similarly to McCoy’s development during my interviews with them.

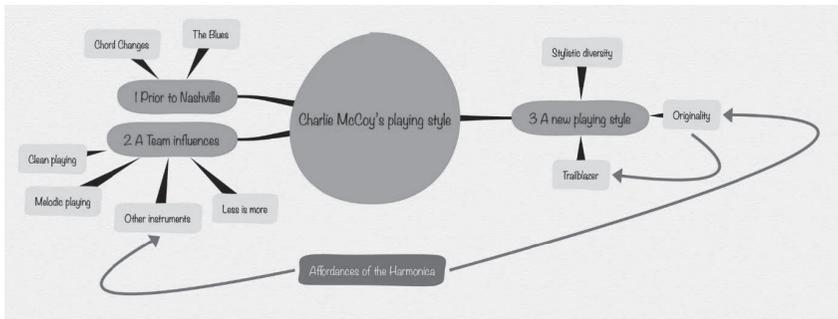


Figure 1 Charlie McCoy’s playing style. This figure shows (1) what McCoy brought with him to Nashville, (2) what he learned from producers and other session players, and finally (3) the important traits of his playing style. The affordances of the harmonica specifically relates to how he learned from other instruments and his originality as a harmonica player.

In what follows, I discuss all these themes in relation to the interviews and my transcriptions. I divide the themes into three categories as seen in figure 1. The first two themes relate to what McCoy brought with him when he arrived in Nashville, i.e., his formal music schooling and his own musical preferences. The following four themes represent what McCoy learned on the job, i.e., learned from producers and session musicians in the recording studios in Nashville. The next three themes are the result of combining what he brought with him and what he learned in Nashville, i.e., his new playing style. Finally, I seek to further substantiate my analysis by making a more detailed study of how he has explored the affordances of the harmonica and how, in particular, his appropriation of playing styles typical of other instruments have expanded what this instrument affords or resists,¹ through particular innovations by McCoy.

Previous literature

A systematic mapping of the playing style of harmonica players in general has rarely been done, however, there are a few examples. Tom Ball has published two instructional books on the topic, one focusing on the playing style of Sonny Terry, the other on that of Little Walter and Big Walter Horton (*A sourcebook of Little Walter licks*, *A sourcebook of Sonny Terry licks*). Ball states that the purpose of these books are “to supply players with transcriptions [...] of licks” from

the artist's respective repertoires (Ball 5). These books do not contain actual transcriptions of recordings of neither Terry, Walter nor Horton, but instead, the licks presented in the books are transcriptions of the accompanying CD's that are recordings of the author playing licks in the style of the original artists. Transcriptions in general are somewhat problematic since something is always lost in the translation from recording to written notation. Transcriptions are also dependent on the transcriber, and "...should always be understood to be a form of *interpretation*" (Rusch, Salley and Stover 2). The transcriber always makes interpretations and choices on what to write down, i.e., in what detail the transcription should be presented. Ball presents an extra layer of translation and interpretation, since he, first, records himself playing in the style of e.g., Sonny Terry, and then, second, transcribes his own recordings. Thus, the reader sees a transcribed version of the author's playing, which in itself is an interpretation of the actual playing of Sonny Terry. In addition to Ball's work, David Barrett has published several books which contain actual transcriptions of recorded harmonica solos, and one book focuses on a specific album, Big Walter Horton with Carey Bell (Barrett). The transcriptions are very well done and provide a good representation of what is played on the actual recordings. However, the books lack a further analysis of the playing style of Horton and Bell.

As I will show later, Marion "Little" Walter Jacobs was an important influence on Charlie McCoy. Glover

et al. have written an in-depth biography on Jacobs' life. Glover is a harmonica player himself, so the book contains numerous references to Walter's playing style (Glover, Dirks and Gaines). Another book about a blues harmonica player is the study on the life and career of John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson that was published in 2016 (Inaba). This book contains a mapping of Williamson's career placed in a historical context, but also providing insight into his playing style. This is done with several music examples and discussions of a number of recordings. These books, however, are all related to the blues harmonica and no similar work has been done regarding country harmonica playing.²

On the other hand, in the field of country music in general, several examples of analysis of the playing style of specific musicians can be found. Joti Rockwell wrote a dissertation which describes the style of bluegrass (Rockwell). The dissertation provides transcriptions and analysis of different songs and musicians in order to exemplify the typical traits of the genre. However, the transcriptions are not there to describe the playing style of specific musicians, but instead they serve a greater purpose, to increase the understanding of the genre itself. While Rockwell examined the genre of bluegrass, Tim Miller puts the focus on an instrument much associated with country music: the pedal steel guitar. Miller has discussed the instrument itself, as well as the musicians that perform on it, in his dissertation and in an article in the *Oxford Handbook of Country Music* (*Instruments as Technology*, "This Machine Plays

Country Music”). In those texts, Miller provides in-depth analyses of the playing styles of seminal pedal-steel players Buddy Emmons, Lloyd Green and Ralph Mooney. Again, these analyses serve a greater purpose, since they deepen the understanding of the relation between the instrument, i.e., the pedal steel, and the musician.

Joti Rockwell and Tim Miller’s works on the playing style of country musicians examine instruments that are deeply rooted in the history of country music. The harmonica, although present throughout the entire recorded timespan of country music, is not as tightly associated with the genre as, for example, the banjo or the steel guitar. This partly explains why so little has been written about country harmonica. There are a few exceptions, however. One of the first stars of the Grand Ole Opry was harmonica player DeFord Bailey. Bailey’s life and career have been described by Jessica Janice Jones and, in greater detail, in the biography by David C. Morton & Charles K. Wolf (Jones; Morton and Wolf). The article does not delve into the playing style of Bailey, although the biography briefly touches on the topic. Instead, the two work tell the story of Bailey’s life and career.

The working conditions of the top session musicians in Nashville, known as the *Nashville A Team*, have been thoroughly described in *The Nashville Cats* (Stimeling). However, while addressing the subject of these musicians’ playing style, the main focus of the book is rather to explain the impact that these musicians, McCoy being one of

them, had on the recordings made in Nashville during the golden age of the Nashville Sound. The most significant book for this project is Charlie McCoy's autobiography, written together with Dr Travis D. Stimeling (McCoy and Stimeling). It recounts the fascinating tale of McCoy's career as a Nashville session musician. The focus of the book is not McCoy's playing style but rather his life and career in the recording studios and on stages across the world. All in all, this review of the literature serves to show that this paper fills an important gap in the study of the playing style of country harmonica players.

Material and method of the study

Having examined the state of the art of harmonica literature, I will now give an account of my method and the material I base this study on. The main sources for my analysis of McCoy's playing style are my own transcriptions of the 13 first albums that McCoy recorded as a featured artist. These albums were released on the Monument label from 1967 to 1977. This eleven-year timespan is, I would argue, the phase when McCoy developed his style of playing to become the instantly recognizable playing style which in essence, although it has evolved, still remains intact today. This study focuses on McCoy's diatonic harmonica playing, thus I have excluded recordings where he plays chromatic harmonica or bass harmonica. Besides those, I transcribed, and learned how to play, the diatonic harmonica playing

on these 13 albums in their entirety, with one exception: when McCoy overdubs and plays a harmony part to the melody, in which cases I only transcribed the melody. In addition to these albums, I also transcribed a number of recordings that McCoy made as a session musician. Furthermore, I studied the way that McCoy utilizes the country-tuned diatonic harmonica on the dominant chord. This is an important part of McCoy's playing style that I have not heard him utilize before 1979, hence the need to scan McCoy's recorded output as a featured artist from 1979 up to 2020.

The main source of information for this study is the set of three interviews that I conducted during the summer and fall of 2020. The first interview was with McCoy himself on June 23 and the following interviews were with Buddy Greene on August 25 and Mike Caldwell on September 3. In the interview with McCoy, we discussed his playing style and musical journey. The interview was structured according to the funnel model (Kylän 44-51). Initially my questions were not verbal, but musical. I played licks from my McCoy transcriptions for him and let him comment, thus turning the licks into open questions, giving the interviewee a chance to respond without being influenced by a specific question. I followed up with more specific questions proceeding from the informant's answers to the musical question. This part was less open and more focused, representing the narrow section of the funnel. Towards the end I once again asked a few open questions.

The interviews with Greene and Caldwell were structured in a similar way, but in addition to discussing McCoy's playing style, we also analyzed their own playing styles. We also discussed how their playing styles relate to McCoy's. I chose Greene and Caldwell for two reasons: a) they are both very prominent harmonica players within the genre of country music and b) they are both very influenced by McCoy.

As mentioned above, I was in part, *playing the interview* (Rudbuck 120-24). We used music as a starting point for a conversation on the different themes, I played a lick and we not only discussed what I just played, but we also elaborated musically on what I had played. These elaborations were in the form of spoken language as well as in the form of music. This requires the interviewer to be a master of the instrument as well as the genre, to be able to hear, play and fully understand what the interviewee is playing as responses to the initial musical question. The importance of excellent knowledge of the genre cannot be overstated since many of McCoy's licks relate to what other instruments have contributed throughout the history of country music.

In this process of transcribing the solos and categorizing those transcriptions, I view myself as a prospector (Kvale 11-12). These precious nuggets (the recordings) were already there, others had seen them (learned to play them) but they had not been collected (transcribed to notation) and analyzed in this way previously. However, when conducting

the interviews, I took the role of the traveler (Kvale 11-12), walking alongside McCoy, Greene and Caldwell, discussing what we saw along the trail. One might say we looked at the nature that surrounded us and I pointed out certain features of the landscape that were frequently occurring. I, as well as they, had walked down this path many times before. McCoy had in fact created the trail by himself. They had the chance to agree that those features were indeed common, or to point out other features that I may have missed. We also discussed the rich variety of the various features of the landscape.

These interviews have served as a method to validate the analysis of my transcriptions. In addition, they are also a great way to check if I missed anything, as well as to deepen my understanding of the categories by discussing them in depth with highly skilled and initiated harmonica players. This gave me new perspectives on several of the licks.

In what follows, I will make comparisons with traditional blues harmonica playing. In the sections that follow I will focus on a number of aspects that, taken together, not only explain various aspects of McCoy's playing style, but also what has shaped him as a musician and how he has influenced country harmonica players who followed his path.

The Shaping of a Playing Style

The Blues

“the one that started my phone ringing, was nothing but blues” — *Charlie McCoy*

In this section, I will consider the role of the blues in McCoy’s playing style. The opening quote refers to McCoy’s first big hit record as a sideman, Roy Orbison’s “Candy Man”. The quote accurately reflects one of the most important ingredients in McCoy’s playing style, namely the influence of blues harmonica playing. As a young man, McCoy discovered Jimmy Reed, who inspired him to dedicate more time to playing the harmonica (McCoy & Stimeling 11). The discovery of Jimmy Reed led McCoy to Little Walter, whom he considers being the greatest blues harmonica player of all times (McCoy). The very first recording McCoy did in Nashville was a demo session where he was required to play blues harmonica (McCoy & Stimeling 42-44). McCoy’s work on this demo session led to his first actual recording in Nashville. Figure 2 shows how his playing on the introduction almost exclusively relies on the blues scale. The only exception is his use of the major third instead of the minor third of the blues scale. McCoy also plays a number of the notes *dirty*, illustrated by the smaller note-heads, which is a common trait in blues harmonica playing.



Figure 2 Harmonica introduction to Roy Orbison's
"Candy Man", 1962.

As he started recording more frequently, he was asked to play with a less funky tone and to play the melody more, i.e., to play less bluesy (McCoy). McCoy explains that “I moved away from the blues, although I still can play the blues” (McCoy). In order to fit in with the music that was being recorded in Nashville, he de-emphasized his blues influences and started playing less like a blues harmonica player and more in the style of the other instrumentalists that surrounded him in the studios. Buddy Greene refers to this transition as adapting the Chicago blues style of Little Walter to a country music context. A part of this adaptation is playing with a clean tone, which will be discussed further in a later section of this article. Another part of the adaptation is to exchange the minor pentatonic scale, so dominant in the blues, to the major pentatonic scale, also known as *the country scale*, which is preferred in country music. How these scales relate to the harmonica will be examined in the section concerning affordances. Suffice to say, right now, that playing blues influenced licks

with a clean tone set McCoy apart from other harmonica players during the mid and late 1960's.

The 1975 album *Harpin' the Blues* is not only a good example of how important the blues was to McCoy, but also how assimilated in country music he had become. Of the eleven songs on the album, only one is directly linked to blues harmonica, namely "A Tribute to Little Walter". "St. Louis Blues" and "Basin Street Blues" are both, although early examples of blues, more associated with jazz bands than with traditional blues performers. Another song is from the Boogie Woogie tradition, "After Hours" by James P. Johnson. The rest of the material is drawn from various forms of country music. Spending a decade and a half in Nashville had made a great impact on McCoy, so the blues that he chose to record was not primarily from Chicago or the Mississippi Delta, but rather from Nashville and the world of country music.

One can see this album as a journey through the history of country music, viewed through the lens of blues songs. This journey starts in the 1920's with "T For Texas" and ends in the late 60's with "Working Man's Blues". With the blues as a common denominator we take part in a journey from the early country style of Jimmie Rodgers all the way to the Bakersfield style of Merle Haggard. Along the way we pass the Honky Tonk of Hank Williams and stop by the Delmore Brothers, as well as Willie Nelson. Another way to view the album is as a document of McCoy's musical journey starting with the blues, settling down in the Mecca

of country music and throwing in some early jazz influences for good measure.

When asked to describe McCoy's playing style both Greene and Caldwell start out by pointing to the importance of the blues influence. Delineations such as *understands the blues* (Greene) and *appreciates blues* (Caldwell) are used. This section shows that the blues is the foundation of McCoy's playing style, which is very evident on his early recordings, and this influence can still be heard today.

Chord Changes – Three chords and the truth

“I wanna stay in the chord pattern, you know, and not sound like I'm lost” — *Charlie McCoy*

The blues influence on McCoy that was examined in the section above can be regarded as his informal schooling. In this section, I will look into an aspect of McCoy's style that relates to his formal schooling. McCoy took part in a quite advanced music theory class during his senior year of high school (McCoy & Stimeling 16-17). This led him to be able to skip the first four semesters of music theory during his first, and only, year of music studies at the University of Miami (McCoy & Stimeling 27-29). This formal schooling, I would argue, has led to one very characteristic element of McCoy's playing style: his approach to the harmony of the song, i.e., the chord changes.

Most blues harmonica players will base their choice of notes on the key of the song, and on either the minor

pentatonic scale or the blues scale. McCoy utilizes the major pentatonic scale frequently, but he is also adamant about emphasizing the notes of the chord being played. This is an approach that is less stressed by traditional blues harmonica players. Whereas they usually de-emphasize notes that do not fit the chord, McCoy makes sure that chord notes are abundant. One example of this is found in figure 6 where McCoy starts and ends every phrase on a chord tone. On the G chord, he starts on the major third and lands on the tonic. The next chord is C where he starts on the fifth and ends on the major third. On the dominant chord he once again starts on the fifth and lands on the major third. Finally, when the tonic returns, he yet again starts on the major third and lands on what would have been the tonic of the tonic chord, but is now the major third of the Eb chord. These phrases make melodic sense but, as I will argue in the section concerning the affordances of the harmonica, McCoy's choices of notes are also guided by what the instrument affords.

During my interview McCoy stated that "I'm conscious of the chords". He further explained the importance for a session musician to learn the chord changes of a song quickly, stating that "You know when I hear a song, I take it in, especially the chord changes" (McCoy). Caldwell said that one thing that sets McCoy out from most other harmonica players is that "he always plays notes that fit the chords, they're not just licks, they're designed to fit over the chord structure". Caldwell points out that McCoy

plays chord instruments himself and that McCoy utilizes his knowledge of harmony in a sophisticated way, that “he would use licks that would maybe accentuate the 9th or the 7th and he knows how to use them” (Caldwell). Greene also touched upon this topic, stating that “If a note he’s hitting is creating a rub, then he’s not gonna be satisfied with that. He’s gonna wanna come up with something that fits the chord better” (Greene).

McCoy’s frequent use of chord notes can be exemplified by the transcription in figure 3 from “The Fastest Harp in the South”. The chord notes are noted with their respective function in the chord.



Figure 3 The first four bars of the solo of “The Fastest Harp in the South”, 1973. 0.32-0.35

When I read my transcriptions, I can often see what chord is being played just by looking at the lines McCoy is playing. When I mentioned this during the interview McCoy was very pleased and said “Then that tells me I did my job right. I did what I set out to do. Yeah, that’s great, I’m glad to hear that” (McCoy).

McCoy uses certain playing techniques on specific chords, depending on the affordances of the harmonica's interface. The tonic, third and fifth of the tonic chord, when playing in 2nd position, are draw notes on the lower half of the harmonica, which allow for bending. This has the affordance of playing with all the expressiveness that the bends offer. The root of the dominant is also a draw note on the lower half of the instrument. In addition to this, the third and fifth of the dominant are bent notes in the first octave. On the other hand, all the notes of the subdominant triad are blow notes. This means that no bending is available in the two lower octaves. When playing on the subdominant, McCoy often plays with a tongue-block embouchure playing 5th and 6th intervals, as exemplified in figure 4. This is a strategy that McCoy uses to make up for the loss of expressiveness of the holes that do not afford bending. Another way McCoy makes up for this is to play the b7 of the subdominant, which is a half-step bend on hole three draw, in order to create a more expressive sound.



Figure 4 Charlie McCoy: "Columbus Stockade Blues"

So far, the focus has been on what McCoy brought with him to Nashville, I will now turn to describing how he was influenced by working in the recording studios in the *Athens of the South*.

Clean Playing – No blurts

“...Nashville cats play clean as country water”

— *Lovin’ Spoonful* “*Nashville Cats*”

In this section, I will explore one important aspect of how McCoy transitioned from being a blues harmonica to a country harmonica player, namely to start playing with a clean tone. As stated before, when playing in a blues style it is common to use *dirty notes*. As mentioned earlier, producers started saying “could you play maybe not quite such a funky tone?” in order to blend in with the sound of the music (McCoy). This encouraged him to play with a clean tone, which is what the musicians that surrounded him in the studios were doing. To someone coming from a country music background, playing with a clean tone may sound like a very obvious choice, but looking at it from an instrument specific view, it is a trait that really set McCoy apart from other harmonica players in the 60’s and early 70’s. An example of McCoy playing dirty notes would be the 1965 recording of “Harpoon Man”. Before long, his playing became very clean. An early example of this is “Today I Started Loving You Again” from the 1969 album *The Real McCoy*.

In our interview, McCoy refers to a sloppy execution of a note as a *blurt*. He states that “if you go after a note and you accidentally play the one next to it, I call that a *blurt*. And I don’t like *blurts* ... I want them [the notes] to be clear and clean” (McCoy). The *blurts* are not the same as the *dirty notes*. One important distinction is that the *dirty notes* are intentional and played with control, with the aim of producing a specific sound, while the *blurts* are unintentional.

Mike Caldwell has a noteworthy take on McCoy’s tone when he says “I think he plays a lot like a singer sings, that’s why his tone is so nice and smooth” (Caldwell). The influence of singers makes sense in many ways. McCoy spent a large portion of his career backing up vocal stars during the Nashville Sound era. These vocalists generally sang with a very clean tone, so I agree with Caldwell — they are likely to have influenced McCoy’s sound on the harmonica.

Buddy Greene exemplifies McCoy’s clean sound while discussing his blues playing, stating that “I think his approach to blues playing was really unique too, because he was basically trying to play Little Walter stuff but as a lip purser. He was doing sort of Little Walter based licks, but because he was doing a lip-purse they really came out sounding cool and they had sort of a *countryness* to them, but they were still sophisticated, you know.” What Greene describes as cool and sophisticated is the fact that McCoy plays these blues licks, but with a clean tone. Part of that

clean sound comes from playing in a pucker style, or lip-purse as Greene refers to it.

Moving from a blues style to a country style was not the only transformation McCoy did in his early career. He also entirely transformed the way country harmonica was played. Country harmonica prior to McCoy is well exemplified by the playing of Wayne Raney. His style is firmly rooted in old-time harmonica playing. He plays in a tongue block embouchure and uses chords frequently in what in the harmonica world is known as the *Lost John* style. This is the harmonica version of Maybelle Carters' *Carter Scratch*. The melody is usually played on the lower half of the harmonica and chords on the first three to four holes, i.e., the tonic and the subdominant, are played in between the notes of the melody. A good example of Raney's style is his 1949 recording "Lost John Boogie". Country harmonica, after being transformed by McCoy, from the early 70's and onwards is inhabited mainly by players who play with a clean tone and predominantly use the pucker embouchure. A few examples are Mike Caldwell, Buddy Greene, Mickey Raphael, Terry McMillan, PT Gazell, Pat Bergeson and Jim Hoke. Some of these harmonica players use dirty notes to a larger or lesser extent, but the clean tone is their most prominent feature. Others, like Kirk Jellyroll Johnson, exclusively use a tongue block embouchure.

Melodic Playing

“Charlie’s style is smooth, lyrical, very melodic, more melodic than almost any other harmonica player”

— *Mike Caldwell*

The importance of playing with a clean tone, as discussed in the section above, goes hand in hand with another characteristic of McCoy’s playing style, namely to play in a melodic fashion. In this section I will investigate McCoy’s attitude concerning the importance of the melody of the song. The producers that McCoy worked with in his early career did not only ask him to play with a less funky tone but also to “maybe play the melody a bit more” (McCoy). This request by the producers has had an impact on McCoy not only as a session player, but also when he records as a featured artist. On McCoy’s own albums the typical recording is instrumental, starting and ending with McCoy playing the melody, on many occasions overdubbing and playing harmony with himself. In between those statements of the melody there are usually solos by McCoy and other instrumentalists.

On some recordings, such as his 1967 recording of “Ode To Billie Joe”, there are no solos. McCoy simply plays the melody every chorus, just like the original recording with Bobbie Gentry. Here McCoy uses the harmonica like a voice, “singing” each chorus of the song. Variation in the song is achieved by adding various harmonicas playing countermelodies and harmony parts. In a conversation in

2013 McCoy told this author that when he plays a melody, he has the lyrics on the music stand in front of him. That would indicate that when McCoy plays a melody, he is playing not only the notes of the melody, he is actually playing the words of the lyrics. This is also reflected upon by Mike Caldwell when he was asked to describe McCoy's playing style: "[he's] like a country vocalist [...] Charlie is lyrical, like a song" (Caldwell). The very first thing McCoy himself said when asked to describe his playing style was "I play melodies..." (McCoy).

On other recordings, McCoy does not even take a solo, he simply plays the melody in the beginning and again in the end and leaves the solos to other musicians. This approach can be heard on "Country Roads" (1972), and is of course related to his *less is more* approach, but it is significant that when McCoy makes a choice between playing the melody or playing a solo, he opts for the melody and leaves the solos to other musicians in the band. He could have had the melody be presented by the fiddle or the pedal steel and taken the solo himself. The consistency of his choice to play the melody is a clear indication of how important the melody is to him, and also how much he enjoys playing melodies.

Playing a lot of melodies and paying close attention to melodies will rub off on your playing. This has likely led to McCoy's highly melodic style of improvising. Caldwell comments on this aspect of McCoy's playing: "it's got a direction, some guys play licks, but Charlie, there's a

melodic direction, he's got destinations, and he takes you on a journey ... it's got a melodic direction" (Caldwell). This description illustrates an approach to constructing solos that is based on being able to see the big picture, the whole. Caldwell talks about not only taking a *journey*, but a journey that has a predetermined *destination*. McCoy is aware of the destination when he starts the journey (the solo), and this gives the passenger (the listener) a clear sense of *direction*. McCoy is certainly not above playing licks, my transcriptions show many examples of recurring licks. What sets McCoy apart is how he integrates these licks in a way that makes melodic sense.

Other Instruments - Listening to the A Team

In this section I will focus on what McCoy learned from listening to the other session players that he worked with, which in essence is how he learned to play country music. On several occasions during the interview, McCoy states that he is inspired by fiddles, steel guitars and the dobro. On two separate occasions, he states that being inspired by these instruments has played a crucial part in developing his playing style: "I'm trying to play the licks that I'm hearing these guys [fiddle players, pedal steel players, dobro players] play and that's kind of what created what people call my style" (McCoy). Later in the interview, talking about being inspired by these instruments, he states that "that's probably the key of how I developed the style

I have, is listening to all those people... I'm influenced a lot by fiddles, and steel guitar, and dobro" (McCoy). Not only has McCoy listened a lot to the classical country instruments, he has also played in unison and in harmony with them: "I've done a lot of that where were playing with another instrument, unison with them you know, or three instruments together, we've done a lot of that here [in Nashville]" (McCoy). Actually playing and phrasing with other instruments can teach you a lot about how they work. It can also open for new ways to approach your own instrument as far as phrasing and choices of notes go.

Buddy Greene also talks about how the instruments that surrounded McCoy in the studios inspired him greatly: "I think he picked up a lot of things like that just from listening to other players on these sessions and thought: Hey I can do that, you know on the harp, I can figure out a way to do that thing" (Greene). The most important aspect of this quote is that McCoy needed to figure out a way to play these licks on the harmonica. String instruments such as fiddle, dobro, pedal steel, and guitar are all very different from the harmonica. One aspect of McCoy's genius is how he adapted licks that are clichés on other instruments, to the harmonica. During the sessions, he was listening to the way the fiddle and dobro players use portamento and he figured out where and how he can play that on his instrument. This, of course, relates to the affordances of the harmonica, and I will return to that in the next section.

The guitar is certainly one instrument that McCoy would hear on every recording session. A good example of a tune that McCoy wrote with clear influences from guitar playing is “Grade A” from 1972. He plays part of the theme with a staccato that sounds a lot like so-called chicken-picking being done on an electric guitar, often a Fender Telecaster. The name of the song, *Grade A*, being a reference to the classification of eggs in the US, is a clear indication that this is very consciously done. When discussing this tune Buddy Greene says “I’m sure he got that idea from [...] hearing a guitar player chicken pick” (Greene). An example of McCoy being influenced by another instrument, the fiddle, is evident in “Columbus Stockade Blues”, (see fig. 4). Here McCoy plays double stops with fifths and sixths much in the same manner that a fiddle player would do. An example of the influence of the pedal steel guitar on McCoy is a lick from the 1968 recording of “Jackson” on his album *The Real McCoy*. In the second bar of figure 5 McCoy plays a fast legato between E and D which is possible to do on a F diatonic harmonica, which McCoy is using on this recording, since the E is located on hole three draw, which can be bent down to the D. The pedal steel can easily do this in a very similar way with the use of a pedal.

Less Is More - One for the (A) team

“find the space” — *Charlie McCoy*

In addition to learning licks and phrases from his peers in the recording studios, McCoy also learned another important lesson: the importance of leaving space for the vocals. In this section I will examine McCoy’s *less is more* approach, one that sets him apart from the harmonica players that came before him. During our interview McCoy recalled a story that had a big impact on him as a musician. When taking a break during a session, guitarist Grady Martin took McCoy outside and told him that he was playing too much. Martin told McCoy to “Listen to the words, if you don’t hear every word and understand the meaning, you’re playing too much” (McCoy). During the same session, Harold Bradley told McCoy “We think the song and the artist as the picture, we’re [the session musicians] the frame. Our job is to frame the picture, not to distract from it”. “And from that day on, for me, less is more” says McCoy (McCoy). Buddy Greene comments on the Grady Martin story saying “economy and sitting out was just as important as anything he was gonna play” (Greene).

When asked to describe his playing style, one of the few things that McCoy brought up was that “when someone else is playing or singing, I stay out of the way” (McCoy). McCoy also stated that he has worked a lot with female vocalists and that the harmonica is in their vocal range,

which makes it important for him to play in the spaces where the vocalists are taking a rest. Prior to McCoy, most if not all harmonica players played over the vocals. This was the role that the harmonica had both in old-time country and in the blues. The obvious exception is when the harmonica was played by the lead singer. McCoy plays more like a saxophone player would, they are used to laying out and leaving space for other instruments. This is in part due to the timbre of reed instruments, which resemble vocals quite a bit. This approach to stay out of the way of the vocals permeates all instrumentalists in this style of music: “Nashville Sound era session musicians frequently talk about their role in serving both the recording artist and the song itself, making sure that their contributions do not cover up the vocal melody” (Stimeling 172).

McCoy’s focus when recording is not on what licks he will play but what the song needs: “What I think about is the song. How do I play this song, you know, what is the best way to show this song” (McCoy). The session musicians in the Nashville A Team were all required to downplay their prowess on their instruments in order to focus on supporting the song being recorded. They were required to “put[ting] their own professional identities aside in the service of a bigger project”, namely the song (Stimeling 3). Buddy Greene brings this topic up during our interview: “If I’m called to do a session and the session is a country music set, I try to think like Charlie”. Greene

The image displays a musical score for the song "He Stopped Loving Her Today" by George Jones. It is divided into three systems, each featuring a voice line and a harmonica line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "He kept her picture on his wall went half crazy now and then But he still loved her thru it all Hop ing she'd come back a gain". Chord markings G, C, D7, and Eb7 are placed above the voice lines. The harmonica lines contain musical notation, including rests and melodic phrases, with some triplets indicated by a '3' over a group of notes.

Figure 6 Harmonica fills to George Jones "He Stopped Loving Her Today".

will not play McCoy licks but he tries to induce the mindset of McCoy by staying out of the way of the vocals and remembering that *less is more*. Even though this might be an unusual attitude for a typical harmonica player, in the studios of Nashville it is common practice. Timothy Miller sums up the expectations of the session musicians in his dissertation: "Musicians were expected to play to a high degree of perfection and to creatively contribute hooks and licks to enhance a track's salability, but to limit their musical expression to the 'service of the song'" (Miller 92).

McCoy exemplifies the less is more attitude with George Jones "He Stopped Loving Her Today". The producer told McCoy to "get something on the second verse" (McCoy).

McCoy describes his playing on this song as “the simplest thing I’ve ever done on a record, and maybe the most effective” (McCoy). Buddy Greene compliments McCoy’s respectful way of playing behind a singer, “you know I just think he was a, a master of doing fills, you know he could support a vocal really well, he knew how to stay out of the (way)... I loved that about him just how musical he was, economical he was with what he had to say” (Greene).

Having *less is more* as a musical guideline does not only have the advantage of not distracting the viewer’s gaze from the picture, but is also an advantageous strategy when playing live. When talking about young harmonica players, McCoy says some of them play all the time, and what happens is that “if you’re playing in a band and you’ve got a sound man, if you play all the time, they’re gonna turn you down. And if you play something amazing, nobody will ever hear it” (McCoy). Buddy Greene affirms this when he talks about the economy of McCoy’s playing and how good he is at laying out, “... and then when he did say something he really stated something” (Greene). McCoy feels that this attitude is what has kept him in the business for so long: “I understand the song, I know what helps the song” (McCoy). This is how he approaches his own records as well: “I don’t play much on my own records. I play the melody, that’s about it, and, and let all these other amazing musicians shine...” (McCoy).

I suspect that this motto of McCoy, leaving space for other musicians, permeates his way of life in general.

It is, I believe, no coincidence that when McCoy talks about Harold Bradley and Grady Martin in the interview I conducted, he makes sure to mention that they are members of the Country Music Hall of Fame. However, he neglects to inform me, that so is he. Even during the interview, he directs the spotlight to his fellow musicians, not towards himself. Having examined how McCoy was influenced by working with the Nashville A Team, I will now consider the playing style that he developed.

Stylistic Diversity - Both kinds, country and western

In this section I will present one feature of McCoy's playing style that is the result of playing a wide variety of music styles through his work as a session musician, i.e., his stylistic diversity. McCoy addressed in the interview that his playing style is influenced to a great deal by the variety of music styles that he has recorded. He returns to this several times with statements like: "I've done all kinds of music now. And I love to keep stretching the limit..." and "I'm interested in all kinds of music and I've kind of explored a lot of different kinds of music" (McCoy). Spending a lot of time as a session musician means that you are exposed to various types of music which inevitably will influence you.

These influences led McCoy to record several albums dedicated to specific styles of music such as Christmas songs (*Christmas*, 1974, *Charlie's Christmas Angels*, 2007 and *Classic*

Country Christmas, 2017), Bluegrass and mountain style music (*Appalachian Fever*, 1977), Gospel (*Precious Memories*, 1998), Irish music (*A Celtic Bridge*, 2007 and *Celtic Dreams*, 2015), Jazz standards (*Over The Rainbow*, 2008) and paying homage to the rich and varied heritage of American music (*American Roots*, 1995) as well as pure Country (*Classic Country*, 2003, *Lonesome Whistle: A Tribute To Hank Williams*, 2011 and *Country Gold*, 2018). In addition to these albums with special themes, McCoy's recordings have been filled with Tamla Motown soul/R'n'B ("Fingertips", "Uptown" and "Shot Gun" 1967, "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" 1973), contemporary pop songs ("Good Vibrations" 1967, "Hooked on a Feeling" 1968), the Beatles ("Something" 1973, "Yesterday" 1989), Western Swing ("Faded Love/Maiden's Prayer" 1973), Swing ("Back Home In Indiana" 1975, "One O'Clock Jump" 1988, "Take the A-Train" 1995) and Fusion ("Birdland" 1988) to name but a few.

Buddy Greene explains how the large variety in McCoy's records has influenced and inspired him: "I like to play it all and it's from listening to people like Charlie" (Greene). When discussing the various types of blues that McCoy recorded on the *Harpin' The Blues* album, Greene stated, "He's always going for as much diversity and variety of style as he can, to create interest for the listener" (Greene).

This diversity has also led to arrangements on McCoy's albums that are somewhat unorthodox. A good example of this is the 1976 recording of "Wabash Cannonball", which

ends with the vocal line “And I don’t think Roy done it this a way”. It is clear that McCoy is not only well acquainted with Roy Acuff’s original, but also up to date with current trends in the so-called outlaw movement in country music, hence the reference to Waylon Jennings 1975 hit record “Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way”. The recording makes references both to the past and the present of country music and superimposes this with an arrangement that contains not only traditional banjo and pedal steel, but also clavinet, a disco drum beat and a funky rhythm guitar. On top of that, McCoy plays the melody and improvises with the confidence of a musician who is equally at home in all those musical worlds. The multitudes of various influences in McCoy’s everyday working situation seems to have inspired him to mix it all up, with no fear of what traditionalists might say. This is perhaps not that unlike what Bob Wills and Hank Williams did in their early careers. Wills mixed traditional fiddle tunes with New Orleans style jazz and swing, combining traditional country instruments such as the fiddle and the guitar with drums, electric steel guitar, saxophone and trumpet. Williams took the sound of traditional country and wrote songs in a pop-style AABA format. McCoy, Wills and Williams all soaked in the music that surrounded them, mixed all that together and recorded music they enjoyed listening to.

Originality

“I know it was you” — *Charlie McCoy*

A successful session musician must be at once flexible and yet have a distinctive voice of their own. In this section I will focus on McCoy’s deliberate effort to find a personal playing style. One of the closing remarks that McCoy had in our interview concerned the importance of having a voice of your own, to be unique. He said “To me ... just for someone to say I heard a record and I know it was you, I mean, that’s a compliment” (McCoy). It is a fine line to walk as a session musician, to have a unique and identifiable sound, while still being the *frame of the picture*, not distracting from it.

On the *Harpin’ the Blues* album McCoy only plays one song that relates to a blues harmonica player, his biggest hero Little Walter. However, it is significant that McCoy does not play a Little Walter song, but instead choses to write and perform a tribute to Walter. This means that he can pay his respect to a great influence, but still has the opportunity to express his own voice. On his first album from 1967, McCoy does play a cover version of Little Walter’s biggest hit “Juke”, and another version of “Juke” appears on *Charlie, My Boy* eight years later. None of these recordings are a note-for-note copy of the original, on the contrary they are very much Charlie McCoy recordings. In the 6th chorus of the 1975 version McCoy plays triplets throughout the entire chorus in a way that is quite difficult

to execute and that has no resemblance to the original recording. In the last chorus of both versions McCoy returns to the theme of the 1st chorus, which Little Walter never does. It seems like McCoy is aiming to formalize the structure of the tune in a way that Walter never did, in a way that is more typical of a jazz instrumental or one of McCoy's own instrumentals.

Caldwell shared an illuminating story concerning McCoy's view on the importance of having a personal style. When Caldwell at age 16 met McCoy for the first time he played him the solo to McCoy's recording of "Back Home in Indiana" which Caldwell had transcribed and memorized note for note. After hearing the youngster McCoy recognized the effort he had made: "He said: 'Sounds just like the record'. But he didn't look impressed, in other words he was saying I need to learn my way to do it" (Caldwell). I have no doubt that McCoy was impressed by the 16-year old's playing ability, it is a quite demanding solo to play. But the most important message that McCoy wanted to give this young, obviously very talented musician, was that he needed to find his own voice. Learning to play the solo the way McCoy did it on the record was fine, but replicating that did not add anything. McCoy was trying to encourage Caldwell to play his own solo, to create a contribution that was unique to him.

Greene points to one strategy that McCoy utilizes in order to create and maintain a unique voice; he leaves the past behind him. When McCoy is looking for inspiration,

he will, as described in a previous section, listen to other instruments than the harmonica: “He wasn’t like just, you know going back and trying to figure out ‘what would Wayne Raney do?’, [...] he was trying to figure out how do I take this to the next level, find my own voice, come up with some new ideas”. Wayne Raney was one of the most prominent harmonica players in the world of country music during the 1940’s and 50’s. The only harmonica players that McCoy did study in detail was Jimmy Reed and Little Walter, and neither of them played country music. I believe that McCoy made an active choice not to study any country harmonica players since, as he put it himself “what I would hate is [for someone to say] ‘you know I heard you play and you sound just like so and so’, I’m thinking, no, I don’t wanna sound just like so and so” (McCoy).

Trailblazer

“Nobody had ever heard that in Nashville”

— *Buddy Greene*

In this section I will look into the various ways that McCoy has been a trailblazer when it comes to harmonica playing in country music. The impact McCoy has had on the way country harmonica is played today cannot be overestimated. When he first came to Nashville his blues style of playing the harmonica was “a novelty, nobody in Nashville was playing like this” (McCoy). This was his first

contribution as a trailblazer for the harmonica world. Even though he played blues on his first hit, there was the sound of the harmonica on a hit record recorded in Nashville. This enabled him to acquire more work as a harmonica session player and eventually, as discussed previously, he adapted his playing style to fit in with the Nashville Sound.

The vast amount of recordings that McCoy made during the late 60's and throughout the 70's meant that the harmonica was exposed to a lot of listeners that a) would not have heard harmonica to this extent and b) would not have heard harmonica on this skill level. This not only meant that aspiring harmonica players had someone to learn from and be inspired by, but also that harmonica players became popular in road bands of big country stars. This gave work to Mickey Raphael with Willie Nelson, P T Gazelle with Johnny Paycheck in the 70's and Buddy Greene with Jerry Reed in the 80's. Greene talks about the importance of McCoy: "About every other song you heard on the radio (in the 70's) there was a harmonica part, you know, and it was usually Charlie ... Without his expertise, I don't think the harmonica would have enjoyed its place in country music in the 60's and 70's" (Greene).

Since his early years in Nashville McCoy has virtually created the mold as far as country harmonica playing is concerned. Those that followed him are influenced by his recordings. When it comes to certain licks and strategies that are abundant in his playing, McCoy himself is not aware of any specific moments of epiphany where he

came up with something new to the language of country harmonica. During the 60's and 70's McCoy was spending so much time in the studios, there was simply no time for long practice sessions. When he came up with something new, it happened at work: "A lot of that stuff [...] came to me on the spot" (McCoy).

As will be discussed in the next section, McCoy has contributed several harmonica specific innovations as well. The country tuning and how he uses it over the dominant chord is one good example. Another is his use of three-hole splits, which Buddy Greene comments in our interview: "Back in the day, I never heard anybody do that but Charlie" (Greene). When discussing McCoy's 1969 recording "The Real McCoy", Greene states that "I'd never heard anybody play the harmonica like that. Cause nobody had!" (Greene).

Affordances of the harmonica

"He's a brilliant guy in figuring out how to use the harmonica to good effect." — *Buddy Greene*

Finally, in this section, I will look into the role that the harmonica, or more specifically the affordance of the harmonica, has played in shaping McCoy's playing style. As any other instrument, the harmonica has its specific affordances and resistances. Some things are easily executed, others require more effort. Some things were not even intended to be done when the instrument

was originally designed. The Richter tuned harmonica was made to play melodies that contain the notes of a major scale, and to accompany this melody with the tonic chord and the dominant chord. No more, no less. However, since the invention of the Richter tuned diatonic harmonica in the mid nineteenth century, musicians have played much more than major melodies. There are two important aspects to how the harmonica is used that McCoy utilizes frequently. The first aspect is that he plays a diatonic harmonica tuned in C major when the song is in the key of G. Harmonica players refer to this as “second position”. Playing in a key a fifth above the key of the harmonica has two ramifications: 1) Instead of a regular major scale you have a mixolydian scale as your pitch material and 2) The available chords are the tonic and the subdominant. The second aspect is the use of bent notes. Without delving too deep into the mechanics of the instrument, the harmonica has the affordance to lower the pitch of the notes in the lower six holes while inhaling and the notes of the top four holes while exhaling. This means that you can produce more notes than the major scale that the harmonica is tuned to. When playing in second position, this adds the flat 2nd, minor 3rd and the flat 5th to your scale. It also affords you to be able to play the major 2nd and the flat 7th and the natural 7th in the lower octave, notes which are not available without bending. The harmonica players that McCoy studied during his formative years mostly added the notes that are part of the blues scale. However,

McCoy has used bent notes to play the major pentatonic scale and to be able to achieve chromaticism. The bent notes also enable glissando playing on certain spaces of the harmonica, which makes the instrument expressive in a voice-like manner. The actual notes where you can bend and make these glissandos are sometimes referred to as *sweet spots*. Jonathan De Souza states that “In ecological terms, a “sweet spot” [on the harmonica] would be a place where the object’s affordances converge with the agent’s abilities in a particularly strong way. The sweet spot offers less resistance, more possibilities.” (De Souza 73-75). As I have shown in figure 5 and 7, McCoy is particularly apt at putting these sweet spots to good use when emulating idiomatic pedal steel guitar licks.

One of McCoy’s great contributions to the harmonica world is the so-called country tuning. McCoy not only introduced this tuning to the harmonica world through his recordings, he also realized its full potential on the dominant chord. At first, he used the country tuning to be able to play a major seventh on hole five draw (which originally is the flat 7th in standard Richter tuning) when playing in second position. After a few years, though, he realized that this added note is the major third of the dominant chord and has the affordance of being bent down a half step to the minor third of the chord. Thus, he discovered another sweet spot on the harmonica. A very common trait in country music is to play portamento between the minor and major third of the chord. This had

previously been possible to play on the tonic chord, but now the opportunity to play the same type of licks on the dominant chord appeared. On discovering this way of using the bent note to slide between the minor and major third of the dominant chord, McCoy said “Just sitting there playing with it and...and I hear it and I say oh my gosh you know” (McCoy). The earliest recorded example that this author has heard of McCoy using a country tuned harmonica is on his 1977 album *Country Cooking*. The first recording that this author has heard where McCoy plays a dominant lick that bends from the flat 3rd to the major third is from 1979, “Bringing Mary Home” by Vernon Oxford.

Going back to figure 6, “He Stopped Loving Her Today”, as I stated earlier, I believe there is more to the design of McCoy’s playing than just melodic thinking. The first note of each phrase is not only a chord note, but a note that can be bent down at least a semi-tone. This is central to the cohesiveness of these phrases. The first three phrases move in a descending motion, almost as if to give us a hint of the dark side of this tale. These bent notes are important in the way they support the emotional aspect of the lyrics. I would argue that there is a certain tension to a bent note that is perceivable to a listener even if they are unaware of the physical aspects of the instrument. This tension has a similar effect as a blue note, it attracts attention and heightens the emotional context, which fits very well with the lyrics.

Another harmonica specific contribution of McCoy's, relating to the affordances of the instrument, is playing a three-hole split, e.g., blow 3 in the left corner of your mouth and blow 5 in the right corner while you tongue bocks out hole 4. This would produce a major sixth interval, if you inhale on the same holes it would produce a flat fifth interval, on other holes it might be perfect fifth. This is exemplified in figure 4.

McCoy comments on the specifics of the harmonica in the following understated way: "You know that's steel guitar stuff right there, but when you play it on the harmonica it kind of takes on its own thing" (McCoy). The comment is about the introduction and hook to Jerry Lee Lewis' "What Made Milwaukee Famous", and McCoy is clearly relating to the different, and common, affordances of the pedal-steel and the harmonica. In this lick the pedal steel uses the A pedal to slide from D to E and from E to D on the B-string. The E is located on hole three draw on the harmonica, where the affordance of bending down to the D is available. This opens up the opportunity for McCoy to mimic the glissando of the pedal steel quite closely. However, the only place where the steel-bar is used for a glissando is between D and C in bar 1. These notes are draw 6 (D) and blow 6 (C) on the harmonica, so McCoy is not only unable to play a glissando with bends, but he must also change direction of the air. This makes even legato playing very difficult on a harmonica.

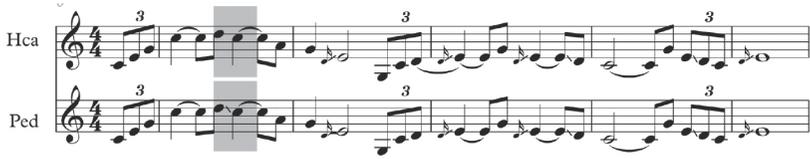


Figure 7 Harmonica and pedal steel interlude, 1.28. Jerry Lee Lewis What Made Milwaukee Famous.

Conclusion

We have seen in this paper how the idiolect of Charlie McCoy has been formed, how influential he has been, and how he has created the mold for how to play country harmonica. In what follows I list the most important features of this paper.

- The blues influenced McCoy to start studying the harmonica in a more serious way. Imitating blues harmonica greats such as Jimmy Reed and Little Walter is how he honed his skills on the harmonica.
- McCoy's formal music training prior to arriving in Nashville was important for his idiolect since it made him conscious of chordal structures and to emphasize the notes that work well with the harmony.
- Playing clean notes, which is contrary to how blues harmonica is usually played, was required by the producers of the sessions. This led to McCoy taking great pride in playing clean notes, which became an important part of his idiolect.

- McCoy's playing is always very melodic, even in his improvisations. This is also a product of what the producers asked him to do, to play more melodically.
- Learning from other musicians on the sessions is perhaps what has shaped McCoy's idiolect more than anything else. Hearing idiomatic licks played on pedal steel guitar, dobro or fiddle and adapting them to the harmonica is what McCoy himself says created his style of playing.
- Applying the concept of *less is more* has been an important feature of McCoy's idiolect ever since Grady Martin took McCoy aside and told him he was playing too much.
- Stylistic diversity is another feature of McCoy's idiolect which sets him apart from most harmonica players. Granted McCoy is known by most as a country harmonica player, but he has recorded music in a multitude of various genres, both as a session player and on his own albums.
- McCoy himself emphasizes the importance of having an original style. He is a master of the art of playing what the song needs, while also playing with his own distinct style.
- No one in the history of country harmonica has been as influential as McCoy. One could argue that no other harmonica player has been more influential, regardless of genre.

- McCoy has worked with the affordances of the diatonic harmonica and made great use of them within the context of country music. He has not only figured out how to take advantage of the standard Richter tuned harmonica, but in addition to that, he is the first to record with the country tuned harmonica, thereby adapting the affordances of the instrument in order to make it work even better with the idiomatics of the genre.

Charlie McCoy started playing harmonica for the same reasons most harmonica players do: he heard blues harmonica and was drawn to the expressiveness of the instrument. In his case, it was Jimmy Reed which led him to Little Walter. What makes McCoy unique is that he brought the 10-hole diatonic harmonica to the studios of Nashville during the height of the Nashville Sound era, and made the instrument an integral part of that sound. The blues were his point of departure, but he adapted to the requirements of the Nashville producers of the 1960's. In addition to playing more melodically, he needed to play less busy and to play what the song in question required. At the same time, he had to play with a distinct style of his own, a highly personal playing style. All this while negotiating the affordances and resistances of the humble diatonic harmonica: no small feat indeed. Charlie McCoy has had, and continues to have, a great impact on everyone who plays country music harmonica today. If I would start to play the harmonica today and I wanted to learn

how to play country music, I would learn directly from McCoy if I chose to study his recordings. If I instead studied the recordings of Buddy Greene or Mike Caldwell or Jellyroll Johnson or PT Gazell, to name but a few, I would learn indirectly from McCoy, since they in their turn have built their individual voices on the foundation of McCoy's playing.

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Endnotes

- 1 Dawson and Propes, *First Rock 'n' Roll Record*, 70.
- 2 Gibson states that "The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes..." (Gibson 129). The affordance of the harmonica is thus what it offers me as a harmonicist, what it does more or less willingly; which in itself also implies what it resists, i.e., what is more difficult to perform. The concept of affordances emanates from ecological psychology, which in turn has informed embodied music cognition. My own research is situated in embodied music cognition.

Borderlands: Representations of Mexico in Mainstream US Country Music

by Hannah Blackwell

Introduction

I heard it said once that although both could potentially lead us astray, in the end, always trust musicians more than you trust politicians because seeking beauty is more noble than seeking power. I tend to agree. It is also important to note that this is not a political paper. It is a paper about beauty, awareness, and the songs that can oftentimes teach us how to think, feel, and behave. Identity, collective and otherwise, is a product of discourses much more so than they are political fact (Gavrilos, 2010). Once abstract meaning is made concrete through discourse such as media (music, for example) those meanings are bolstered by being shared and those shared meanings become crystallized as truth (Northup, 2010). Through the critical discourse analysis (CDA) of popular US country music songs about Mexico, this paper serves as a conversation about the ways in which popular country music influences representation and perceptions. This work goes on to provide insight into

the ways in which these elements can impact equity and access both locally and globally. Ultimately, this is a paper about borders, the ones that keep us in, the ones that keep us out, and the road trip playlists that get us there.

Borders exist for a variety of reasons. They keep us as contained and safe while simultaneously keeping us ignorant and separated. We are constantly toeing the line between the security of what is and the novelty of what could be. Borders have caused war, famine, and death. Conflict over borders are happening in very real ways across our world today. They are found in actual warfare and unrest in countries both close and far from us. They are found around mega mansions and in makeshift posts strung across homelands. They can also be found as strongholds within our minds that play out in separation, animosity, and hate.

I never thought I'd live in a border town. Yet, here I am. The United States and Mexico border has been one of great political fodder. Immigration policies and policing of people entering the US from Mexico has increased tensions across both countries. As a Native American/Indigenous (Choctaw) scholar currently living on the US/Mexico border, I now have more questions and greater curiosities about the policies, mindsets, and ideologies that shape us all.

According to a recent study by the Country Music Association, 51% of US adults listen to country music. The data goes on to illustrate that the reach of country

music is consistent nationwide with each region falling between 46 and 60 percent country music listenership (www.cmaworld.com/research-insights/, 2022). The music and messages heard and received by this large and growing fanbase shapes their identity and understanding. These cultural cues provided by country music develop shared and collective meanings that then serve to perpetuate the current ideologies and oftentimes hegemonic constructs of society. This type of reach is powerful and serves as a great source of insight into representation and perceptions. Country really is country wide.

Perceptions and representations are truly important. As a Native Scholar, I understand the importance of highlighting voices in our underrepresented communities. I also know we must take a hard look at our dominant ideologies if we want to have any chance to bridge the gap. How can we “change the world” or even our own perceptions if we don’t understand the dominant programming around us – and at times, within us.

Although social scripts and programming is subjective in that it can be good, bad, or neutral, it is important to understand its widespread prevalence. As evidenced through empirical research, music is as much a site of social order as it is art (DeNora, 2001). Perhaps Dolly Parton says it best: “if you talk bad about country music, it’s like saying bad things about my mama. Them’s fightin’ words” (Inspirational Music Quotes and Sayings, 2007). I could not agree more with this sentiment. However,

understanding the messages we receive behind catchy tunes, aggressive anthems, and beautiful ballads is necessary if we want to truly understand where our scripts for life might have originated and grown.

Although music is only one source of socialization, it is an important one. Music and memory are inextricably linked. This is clearly illustrated in the fact that, although you may not be able to remember the name of your childhood friends, you still know every word to that song you loved in third grade. Melodies are memories. Memories are also powerful in shaping and forming collective and shared memory as a means of social production (Berg 2010, Gillis 1994, Zelizer 1995, Browne 1993). With themes of nostalgia, patriotism, and storytelling, country music is a powerful medium in the construction of memory, identity, perceptions, and representations.

Often dubbed as truly “American music,” country music is a great way to achieve insight into dominant ideologies. Music can be considered a dialogic process simultaneously articulated individually and collectively (Gillespie, 2007). Music is a meeting point of public and private lives – an intersection. Music easily flows between identity elements of self, as well as self in relation to others. It says both “this is who I am” and “this is who we are” (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). It truly connects people to themselves and others. Country music, specifically, more than any other modern cultural product, has true nation-wide reach within the US. It is not geography that unites country music audiences, it

is ideology (Boulton, 2008). This level of integration of the individual and collective serves as a powerful reinforcer to dominant discourses and constructs. These ideologies can then lead to very real notions about our neighbors, immigration, and policies that can mean life and death for many. Country music creates a wonderfully nuanced space to explore intersections of identity (race, class, gender, etc.) and the ways in which perceptions and representations impact access and equity (Hubbs 2014, Fox 2012).

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a qualitative methodology that is both interpretive and explanatory. It explores the ways in which discourse and text is enacted and perpetuated in order to better understand social issues and power inequity (Mullet, 2018). For this project, I utilized multiple search engines, blogs, lists, and repositories, as well as my own experience, to compile some of the most popular country music songs about Mexico. Most of the songs selected included Mexico in the song title or mentioned it multiple times within the song. Another criterion for selection was that the song be released within the last 35 years. Although classic country is important and beloved by many, myself included, it was important to signify the trends and zeitgeist of the current day in order to glean insight into current prevalent worldviews and the collective meaning making occurring in real time.

Even though other songs and artists are introduced in the piece, it was also important to only include popular mainstream songs (charted) by popular mainstream (award-winning) artists in the analysis in order to better understand current dominant mainstream trends. It is also important to note that throughout this text I refer to the artists singing the song as opposed to the songwriter(s). Songwriters play a very important role. This, in no way, diminishes their contributions. However, for ease of understanding and the context in which others are exposed to the song, the artist who performs the song most recently will be referenced.

Once I compiled the songs, I obtained lyrics from multiple internet sites in order to ensure accuracy. The lyrics were then coded based on thematic material, content, overall message, tone, and word choice. Once this was complete, I analyzed for consistency of concepts and overall trends. This led to the established themes. Once the themes were solidified, a close reading and analysis of the lyrics provided a better understanding of the overall messages being portrayed about Mexico.

This methodology also allows for more performative writing and articulations (Pollock, 1998) and asserts the role social interaction and construction plays in research. It also rejects the concept of value-free science. Additionally, this framework acknowledges the personal values and tacit knowledge of the researcher and writer. This is, by no means, a comprehensive or exhaustive analysis. It is a snapshot to serve as a conversation about the power of

country music, what it teaches us about the world, and what it teaches us about ourselves. It also serves as a small contribution to the conversations around country music and the role it plays in perceptions, representation, and ultimately, equity and access.

Major Themes

According to US country music, getting over a break-up, escape from your current life, running from the law, vacation, and existential crisis (soul-searching) are the reasons to go to Mexico. Essentially, it is about “heading south” when it all goes south. The analysis of the 22 songs prominently highlighting Mexico found six major themes and five minor themes.

Alcohol

The first theme is alcohol. It was mentioned in 19 of the 22 songs, making it the most prevalent and consistent trend. Although various alcohol types and brands were mentioned, tequila was the most frequently specified, followed by margaritas. This is not surprising as these beverages have a high correlation with Mexican restaurants in the US and are often consistent with the options provided at resorts in Mexico. With so many songs mentioning tequila, it's no surprise that artists and songwriters had to get creative with the rhyming scheme. Perhaps the best example being Tim

McGraw's hit "Refried Dreams" where he aptly rhymes "drinking tequila" with "wanting to kill ya'."

American excess and the idea that "more is more" is highlighted in the Kenny Chesney tune, "Another Beer" while an interesting juxtaposition in this theme can be illustrated through "Don't Drink the Water" by Brad Paisley (featuring Blake Shelton) and "A Lot to Learn about Living" by Easton Corbin. Paisley sings a list of alcoholic beverages to drink in Mexico because one should not drink the water. There is an insinuation that the country does not have access to water that is safe to drink therefore implying that the country is poor and/or in some way less than the US (or other countries). This stands in stark contrast to Corbin's line "the hardest decision down there is whether to drink tequila or beer" (with your food). Corbin's overall tune details a glorified and romanticized version of a place where life is so easy. The narrative involves the narrator leaving his difficult life in the US for an easy life in Mexico. I guess he found a place where he could safely drink the water.

Vacation

The next theme is vacation. Between rest and relaxation and freedom and escape from responsibilities, this trend was found in over half of the songs analyzed (12 of 22). From rompy drinking tunes about vacations ("Good to go to Mexico," "Stays in Mexico," "Down in Mexico") to songs that illustrate a slower pace and safe haven ("Mexico,

Tequila, and Me,” “Mexican Minutes,” “O Mexico”), freedom seems to be the common denominator. Whether it is a vacation from life or a gateway to a new life, Mexico seems to be the place to be.

Relationships

In 17 of the 22 songs, relationships were the catalyst. It was equal parts falling in love and breaking up (5 songs each) with stories of infidelity and hook-ups littered among the other seven. Some great examples of the love stories can be found in songs like “Moon Over Mexico” by Luke Combs and the Brett Eldredge song “Beat of the Music” while examples of endings can be best illustrated by McGraw’s “Refried Dreams” and “O Mexico.” These break-up song examples paint a wonderful picture of the ways in which Mexico can be used as the place and anchor for those experiencing a difficult break-up. In “Refried Dreams,” Tim McGraw sings with vivid clarity how upset he is: “...this picture ain’t pretty...I’m ragged and dirty... down to my last dime and coming apart at the seams...I’m messed up in Mexico living on refried dreams...” while Trisha Yearwood’s emotional ballad “O Mexico” conjures wistful nostalgia and the palatable and painful need to escape a love lost: “...all I hear is a heartbreak song haunting me, relentlessly, come the morning and I will stand on the banks of the Rio Grande, a brand new day, wash these tears away...Mexico, O Mexico, adios mi corazon...”.

Perhaps the most blatant example of infidelity in this theme comes from the Toby Keith hit “Stays in Mexico.” Behind a playful soundtrack, this song details an affair in Mexico between two seemingly average middle-class Americans with the borrowed punchline being: “what happens in Mexico, stays in Mexico.” Although not the first of country royalty to record the song, in 2005 George Strait’s rendition of “Seashores of Old Mexico” definitely made a splash. In great story song fashion, it also encompasses more romantic relationship categories than any other song (hook-up, infidelity, and a “love” story). Much like life (and country music), most of the songs about Mexico revolve around love and relationships – the good, the bad, and the heartbreaking.

Storytelling

Storytelling is a tradition as old as time. It helps us make sense of the world and our place in it. It also teaches, entertains, and passes down culture. Country music has long been known as a storytelling tradition. Of the 22 songs analyzed, direct storytelling was employed in 12 of them. Although there are many examples, perhaps one of the best can be found in Blake Shelton’s 2003 release, “Playboys of the Southwestern World.” The song chronologically details the wild and possibly illegal antics of two best friends. The detailed imagery paired with both spoken and sang lines paint a detailed picture behind a nostalgic soundtrack: “...

got a pocket full of cash and that old Ford truck, fuzzy cat hanging from the mirror for luck...”.

Place

The concept of “place” has varied meanings depending on context. For the purpose of this work, the more literal definition most closely aligns. The mention of specific towns, cities, and regions (in both the US and Mexico) can be found in 17 of the 22 songs. Well-known tourist and resort places were common (Cabo, Cancun, etc.) while songs like “Seashores of Old Mexico” highlighted lesser-known towns/cities.

A great example of the use of place to situate characters is showcased in Keith’s “Stays in Mexico:” “...he was a salesman from South Dakota, she was a first grade school teacher Phoenix, Arizona...”. For many, the mention of these cities and states conjure images of the type of people perceived to be in those places and provides a connecting element between the listener and the characters in the song. Other common place elements were regional or broadly directional (bordertown, going south, etc.). Perhaps the Jerrod Niemann tune (“Down in Mexico”) says it best: “can you really be down in Mexico.”

Spanish Words/Stereotypes

The final major theme is the use of Spanish words and stereotypes. This theme was employed in 12 of the 22 songs. Whether she was “little,” “young,” or “bad,”

“senorita” was one of the most common Spanish words used. Gringo, siesta, amigo, pesos, and adios were among others included. The more generalized tropes resounding through the lyrics were “mariachi band” and “sombbrero,” among others. Interestingly, the only artists who actually sang in Spanish (unironically) were also the only two female singers represented in the sample – Carrie Underwood and Trisha Yearwood.

Minor Themes

Existential Soul-Searching

The more minor themes, although represented in less than half of the songs sampled, were significant, nonetheless. The first trend was existential soul-searching. Found in 7 of the 22 songs, this theme showcased the deeper meanings, messages, and philosophical/psychological underpinnings of a person searching. These songs moved beyond simple escape and spoke to reinvention or healing. A great example of this lies in Kenny Chesney’s hit “Beer in Mexico.” At first glance, this might seem like a light-hearted drinking song. However, lyrics like, “...I’m at these crossroads in my life..” and “...just trying to search my soul...” reveal deeper existential quandaries.

Objectification/Innuendo

Found in 10 of the 22 songs, objectification and innuendo is the next minor theme. The prevalence of vacation hook-ups/affairs and the problematic relationship scenarios between “senoritas” and “gringos” could easily cast Mexico as more of a fictional playground than an actual country. Similarly, the persistent narrative that it is the “woman and Mexico’s fault that I cheated, hooked-up, and got my money stolen” further perpetuates notions of privilege, lack of responsibility, and bolsters the excuse that “Mexico made me do it” all while cleverly weaving enough innuendo to keep listeners amused.

Nostalgia

Few things do nostalgia better than country music. Although only present in 5 of the 22 songs, nostalgia plays a very large role in country music more generally. Perhaps the novelty of a different country does not always lend itself well to stirring up romanticized images of the past. Maybe the most literal example is in “Moon Over Mexico” by Luke Combs: “...taste the salt on the rim, feel that sand on your skin and the wild in the wind like I’m right there again, under a moon over Mexico...”.

Tans

Found in 6 of the 22 songs, references to “tans” is another minor theme. Examples include: “golden glow,”

“working on our tan,” “girls with cinnamon tans,” and “tan lines,” among others. Although not always the case, the mention of “getting a tan” almost exclusively pertains to white people. Besides the inherent link to race, it can also be a classed notion – meaning that the person has the money and leisure time to spend time outdoors (usually on a beach) for the sole purpose of “getting a tan.”

Outlaw

From the outlaw movement(s) to performances in prisons, country music is certainly no stranger to topics like jail time and running from the law. In 4 of the 22 songs, the minor theme of “outlaw” was employed. Although seemingly low in prevalence, this trend is important because, in every case, the rebellious outlaw was glorified. This provides some insight into rebelliousness in country music – both real and perceived – especially as it pertains to border-crossing and representations of Mexico.

Ultimately, these major and minor theme findings provide a snapshot of the meanings and messages being portrayed in popular US country music narratives about Mexico. It is from this vantage point that we can begin to see the ways in which country music can influence perceptions and representations and how that can then influence equity and access. The following section provides an example to ponder in relation to this concept.

Implications: A Regional Comparison Example

It is important to note the implications of class and social location throughout the lyrics. The most mainstream and popular songs would seemingly suggest a middle-class demographic. They would also seem to relay the message that Mexico is a fun vacation spot. It is a place to enjoy, to find yourself, to drink a lot, to release all responsibility, and perhaps make some bad choices, then walk away with a good story, a ton of memories (nostalgia), and perhaps a good tan. (This can be further solidified by those who have actually traveled to these resort towns specifically designed for tourists to create such experiences.) This perception and representation of Mexico can permeate to all listeners as collective identity, representations, and perceptions are formed. Thus, resulting in a skewed perception of the country. This could logically lead to questions about why someone would want to leave a place; thus, complicating understandings of immigration and mobility within the country.

An example of how this ideology spreads to all classes of country music listenership can be illustrated by the song “Mexico” on Granger Smith’s latest album. The chorus is as follows: “...tequila drippin’ off your lips, kissing Coppertone off your skin, takin’ me places I’ve never been, I’m running my hands through the sand on the Cancun coast, but I ain’t ever been to Mexico...” Regardless of whether or not the Red Dirt/Texas Country artist has been

to Mexico, this song is directed to a listenership who has not. Utilizing the imagery of the stories and stereotypes of other songs, Smith skillfully inserts pride and implies that there are much better things in this world than Mexican beach vacations. He further solidifies perceptions of a Mexico tied to wealth and ease with no actual experience to confirm this perception.

This is interesting for a Red Dirt/Texas Country artist as regional proximity to Mexico and a desire for a less commercialized (more “authentic”) narrative (Fox & Ching, 2011) typically results in a more nuanced and contextual expression. Among a myriad of other examples, Roger Creager’s songs “Where the Gringos Don’t Go” and “Long Way to Mexico” speak to a more “local” version of Mexico while Aaron Watson’s album “Vaquero” seeks to honor both Texas and Mexico regardless of their storied past. One of the songs “Clear Isabel” tackles topics of the cartel, immigration, and green cards weaved beautifully together in a classically tragic story song. Other examples include a song about cock fighting (fighting roosters) by Jason Boland and the Stragglers called “Gallo Del Cielo” and a song about the work of a coyote (a person who helps transport Mexicans across the border into the US illegally) by Flatland Cavalry called “Coyote (The Ballad of Roy Johnson).” These songs, amidst so many other contributions by Red Dirt/Texas Country artists, really highlight the different ways in which Mexico can be

understood, perceived, and represented, as well as provide a counternarrative to the mainstream.

Also worth noting, is the ability of perception and representation to evolve. A great example of this lies in Tim McGraw. Because country music, unlike some other genres, allows some people to experience more longevity in their careers, Tim McGraw went from being an “Indian Outlaw” to “Humble and Kind.” He also went from “ragged and dirty...messed up in Mexico, living on refried dreams...” to “...that’s why God made Mexico...where the Cuervo goes down nice and slow and the warm winds blow...”. This type of fluidity is important to remember. Experience can always help hone the borders of our perceptions if we let it.

Conclusion

Journeying through and around borders can be messy. This brief analysis has served as small contribution to the conversation and to the muddy waters that result when we have the courage to wade out in it. We know what we know, most typically, based on what we see and hear. Living close to a border can be one of the best ways see the context and the nuance. Listening to others, especially those from the “other side” of the boundary line can create the perception shifts that allow for the kind of decency, humanity, and equity we can all see, hear, and believe. I’m grateful for my time in the bordertown. It is not a place I will stay forever, but it is something I will carry forever.

Know that regardless of the perceptions you have or the representations you see that there is a big world out there to understand – if you are willing to wade into the borderlands. Again, this is not a political paper. It is a paper about the borders, both real and imagined, in our world, in our minds, and in our lives – both individually and collectively. It is a paper about awareness, the pursuit of beauty, and a good country soundtrack to get us through/across. Regardless of unrealistic perceptions and potentially problematic themes, I will always trust musicians over politicians – especially ones who play country.

List of Songs

Playboys of the Southwestern World – Blake Shelton

Seashores of Old Mexico – George Strait

Beer in Mexico – Kenny Chesney

That's Why God Made Mexico – Tim McGraw

Refried Dreams – Tim McGraw

I Got Mexico – Eddy Raven

Mexico – Granger Smith

A Lot to Learn about Living – Easton Corbin

Cabo San Lucas – Toby Keith

O Mexico – Trisha Yearwood

Down in Mexico – Jerrod Niemann

Tequila Sheila – Blake Shelton

Stays in Mexico – Toby Keith

Blame it on Mexico – George Strait
Beat of the Music – Brett Eldredge
Mexican Minutes – Brooks and Dunn
Mexico, Tequila, and Me – Alan Jackson
Don't Drink the Water – Brad Paisley (Featuring Blake Shelton)
Mexico – Carrie Underwood
Good To Go To Mexico – Toby Keith
Moon Over Mexico – Luke Combs
Gallo Del Cielo – Jason Boland and the Stragglers
Where the Gringos Don't Go – Roger Creager
Long Way to Mexico – Roger Creager
Clear Isabel – Aaron Watson
Vaquero (Album) – Aaron Watson
Coyote (The Ballad of Roy Johnson) – Flatland Cavalry

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Steel Guitar Blag: Provenance and appropriation in Leon McAuliffe's 'Steel Guitar Rag', 1936

by Guy Cundell

On the 29th of September 1936 in Chicago, Bob Wills' ensemble stood ready to record the first tune of the day. It was the second day of their second session, a year after their first in Dallas and the entire string band, extended with drums, piano and a three piece horn section, was to be engaged in the tune, an instrumental steel guitar feature entitled 'Steel Guitar Rag'. It had been part of the band's repertoire since its composer, steel guitarist Leon McAuliffe, had joined the group eighteen months earlier.

McAuliffe, along with Bob Dunn and Noel Boggs, now stands as a colossus of the steel guitar, whose stylistic innovations on the newly electrified instrument set a standard for steel guitarists throughout country music for years to come. But in 1936 he was just twenty, having taken up the instrument in his early teens. He had left school and began paid performance work at fifteen. He joined Fort Worth's renowned Light Crust Doughboys in 1933 before being poached by Wills in early 1935.

A sense of anticipation and, perhaps, anxiety may have gripped McAuliffe as his tune had been rejected at the first session by the recording director Art Satherley, but this time, with the band's fortunes ascendant and Wills adamant of its inclusion, the opportunity to wax his composition had arrived. None in the studio could have foreseen the significance of the tune which, riding the growing national popularity of Wills and his band, would be widely revered and become an iconic steel guitar showpiece. It would be essential in any professional's repertoire, yet not beyond the reach of developing players due to its relative simplicity. More broadly, the piece would be influential in cementing a place for the steel guitar within country music for the foreseeable future.

At Wills' instruction, the take began with an unmeasured chordal glissando from the steel guitar followed by a short, spoken introduction from Wills. His words, ending with "Kick it off, Leon. Kick it off" provided the cue for McAuliffe's opening anacrusis which set the tempo of the piece and then the ensemble took off.

McAuliffe's composition comprised three distinct sixteen bar segments, A, B and C, which began the two and a half minute arrangement. This was followed by a piano solo on the C section, a repeat of the A section by McAuliffe, a saxophone solo again on the C section, ending with a recapitulation of the entire melody.

The horn section's only contribution to the arrangement was to be long isolated triads with syncopated entries

that marked the end of the B and C sections throughout the arrangement. The first take proceeded well but was unfortunately marred by a late entry of the horns at the end of the saxophone solo. This seems to have unsettled McAuliffe, as evidenced by a shaky recapitulation that omitted the B section. A second take was required in which the error was corrected and the result was subsequently released.¹

McAuliffe's account of the rejection of the tune at the 1935 session in Dallas was that the producer, Satherley, insisted that the record label relied on East Coast steel guitar wizard Roy Smeck to provide any steel guitar feature recordings that they released. While this unlikely justification may have been genuine, it is possible that it was proffered by Satherley as a tactful way to cushion the young McAuliffe from Satherley's assessment of his less than stellar steel guitar performances during the session. If so, and in McAuliffe's defence, his performance could well have been impaired by the primitive Volu-Tone amplification equipment that Wills had recently supplied for him to attach to his acoustic instrument, with any difficulties magnified by the pressure of the recording studio. However, by the 1936 session, McAuliffe was equipped with a superb piece of new technology, a bakelite Rickenbacker B6 steel guitar.

Curiously, the Dallas session of 1935 may not have been the first time that experienced producer Satherley had heard the melody that McAuliffe presented. With many years in the fledgling recording industry, Satherley, an

Englishman, had been responsible for marketing records for Paramount and was well acquainted with the company's catalogue. Furthermore, his duties had extended to recording supervision by 1923 when he began conducting sessions for black artists such as Ma Rainey and, later, Blind Lemon Jefferson. A specialist in race recordings and with a reputation for spotting talent, it is likely that he was also familiar with the catalogues of major competitors.

It is possible, therefore, that Satherley was acquainted with at least one of two recordings of an almost identical tune named 'Guitar Rag' made by Sylvester Weaver for a rival company, Okeh in November, 1923 and April, 1927. Weaver, a black Kentuckian, is now recognised for achieving two recording landmarks, as the first guitarist to record an accompaniment for a blues singer and as the first black guitarist to wax a blues instrumental,² passing both milestones in late 1923. After an extensive recording career, the span of which is marked by the two versions of 'Guitar Rag', Weaver had passed into obscurity, retiring from performance in 1928. Nevertheless, his influence was acknowledged by prominent black guitarist Lonnie Johnson and his composition 'Guitar Rag' had been recorded by West Virginian Roy Harvey in 1930.

Weaver's 'Guitar Rag', for solo guitar, may have been played 'in Hawaiian style' with the instrument across his lap using a knife or bar to fret the strings but may also have been performed 'bottleneck style' with the guitar held in standard position with a slide on a finger of the left hand.

With little resemblance to either the form or rhythmic styling of piano rags of the era, this titular rag employs an open triadic tuning. In the 1923 recording, Weaver generates melody on the top strings of his six string guitar accompanied by alternating bass notes. The form consists of two sixteen bar sections, the first circumscribing a melody which resembles McAuliffe's, while in the second, a simpler melody is deployed on a more complex chord structure. The three minute recording consists of five repetitions of the form with little variation beyond a gradual increase in tempo.

A product of recently introduced electronic recording technology, the sound quality of Weaver's 1927 recording was considerably improved. The composition had also undergone development. The same intervallic configuration of tuning was employed but now, with the pitch raised to D major, Weaver had made significant modifications. Unlike his earlier effort, the repetition of the first eight bars of the sixteen bar A section was replaced by a new consequent phrase. A second modification was made to the melody of the B section with an attendant subtle alteration of the harmony. Weaver also added a distinct sixteen bar C section which appears after three repetitions of the A and B sections.

Similarities in melody and harmony between the A section of McAuliffe's 'Steel Guitar Rag' and that of 'Guitar Rag' are striking and it is difficult to believe that McAuliffe didn't use Weaver's piece as a model.

Furthermore, similarities in harmonic structure and form point to Weaver's 1927 recording as McAuliffe's source.

A juxtaposition of the two melodies is provided in Fig. 3 with Weaver's 1927 melody in D transposed to E for ease of comparison. An examination of the score provides clear evidence of plagiarism that previous commentators have identified aurally. When the similarities were put to him directly, McAuliffe denied having heard Weaver's tune. He was insistent that he wrote the piece at the age of fourteen while taking his first lessons on the steel guitar but his accounts of how he arrived at the melody seem barely credible. He stated that he derived his melody from arpeggios that he played while exploring an E major tuning for the first time. This account is inadequate to the point of seeming glib. While this process may have assisted the formulation of his B and C sections, the repeated major sixth (C#) and minor third (G natural) of the A section are conspicuous anomalies. They both fall beyond the ambit of a major arpeggio and, in open position, stopping of the strings is required to achieve the undulating melody and its distinct blues inflection.

He also suggested that the B section was derived from a Hawaiian hapa haole tune called 'On the Beach at Waikiki', which has a melody of different phrase structure and melodic contour and employs a contrasting harmonic structure.

While the similarities between the two tunes are inescapable, their differences are extensive. The first

conspicuous disparity is that of texture. Weaver's piece is for solo guitar while McAuliffe's is a steel guitar melody with band accompaniment. This characteristic may have given rise to a second point of difference in the form of the intricate and technically demanding melody of McAuliffe's B and C section. It is not possible to perform McAuliffe's melodic line in these sections while maintaining the accompanying bass ostinato that is essential to Weaver's arrangement. It is reasonable to assume that in using the tune to audition for the Light Crust Doughboys, McAuliffe played solo. At some point, when the piece became a regular part of the Wills band repertoire, McAuliffe had the luxury of accompaniment, freeing him from the burden of the bass ostinato and allowing him to employ more dexterity in the development of melody. Thus, the transition to the enhanced and revised melody that he recorded in 1936 is more likely to have been an evolution rather than an event.

McAuliffe's equipment may also have played a role in the formulation of 'Steel Guitar Rag'. Electronic amplification that McAuliffe was first gifted by Wills in 1935 allowed him to perform with volume at the front of a full band. This enhanced accompaniment may have provided him with the impetus to develop his composition further.

In terms of melodic differences, McAuliffe's B section can be seen as a vigorous expansion of Weaver's ideas, while his C section represents an entirely new and intricate melody requiring rapid and precise right-hand picking. Another more subtle but powerful melodic variation

is evident in the A section in the modification of the major third of Weaver's repeated motif (G#) to a bluesy G natural, imbuing McAuliffe's opening melody with a distinctive tonal hue. Ironically, almost all subsequent recordings of McAuliffe's piece by innumerable country musicians remove the blues shading by returning Weaver's G# to the motifs.

Condemnation of McAuliffe continues to grow today as Weaver's obscure recordings circulate through reissues on CD and internet videos, providing an ease of comparison that McAuliffe could never have imagined. In view of the rising chorus of criticism, it seems fair to consider any factors of mitigation that might exist.

Firstly, it is possible that McAuliffe's appropriation was inadvertent. He may have been exposed to Weaver's melody by hearing any of the three recordings of the piece made before 1931 and subconsciously reproduced it as he composed his tune. However, his use of the identical forty eight bar form and harmony of Weaver's 1927 release suggests his awareness of Weaver's tune extended well beyond casual acquaintance.

Secondly, McAuliffe may have considered that Harvey's spoken prelude to his 1930 recording, in which he stated that 'Guitar Rag' was a traditional melody, was an unencumbered invitation to reproduce the tune in his own way. Again, McAuliffe's adherence to Weaver's 1927 version tends to discount this theory as the form and melody of Harvey's version was based on Weaver's 1923 recording.

A third possible view is that McAuliffe considered the alterations that he made to Weaver's tune achieved sufficient differentiation for him to claim it as his own. This may explain why he retained Weaver's title as the root for his. In considering this view it is useful to use the lens of James Young's *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* in which the author defines five modes of cultural appropriation. Rejecting the notion that cultural appropriation should be invariably condemned, Young makes a clear distinction between innovative and non-innovative content appropriation and points to the aesthetic success of innovative popular musicians made possible by appropriation.

Alternatively, McAuliffe's borrowing may have been a shameless act for which he had no remorse. The obscurity of the retired Weaver and his little-known recordings would have made the prospect of discovery seem remote at the time with McAuliffe's choice of title indicating total indifference.

The elephant in the room that persists is the lack of justice for Weaver and his heirs. It is estimated that Weaver may have only garnered \$25 for performance and \$50 for royalties of his first recording. Discographer and historian Tony Russell estimates sales of his second release to be even fewer than the first. In contrast, the enormous commercial success of 'Steel Guitar Rag' has generated income for McAuliffe (1917- 1988) and his estate and will continue to do so for years.

It seems unlikely that McAuliffe's claims of authorship would survive contestation in contemporary litigation as the case of George Harrison's 'My Sweet Lord' demonstrates. The precedent of Harrison's unsuccessful defence of unconscious imitation in the formation of his song's central hook is eclipsed in stringency by the case of Australian band, Men at Work. Their song 'Down Under' was judged to have used a fragment of the melody of a popular children's song presented in a different harmonic context within the accompaniment. The similarity is so opaque that it only came to light twenty years after the record's release as an obscure question in a music game show, with the observation subsequently reported to an oblivious copyright holder. Despite the tenuous connection, a breach of copyright was determined with attendant financial impositions.

However, to take a broader view, the value of McAuliffe's adaptation in furthering the fortunes of the steel guitar is incalculable. Along with helping to cement the instrument within western swing, and consequentially country music as a whole, the lively tune has helped provide a performance pathway for many aspiring young players in a way that Weaver's obscure composition could never have achieved.

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Endnotes

- 1 Discographer Tony Russell advises that take 2 was indeed released on Vocalion 03394, and reissued on Okeh 03394 and two later red Columbia issues. However, take 1 was issued, though apparently only on Okeh 03394 (and so possibly by mistake).
2. Weaver's blues instrumental had been preceded in 1922 by Nick Lucas' 'Teasin' the Frets'.

The Impact of the Carter Family in Japan: How have they become known to the Japanese?

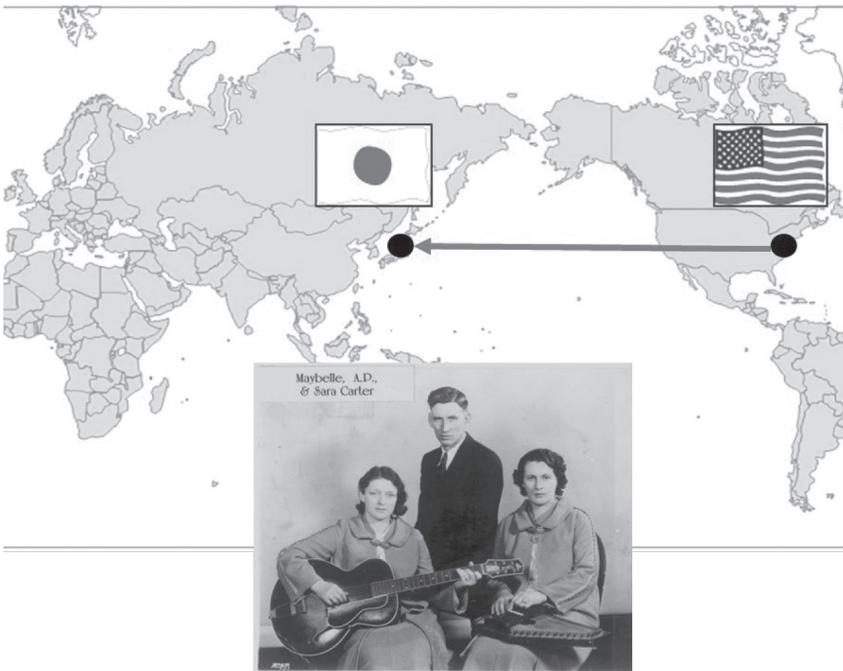
by Kenichi Yamaguchi

Introduction

Japan opened its doors to diplomatic relations and foreign trade 170 years ago. Since then, many things from Western culture have been brought to Japan. World War II in the Pacific ended in 1945. Country music was essentially introduced to Japan by Occupation Forces and the Armed Forces Radio Service.¹ Since then, country music has spread to Japan through various mediums like radio programs, movies, records, books, magazines, and more. Two big waves, the folk music revival movement and the bicentennial anniversary of the founding of the United States, influenced the development of country music in Japan from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s.

The Carter Family, known as “the first family of country music”,² “the royal family of country music”,³ and “the first superstar group of country music”⁴ in the United States, has been introduced to the Japanese as one of the important heroes of early country music in books, album

cover notes, and magazines focused on country and folk music. Thus, the name of the family began to be known and then spread more as a result of the folk music revival movement, record releases from the Carter Family, the music activities of Bill Clifton, Tomoya Takaishi, and more. As a result, the first complete collection of Carter Family recordings in the world was released in Japan in 1974. There



are several bands in Japan that love the Carters. Although the Carter Family home in Virginia is nearly half a world away from Japan, and although 90 years have passed since their first recording in Bristol, Tennessee, their music has

established strong roots in the hearts of Japanese country music lovers.

In this paper, how American music was first introduced, how country music arrived in Japan, and how the music of the Carter Family found a place in the hearts of Japanese country music lovers will be discussed in chronological order

1. American Music Introduced to Japan

Before World War II

Until the “Meiji Restoration” during the long “Edo period”, Japan was a so-called “isolated nation” state, with its gates almost completely closed to foreign countries. Only the port of Nagasaki was opened to a few nations. Since then, foreign culture has been introduced into Japan. Just before the Meiji Restoration, American music arrived in Japan.

1.1 The First American Folk Song Sung in Japan

The first Japanese person to sing an American folk song was John Manjiro. He was onboard a fishing ship that wrecked on the Pacific Ocean in 1841. An American whaling ship saved him and took him to the west coast of the United States, then he was brought to Bedford, MA in 1843 and went to a school there. After a while, he went back to California and worked at a gold rush mine in

1850. After 10 years in the States, he came back to his hometown, Tosa, on Shikoku Island, Japan in 1852. He sang “Oh, Susanna” at his hometown, which was the first American folk song sung in Japan.^{5,6} shows the statue of John Nagahama Manjiro at Cape Ashizuri.

1.2 The First American Folk Song Played in Japan by Visitors on Black-hulled Ships

Around the end of Edo period (1603-1868), several ships from foreign countries were often seen near Japanese waters and they Japan to open their ports. One group was a fleet of black-hulled steam war ships from the United States. led by Admiral Perry in June 1853. During his second visit in March 1854, they were approved to land to conclude a “Treaty of Peace & Amity” between Japan and the U.S. When Perry landed in Yokohama with 500 soldiers, the marching band of the U.S. ship played “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “Hail Columbia”.These were the first American songs played by Americans in Japan. Several days afterwards, Perry invited Japanese officials to the black ship “Powhatan,” and he entertained them with food, drink, and music from a band called “The Japanese Olio Minstrels”⁷ They played songs such as “Massa’s in de Cold Cold Ground,” “Old Grey Goose,” and “Camptown Races”.

1.3 American Folk Songs Applied to Martial Songs of Japan⁵⁾

Fifty years after the black ships came from the US, Japan fought against Russia at the Lushun of Liandong Peninsula in China between 1904 and 1905. It was called the Russo-Japanese War, and a small country (Japan) defeated a big country (Russia). The armed forces of Japan used the American Civil War song, “Marching through Georgia” as a march song. The song was composed by Henry Clay Work, who also wrote “Grandfather’s Clock.”

Fifteen years later “Marching through Georgia” was arranged as the comic parody song “Tokyo-bushi,” known as “Pai-no Pai”, by Tomomichi Soeda. The comic song was a great hit and created a sensation in those days.

1.4 Naturalized American Folk Songs in Japan

Foreign Songs for School Children

Japan has introduced various Western cultures and technology after the Meiji Restoration, opening the country in 1867. In introduced cultures, foreign songs were also included.⁸ shows some of these American songs. Many of them were included in music textbooks for schoolchildren. Some were translated from English to Japanese, close to the original lyrics and titles, and others were arranged with different titles and lyrics using the original melodies. Some of them became popular music in Japan. All the American songs taught to children have become completely integrated

into the Japanese culture. Next we move to the era after World War II, and the development of country music in Japan is described.

2. Development of Country Music in Japan

After World War II in the Pacific

Country music was essentially brought into Japan after World War II in the Pacific. The US Occupation Forces, especially radio broadcasts by the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) and entertainment businesses in the camps, played important roles in spreading country music. The progress from the end of the World War II to the golden era of country music in Japan was described in the 2018 edition of this Journal by the author.¹

2.1 Country Music and Occupation Forces

World War II in the Pacific ended in 1945, and Japan became a defeated nation. The office of the General Headquarters (GHQ), was located in Tokyo. Military bases and camps were scattered throughout the Japanese Islands. Radio stations of AFRS, the Armed Force Radio Service, were networked in various places in Japan. The broadcasts were for Americans coming into Japan, but the Japanese people also were able to listen to it easily.

1) Radio Broadcasting by AFRS

Each AFRS radio station broadcast several kinds of music including jazz, popular music, dance music, Latin, French, country & western music, and so on. In those days Japanese people called all foreign music “jazz”. American music heard on the air played an important role in smoothing the differences in racial interaction, overcoming the walls of language and culture.

2) Recordings by GI Bands of the Occupation Forces

After a short time, some GI country music bands were formed in the camps and they recorded and released records like those listed in in Japan.⁹ Some of the bands included Japanese musicians, like “The Western Ramblers.”

An American soldier, Bobby Norton, recorded and sang “Soba Song,” which became a great hit. The greatest female Japanese singer “Hibari Misora,” also covered it when she was in her teens.

3) GIs Entertained by Japanese Country Music Bands

To kill time for bored military officers and soldiers in the country of dispatch, a few clubs and amusement facilities were built in the occupation force camps. Various events and programs of Japanese cultures and music were held to entertain them and their families.¹⁰

Many soldiers in the Occupation Forces came from the southern part of the United States, so they asked Japanese

musicians and entertainers to play country music. To meet the GI demand for country music, some Hawaiian and jazz bands changed to country music bands. Students also formed country music bands. Among those who sang in the American Army camps were Kazuya Kosaka, Jimmie Tokita, Yoshio Ohno, Keiichi Teramoto, and others who later became famous country musicians in Japan.¹

2.2 Spreading of Country Music in Japan

Country music played by Japanese musicians was performed for the occupied forces first, but soon it began to be played for Japanese people, too. Elements like movies, radio programs, private music societies, and so on, had a positive effect on the spread of country music in Japan.

1) “Western” Movies

Western movies, that is to say cowboy movies, promoted country music widely in Japan. It was the golden era of Western movies in the early 1950s. “Bury Me Not on Lone Prairie” from *Stagecoach*; “My Darling Clementine”, “She Wore a Yellow Ribbon” and “High Noon” from movies by the same names; “Buttons & Bows” from *The Paleface*; and “The Call of the Far-away Hills” from *Shane* were huge hits.

2) Radio Programs of Country Music

The second influence was radio broadcasting. AFRS and later FEN broadcast a country music program called “Honshu Hayride”. Japanese country musicians eagerly listened to this program to widen their repertoires. Then the enthusiastic general public did, too.

Five years later in February, 1957 one of the domestic radio stations, Bunka Broadcast, started broadcasting a weekly country music program, “Sunday Western”. In 1958 Radio Kanto aired “Western Jamboree”. In these programs country songs and performers were commentated upon easily and knowledgeably.¹¹

3) Magazines and Private Country Music Societies¹²

With the spread of western movies and radio programs, some highly educated country music lovers appeared—especially in the big cities of Japan. These western music buffs gathered and established private country music societies like the Country & Western Music Society in Tokyo in 1955 and the American Folk Music Society in Osaka in 1954. They held private record concerts regularly and handed out pamphlets to explain the music. Then the society in Osaka published the *Western Journal* in 1958. This was the first country music magazine in Japan. Unfortunately, the publications from these societies went out of print around the end of the 1950.

For a while there were no country music magazines, but in 1963 the long-lived *Country and Western* was published by Takashi Shimbo and his friends. Over 80 issues were published through the late '70s. This magazine educated many country music lovers in Japan, giving them a lot of information about the music.

4) Importing Country Records and Musical Instruments

Some of the people who were crazy about country music wanted to buy records and musical instruments. Gradually such kinds of business were paying off. Many of them were located in a student town, Kanda, in Tokyo. Some of the important record shops included Muse-sha, Harmony, and Disc Union. The most popular musical instrument shops were Kawase and Yamano.

5) Great Country Music Stars Visit Japan

As country music became increasingly popular, lots of big country music stars from the United States came to Japan to perform.^{11, 13}

1962/Nov. Johnny Cash w/June Carter

1963/Apr. Ferlin Huskey

1964/Feb. Hank Snow

1964/May Little Jimmie Dickens

1964/May Roy Acuff

1964/Nov. Marty Robbins

1965/Oct. Pop & Country (Nashville Sound)

Chet Atkins, Hank Locklin, The Browns, Skeeter Davis, et al

1966/Dec. Sons of the Pioneers

1967/Feb. Buck Owens & the Buckaroos

1967/Mar. Hank Thompson

6) Release of Country Records

Japanese record companies began to release country music records extensively in the late 1950s. As seen in the pictured brochures, major record companies in Japan advertised. Lots of records from RCA Victor, Columbia, Decca, Dot, United Artists, Capitol, MGM, Kapp, Epic, Vanguard, and others were released, one after another. American fans in the home of country music envied the number and quality of record releases in Japan at that time.

The factors mentioned increased the popularity of country music in Japan during its first 15 years in the country. Country music, first called “western music” in Japan, gradually became better known to the public.

2.3 Movements Affecting Country Music

After that, two big waves of popularity influenced the growth of country music in Japan. The first was the folk music revival movement, and the other was the bicentennial anniversary of the founding of the USA.

1) Folk Music Revival (Hootenanny) in Mid '60s

The first wave was the American folk music revival movement in Japan in the mid '60s. The folk boom first developed among college students. Folk music records were released. Artists from the United States like Pete Seeger; the Kingston Trio; the Brothers Four; Peter, Paul and Mary; Joan Baez; and Odetta came to Japan. Lots of Japanese student bands sang American folk songs in English, and then composed their own songs in Japanese and sang them. This movement founded the basis of current Japanese pop music, based on playing music of their own composition and singing songs while playing instruments.

Unfortunately, the folk music boom disappeared a couple of years later. The movement caused Japanese university students to be interested in American traditional folk music, but very few folk music enthusiasts remain in the fields of traditional music and country music.

2) Bicentennial Anniversary of the USA in Mid '70s

The second movement affecting country music in Japan came with the bicentennial anniversary celebration of the United States in the mid '70s. Riding on this wave, Japanese record companies released and sold country music records, especially bluegrass at this point. They not only sold records from major companies such as MCA, Dot, Capitol, RCA, and MGM, but also independent labels like Starday, Rounder, Rebel, Old Homestead, and more.

Live music event producers also invited several musicians from the States and had concerts here and there in Japan. In 1975, Jimmy Martin, The McLain Family, Jim & Jesse, Ralph Stanley, J.D. Crowe, The Country Gentlemen, The Lilly Brothers, and Bill Monroe toured Japan. In 1976, Doc Watson, The David Grisman Quintet, Charlie Pride, Reno & Harrell, Bill Clifton, the New Grass Revival, Grandpa Jones, and Olivia Newton-John visited our country.¹¹

These two waves increased the number of country music fans, attracted fans across generations, and raised the knowledge level of American folk music and country music in Japan.

3. How Did the Carter Family Become Well-known in Japan?

Clues about the influence of the Carter Family on country music in Japan may be found in the release of their records in the 1950s through the early '60s, and also their presence in a couple of textbooks on country music published in Japan.

3.1 Clues to Japanese Familiarity with the Carter Family

1) “The Carter Family” in Country Music Records

The first clue appeared in the release of country music records, I think. In many albums of country music

and American folk music released in Japan, fans realized that some of the songs came from A. P. Carter. They also found some tribute records to the Carter Family by Flatt & Scruggs, Bill Clifton, the Phipps Family, and more. Some of the Japanese artists who sang the Carter Family's songs in the 1950s include:

Tomi Fujiyama: "Jimmie Brown the Newsboy"
(English & Translated Japanese)

Jimmie Tokita & His Mountain Playboys: "Wabash Cannon Ball", "Jimmie Brown the Newsboy" and so on

2) Publications Introducing the Carter Family

A) Books

The second clue was found in country music books published in the late '60s and the early '70s in Japanese. The authors devoted a considerable number of pages to introduce the Carter Family in each book. These were the textbooks used by country music lovers in Japan:

H. Takayama / *Introduction of Western Music* (1963)

T. Mitsui / *Bluegrass Music* (1967 & 1975)

T. Mitsui / *History of Country Music* (1971)

B) Magazines

Country and Western magazine, which was shown in 2.2, also contributed to the introduction of the Carter Family.

This magazine featured the Carter Family in an entire issue in 1968.¹⁴ The table of contents included:

- 1) Story of the original Carter Family
- 2) Discography of albums of the Carter Family
- 3) Playing style of the Carter Family
- 4) “Me and the Carter Family”, short essays by some fans of country music
- 5) Recording the history of the Carter Family by John Edward
- 6) Famous songs of the Carter Family

At that time, American folk music was extremely popular among college students in Japan. This issue of the magazine also became a textbook on the history of American folk music and country music.

3.2 Factors in Spreading Their Music

The records, books and magazines listed above let some Japanese recognize that the Carter Family had an important and essential role in American music. Then the following factors that took place in the 1960s and the early 1970s spread the music of the Carter Family even more.

1) Folk Music Revival

The first was the “American Folk Music Boom” in Japan in the ‘60s, I believe. The heroes of the folk music revival in the US, Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan, wrote some songs using the melodies of Carter Family songs.

Woody's "This land Is Your Land" was from the Carter's "When the World's on Fire". "Ruben James" was from "Wildwood Flower". "Tom Joad" was from "John Hardy", and "I Ain't Got No Home" was from "This World Is Not My Home". Dylan wrote "Paths of Victory" using "Wayworn Traveler".

The famous folk artist Joan Baez sang lots of songs from the Carter Family repertoire like "Wildwood Flower", "Little Moses", "Engine 143", "Little Darling Pal of Mine" and "Gospel Ship" on her early albums. Therefore, Japanese folk music fans realized that the Carter Family strongly affected great folk music heroes through these recorded songs. They recognized the greatness of the Carters.

2) Bill Clifton

The second influencing factor was Bill Clifton. Bill, when in his twenties,¹⁵⁾ often drove down to Maces Spring, Virginia to meet and play music with A.P. Carter. It was a four-hour drive from his home in Charlottesville, MA. Bill published a songbook in 1955 titled *150 Old Time Folk and Gospel Songs*,¹⁶ which soon became one of the most influential songbooks at that time. It included lots of the Carter Family's songs such as "I'll Be All Smiles Tonight," "Little Daring Pal of Mine," "I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes," "Wabash Cannonball," and more. A. P. Carter wrote the foreword to this song book. Clifton also released an album dedicated to the Carter Family from Starday Records in 1962.¹⁷

He went to England and stayed there between 1963 and 1970, and he toured all over Europe playing in local folk clubs. In 1967 he joined the Peace Corps, serving three years in the Philippines. Meanwhile, he recorded with a local New Zealand band, The Hamilton County Bluegrass Band. Then he travelled to many countries. Among the countries he visited, he loved Japan and the Japanese people. He visited Japan four times, in 1968, 1976, 1993, and 2003. He sang the Carter's songs and told the story of the Carters and A. P. Carter whenever he gave a concert here and there in Japan. He sang lots of their songs as "a missionary of the Carter Family."

3) The Carter Family's Albums Released in Japan

The third factor was Japanese record companies. The American folk music revival and the bicentennial anniversary of the United States stimulated interest in American folk music and country music among the younger generation in Japan. As a result, lots of records in the fields of American folk music, early country music, and bluegrass were released during this period. Among them, RCA Victor Music Industries Inc., Tokyo achieved great efforts to spread the music of the Carter Family. The company released the first album of the Family in 1963 and the second one in 1969, titled *The Eternal Carter Family, Vol. 1*¹⁸ and *Vol. 2*.¹⁹ And then they released *The Legendary Original Carter Family*, which compiled 148 songs recorded between 1927 and 1934 and in 1941 in 10 LPs, in 1974.²⁰ It was the

first complete collection in the world until the Bear Family collection²¹ appeared 26 years later. The late Mr. Tagayasu Shimada really did a great job on this project.

After the release of this great collection, other Japanese record companies released copies on Harmony, Decca, and Old Homestead in Japan in the late 1970s. Carter Family fans all over the world envied such lively record business in Japan.

4) Carter Family Picking

Maybelle's guitar picking, known as "Carter Family Picking", is one of the basic guitar picking skills. Her technique has been introduced in some guitar textbooks in Japan. Michio Higashi first showed "Carter Family Picking" in his guitar instruction book.²² During the American folk boom revival in Japan, lots of young people tried to play the guitar using these instruction books. The Carter Family name was spreading more among young people, thanks to guitar textbooks in Japan.

5) Tomoya Takaishi

Tomoya Takaishi is a Japanese folk singer. To find the origins of American folk music, he put his successful music activities in the mid '60s on hold to travel alone in the United States for five months in 1970. He stayed at the Carter's home in Maces Spring for a while during this trip. It was a precious time for him to have spent with Janette and Joe Carter. When he returned to Japan,

he wrote many songs using melodies from various types of American music including traditional and current folk music, bluegrass, and more. And he formed a band called “The Natarsher Seven.” The band completed 11 albums, releasing one every three months from April, 1976 through 1979.²³ The first of the 11 albums was *Youki-ni-Ikou*,²⁴ which means “Keep on the Sunny Side”. It contained all the Carter Family’s songs with Japanese lyrics written by Tomoya. With this song “Youki-ni-Ikou” as the band’s theme song, they toured around performing concerts all over Japan for more than 40 years.

Tomoya invited Janette and Joe to Japan in 1981. They appeared in the National TV Broadcasting and performed at the “Yoi-Yoi-Yama Concert” in Kyoto. Some of songs by Janette and Joe were recorded in the live album.^{25, 26}

Giving concerts throughout Japan, Tomoya and the Natarsher Seven spread the Carter Family’s songs and the Carter Family to the Japanese. At the same time, several bands that followed him and the music of the Carter Family were formed all over Japan. shows a few examples of followers of Natarsher Seven’s band. There are a couple of dozen bands such as these in Japan, I suppose. They often have singing meetings as described in these brochures. They often sing the Carter Family’s songs with adopted lyrics by Tomoya.

6) Bands, We Love the Carter Family

In addition to the followers of the Natarsher Seven's band, there are four "We Love the Carter Family" bands in Japan, as far as I know. The main repertoire of these bands are the Carter Family's songs. The first, "Lassie", a senior couple now, has been playing music around Kyoto and Osaka since 1971. The Carter Family song, "Happiest Days of All", is this band's favorite. The next one is the Green Mountain Boys, who started their band in 1971 at Hyogo. "When the Springtime Comes on the Mountain" is a favorite of the Boys. Yagi-Tako, a duo, has played all over Japan since 2009. The band often sings "When I'm Gone". "Keep on the Sunny Side" is the favorite of 640 Family Band. They have played at Nagano since 1979.

Although not showy, such bands have been constantly spreading the Carter Family and the Family's songs here and there in Japan.

Japanese country singers who started singing country music after WWII sang the songs of the Carter family, and they learned more from country music books and magazines. Throughout the folk boom revival and the bicentennial anniversary of the United States, and through the efforts of record music companies, Bill Clifton, Tomoya Takaishi, and others, this music of the American countryside which originated halfway around the globe and was recorded about 100 years ago, is still being sung in Japan.

4. Current State of Country Music in Japan

There are no longer as many country and bluegrass music records sold by domestic record companies and as many musicians are performing in Japan from their homes in America as there used to be from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. As music media has improved, it changed from the record to the compact cassette, the laser disk, the CD, the DVD, and the like. People can easily obtain the latest media or enjoy music online at places like YouTube.

In recent years, the way people enjoy music has also changed. However, in Japan some useful mediums provide a variety of information to Japanese country music lovers, building friendships and exchanges between them.

4.1 Country Music Concert Events

There were two big annual country music concerts in Japan before the pandemic of the new corona virus. Both of them had over a quarter of century history, and they attracted lots of country music fans all over Japan.

A) Country Gold

The biggest event is “Country Gold” which is held in the vast outer rim of a crater of Mt. Aso, the largest active volcano in Japan, at Kumamoto in Kyushu Island. Organized on the third Sunday of October every year, the date is known as “the Promised Day.” It has been produced by Charlie Nagatani since 1989.¹ There have been large

audiences, ranging from 10 to 20 thousand, from all over Japan. Many big country music stars from the States have been invited here, including Bill Monroe, Hank Thompson, Wanda Jackson, Emmylou Harris, Ricky Skaggs, Dwight Yoakam, Connie Smith, Marty Stuart, Brad Paisley, Toby Keith, the Osborne Brothers, and more.

The 32nd concert planned in 2020 was canceled due to the corona virus.

B) Country Dream

Kenji Nagatomi, a dentist and a country music singer, has organized “Country Dream” in the ancient city of Kyoto on the second Sunday in October every year since 1988.¹ Around 200 audience members enjoy a beautiful autumn afternoon, listening to the music every year. Charlie McCoy was invited to the first concert, and he returned as a regular guest. Ray Price, Connie Smith, Hank Thompson, George Hamilton IV, Skeeter Davis and others performed at this venue. Lately, Japanese country music singers and bands are performing. The concert in 2020 also was canceled due to the corona virus.

4.2 Bluegrass Festivals

There were 27 bluegrass festivals in 2006 in Japan.¹¹ The number of current festivals is almost the same as that time²⁷ and more than half of the festivals were 30 years old. Among them, over 100 bands play on the stage at

the biggest festival the “Takarazuka Bluegrass Festival” which has been organized by Toshio Watanabe of BOM Service since the early 1970s. Young student bands have played there. Unfortunately, the 49th festival in 2020 was canceled due to the new corona virus, and the record for 49 consecutive years was broken.

4.3 Bluegrass Music Journal, MoonShiner

A monthly bluegrass music journal has been published in Japan since 1984. It has been a useful medium which provides a variety of domestic and international music information to Japanese bluegrass music lovers and, as a result, has built friendships and exchanges between them. Saburo “Sab” Watanabe Inoue edited *MoonShiner* for over 30 years. But sadly, he passed away in November 2019. Shin Akimoto is taking over as editor and issue #450 was published in April, 2021.

These events and a magazine have supported the music culture of country and bluegrass music for many years. There are not huge numbers of country and bluegrass music fans in Japan. But when one discovers and grows to love this music, he or she will generally become a very enthusiastic, loyally devoted fan. The music of the Carter Family has been loved by these fans and musicians and will keep being loved from now on.

5. Conclusion

Black ships came and asked Japan to open the door to its country in 1953. Before then, Japan was almost entirely isolated from foreign countries. After Japan opened the gate to foreign countries, American music came to the country step by step. World War II in the Pacific ended in 1945, and country music was essentially introduced to Japan by Occupation Forces and the Armed Force Radio Service. The music has taken root in Japan, in spite of different languages. It has been supported by enthusiastic and highly educated country music fans throughout Japan.

The Carter Family and their music, which is simple and beautiful, has taken root in the hearts of enthusiastic country music lovers in Japan, though almost 100 years have passed since their first recordings in Bristol, and their home is nearly half a world away. Clues to why and how they have become so well-known in Japan include records released in the 1950s and '60s, as well as references in country music textbooks published in Japanese. With the efforts of record music companies, Bill Clifton, Tomoya Takaishi, and others, the music has spread deeply through Japan. Although there are not as many fans of country music as in some other countries around the world, the Carter Family's music will continue to be loved and performed in Japan far into our future.

Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate this paper to the original Carter Family, the Carter Sisters, the Late Ms. Janette Carter, the Late Mr. Joe Carter, Dale and Teresa Jett, and Rita Forrester and all their families. I'd like to say special thanks to the pioneers of spreading country music in Japan: the late Mr. Hiroyuki Takayama, Toru Mitsui, the late Mr. Jimmie Tokita, Takashi Shimbo, the late Mr. Tagayasu Shimada, Kensuke Sugie, Masaaki Yoshimura, Michio Higashi, Charlie Nagatani, Kenji Nagatomi, Tomoya Takaishi, BOM Services, and others. And I have to thank some of my friends who provided useful information for me to write this paper: Bill Clifton, the Late Mr. Sab Watanabe, the Late Mr. Toshiyuki Tsuda, Takashi Hashimoto, Yoshitami Yasuda, Yoichi Nakamura, and Takako Tsujii. Ms. Nancy Cardwell Webster refined my poor English in this paper.

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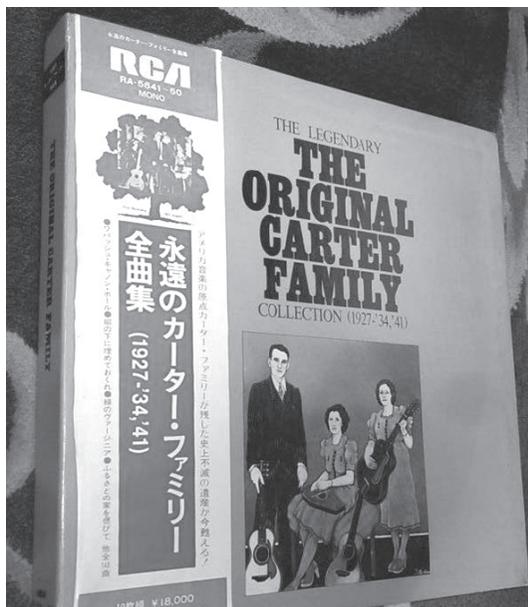
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Endnotes

- 1 Wayne Raney, another seminal country harmonica player, has published an autobiography (Raney). Unfortunately, the book is out of print and I have not been able to find a copy of it.
- 2 *Dirty notes*: While playing a single note, you open your mouth a little wider to let in a tiny portion of an adjacent (usually higher) hole. This gives a certain texture to the note played, reminiscent of distortion, due to the occurrence of a *difference tone* (Filisko).
- 3 *Positions*: ... McCoy usually plays in what is referred to as second position. This means that you play a harmonica tuned in C major in the key of G, i.e. in the mixolydian mode. If a song is in a minor key, McCoy will play in the relative minor of G mixolydian, what is known as 5th position. Even though this would mean that McCoy plays in a phrygian mode, he avoids playing the b2 and b6, instead opting for a minor pentatonic scale.
- 4 *Pucker*: This is the term used to describe one way of obtaining single notes on the harmonica. You simply pucker your lips, as if attempting to whistle.
- 5 *Tongue block*: Another way of attaining a single note is to open one's mouth for three holes (or more), and blocking out the holes on the left side of your mouth with your tongue, leaving a small opening on the right side of your mouth where the desired note is played.
- 6 *Country tuning*: This tuning is a modification of the standard Richter tuned diatonic harmonica, where hole 5 draw is tuned up one semi-tone. This means that when playing in second position, the scale in the middle octave is no longer mixolydian, but ionian. The tuning also has the affordance of bending the major third of the dominant chord down to a minor third.

- 7 A Richter tuned diatonic harmonica is the most common type of harmonica. It has 10 holes and contains only the notes of the major scale of the key to which it is tuned.
- 8 This is also known as cross-harp, harp being slang for harmonica.
- 9 The blues scale is a minor pentatonic scale with an added flat fifth.
- 10 On a F major diatonic harmonica, which is what McCoy is using on this recording.

Another Place, Another Time

by Carl Eddy

In 2020, the publication of *Pictures from Life's Other Side*, an audio package of remastered *Mother's Best* transcription recordings, combined with an extensive book of Hank Williams photographs, many of which were published for the first time, became available. The remastered *Mother's Best* recordings sound amazingly warm and intimate and they are the best Hank has ever sounded.

The saying goes that a picture is worth a thousand words, and many of the photo captions provide information regarding who, what, when, and where. Some included fascinating, previously untold background stories. On the other hand, a number of photos had no captions or background at all. But, overall, the book itself is a very worthwhile addition to the body of Hank Williams literature.

One photo in particular was intriguing by its absence from the *Pictures from Life's Other Side* collection. Readers might be familiar with it because it has been included and described in several publications about Hank, usually to draw attention to the stormy relationship between Hank and his wife, Audrey. Of this photo, Hank biographer Chet Flippo said, “[it is a] devastating photograph of Hank

turning away from a distraught first wife Audrey outside their Franklin Road home in Nashville. Audrey has her hands clasped over her eyes in seeming anguish, as a rail-thin Hank seems to recoil away from her.” Commenting on the same photo in his own “Hank Williams: The Biography,” Colin Escott speculates that the photo might reflect an argument during the ‘late stage’ of Hank and Audrey’s relationship, but admits it might simply show the couple turning away while daughter Lycrecia and son Hank Jr. play hide and seek.



Other publications are more accurate in placing the photo much earlier, at Hank and Audrey's home at 10 Stuart Avenue in Montgomery, sometime between 1947-1948. There is no doubt about the location because the home can be viewed and compared online as of this writing. Also, it can be seen in three other photographs taken at the same location perhaps within moments of each other.

Considering these four photographs and their location as a whole, it is interesting to speculate on what they represent based on the information available about Hank's life during that time period. For example, we know that Hank Jr. was not playing hide-and-seek off-camera because he was born over a year later, in May 1949, well after Hank and Audrey had moved from Stuart Avenue to Shreveport so Hank could join the Louisiana Hayride.

The major biographies consistently indicate that 10 Stuart Avenue was Hank's first home purchase and it occurred in 1947, after he began acquiring earnings from his first big hit, "Move it on Over," which reached #4 on the Billboard "Most Played Jukebox Folk Records" chart on August 9, 1947. Hank and Audrey's daughter, Lycrecia, seen in two of the photos, recalled returning from a 1947 summer stay at her grandparents' farm and moving into the Stuart Avenue home ahead of her first-grade school year. This would likely place the earliest date of the photos sometime in August 1947. Consider also that the biographies indicate Audrey left Hank in February 1948, moved Lycrecia back to her grandparents' home,

where Audrey enrolled her in school, and filed for divorce from Hank in April 1948. Records indicate Hank sold the Stuart Avenue home on April 3, 1948. Taken all together, the evidence places the possible timeframe of the photos between August 1947 and mid-February 1948. Considering the lighter-weight clothing worn outdoors in the photos, I speculate they were taken between August and October 1947.

The three women in the photos, Audrey, Lycrecia, and Hank's mother, Lillie, are wearing stylish dresses and shoes, perhaps indicating a special event. Hank is wearing slacks, a shirt, tie, and fedora in two of the photos. His hat, and maybe the tie are missing in a third. At least one of the three adults is missing from each photo, suggesting that no other adults were in attendance and the camera was passed among the three to capture the various groupings.

One photo was taken from the edge of the street, perhaps by Lillie from her car, because Audrey and Lycrecia appear to be waving.

In speculating further, one might ask, was there a dress-up event that would bring the four people together for some photos in front of the Stuart Avenue house? There are several possibilities. Based on Lycrecia's account of this period, perhaps this was a celebration of her homecoming from the summer visit to her grandparents' farm. Escott points out that Audrey had trendy awnings installed on the new house and Lycrecia recalled the awnings in her memoir, so was it a housewarming and were the photos intended to show off Audrey's new awnings? Maybe the

get-together involved a meal at a restaurant to celebrate the success of “Move it on Over.” Better yet, perhaps it was a party for Lycrecia’s sixth birthday on August 13. Or, perhaps it was a grand send-off for Lycrecia’s first day in the first grade. It might even have been a celebration of Hank’s 24th birthday on September 17.



Other evidence can be brought to bear on the Stuart Avenue photos. Band members and Lycrecia remembered volatile arguments and fights between Hank and Audrey during this timeframe. Biographers describe Hank’s problematic drinking during this period, so much so that Audrey took Lycrecia and left in February and began divorce proceedings. Hitting rock bottom in early 1948, Hank fled in March to his friends and sanctuaries in Pensacola;

back in Montgomery in April, he botched a show with Cowboy Copas and Johnny Bond at the Charles Theater



and then lost his gig at the 31 Club in Montgomery due to drunkenness; and, later that month, he was committed to a sanatorium to dry out. Letters from publisher and record producer Fred Rose in February and March refer to the struggles Hank and Audrey were experiencing. The ultimate irony is that while Hank's personal life and career were disintegrating during April 1948, columnist Allen Rankin heralded his radio and recording successes, proclaiming him "Shakespeare" in the *Montgomery Advertiser* on April 4.

Whatever event prompted these photos, the adults do not appear happy. Lycrecia looks upbeat in the photo

with Audrey and Lillie, but the adults appear morose, even grim, in all four photos. There was considerable friction between Audrey and Lillie over control of Hank's earnings and general behavior during this period, and Hank was painfully aware of it. Knowing the extent of the interpersonal dynamics and struggles these individuals were dealing with, it is perhaps too easy to project them onto an interpretation of the Stuart Avenue photos.

In conclusion, there is a good case that these photos capture a homecoming, housewarming, and/or birthday celebration. The subjects are dressed for a special occasion. The house itself and its new awnings seem to be important elements in all four photographs. The awnings are such a special bit of Hank Williams trivia that they made their way into the 2015 biopic, "I Saw the Light," which was based on Escott's biography. In an early scene, as Tom Hiddleston's Hank is indoors reading the newspaper, Elizabeth Olsen portrays Audrey out in the yard giving stern instructions to the contractors installing the new awnings.

The Stuart Avenue photos are a visual record of a critical time in Hank's life and career. He had demonstrated the talent to write and record hit songs, entertain regional audiences, and begin succeeding as a professional performer. He could not have known he was on the cusp of national popularity, phenomenal achievements as a songwriter and performer, and an enduring legacy. The razor thin line between dismal failure and legendary triumph never

changed for Hank. He struggled between desire and despair, between the joy of a first home and new awnings versus the devastating undercurrents of barely suppressed anger and alcoholism. The Stuart Avenue photos tell a story charged with the hopes and sorrows he wrote about and sang for us all.

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Marc Abraham, *I Saw the Light*, Sony Pictures, 2015

The Virginia Boys, Doc and Carl

*Compiled and Edited By Dave Sichak from writings
by Carl P. McConnell, Ronald McConnell (Carl's son)
and Barnette McConnell, Jr. (Doc's stepson)*

Introduction

Carl Patton McConnell was one half of a duo. The other half was a cousin, Doc Addington, who was a brother of Mother Maybelle Carter. Together, they became known as Doc and Carl. Doc was known for his guitar playing while Carl played mostly the banjo. Carl left behind an essay that told of his early career and the roads he and Doc travelled together. His son Ronald McConnell along with Barnette McConnell, Jr. wrote other essays that are combined in this attempt to tell their story.

The duo became known as Doc and Carl, The Virginia Boys — long before Jim and Jesse McReynolds came onto the music / bluegrass scene.

This essay might be a branch of the Carter Family legacy in country music history. It documents events within the family and how Doc and Carl fit into the family history.

I tried as much as I could to keep the original text provided to me as I often found they were able to paint a picture for the reader, based on their personal recollections.

Carl Patton McConnell

Carl McConnell was born January 24, 1913, on a farm in Big Moccasin Valley, at the foot of the north side of Clinch Mountain. He wrote was born in an old log cabin that had been the birthplace of his mother and her four sisters and one brother. He was a Baptist by faith and the third child of a family of seven; five girls and two boys.

Music seems to have run in the family. He stated:

“My mother could do a pretty good job at playing the autoharp and organ. She also sang soprano and alto parts. Three of my sisters could play the organ and sing real well. ... My mother’s parents were Mr. And Mrs. B. M. Francisco. My Grandma Francisco was an excellent old-fashioned singer, with a beautiful, loud, clear voice. She had the reputation of being able to do more good with her singing in the old revival meetings than a lot of preachers could do with their preaching. They sent for her and came after her from miles around to get her to help sing and take part in the old-time country revival meetings. It was well known in those days that she spent a large portion of her time in this manner.

My Daddy, was fairly good at playing the harmonica, Jews harp, and could plunk quite a few of the old tunes on the five-string banjo. He did some bass singing.

My grandpa, Patton McConnell, born February 2, 1846, was a top old-time fiddler and banjo picker. He was considered the champion fiddler of this area (Scott County, Virginia) for years, back in the days of about 1875 until about 1900. He had participated in almost all of the entertainments and exhibitions around this area in those days.”

Carl wrote that Grandpa Francisco was a farmer and owned one of the larger apple orchards in the area ‘high up under the north side of Clinch Mountain. His grandpa Patton McConnell owned and operated a roller mill in Moccasin Valley, operating flour, corn and buckwheat mills. Next door was a saw mill and a planing mill, which used a turbine powered by water flowing by gravity from a concrete dam located just a couple hundred feet above the old mill place. In addition, there was a blacksmith shop, general store and a dwelling house. Carl described it as a “stomping ground and gathering place for all the surrounding neighborhoods.”

Carl writes of his first musical instruments and his learning and style:

The first banjo that I ever owned was a little \$9.95 Supertone five-stringer that I ordered from Sears, Roebuck and Company in January, 1931. After a few days of plunking around, I learned to start a couple of tunes. The first one was “Goin’ Down in Town”. The second was “Down the Road”.

From there I soon learned a lot of the other old tunes; such as “The Spanish Fandango”, “President McKinley’s March”, “Arkansas Traveler”, “Cripple Creek”, “John Henry”, and many others. Those tunes I learned from my Daddy’s youngest brother, Uncle Pat. He was a banjo picker, first class, at the two-finger and thumb style, as well as the old “hoe-down” lick, which has lately been renamed the “claw hammer” style. To me it will always be the old “hoe-down” banjo picking.

As well as I have always loved the old “hoe-down” style of banjo picking; I never did put forth enough effort and time to master it. At that time, I liked the two fingers and thumb style much better and I put all my time in on trying to learn it instead. Now I regret that I didn’t learn both styles.

I also had a cheap Supertone guitar that came from Sears, Roebuck, and Company. It wasn’t a bad instrument for those days. For many years I did a lot of thumping on this guitar and others as well. The fact is, I did about as much guitar plunking, at times, as I did banjo thumping. No one ever called me a “Doc Addington”.

Doc Addington

Barnett McConnell, Jr. (stepson of Doc Addington) wrote an essay of Doc's early life.

Hugh Jack Addington, Jr. was born on November 2, 1913 in the Addington Frame community of Scott County, Virginia, the eighth child of Hugh Jack and Margaret Kilgore Addington. While still a very young lad, Hugh J. Jr. became known as "Doc," a nickname given to him by his Uncle Milburn Nickels who lived near his home on Copper Creek. Uncle Mil Nickels also had nicknames for Doc's brothers that followed them throughout their life. Dewey was known as "Duke," David J. was known as "D. J." William B. was known as "Sawcat," Milbern B. was known as "Toobe," and Warren was known as "Bug."

Doc, as did many of his family, possessed a fine musical talent, most likely inherited from his Kilgore ancestors. As a young boy, he learned to play his sister's guitar. By the time this sister, Maybelle, married Ezra Carter and started singing and playing her guitar at community socials, Doc was also an accomplished musician. As Maybelle became part of the Carter Family singing group in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Doc was singing and playing with a young banjo picker,

Carl goes to write of how he and Doc first came together to join their musical talents.

Doc Addington and I are close kinfolk's. His dad and mine were first cousins. My daddy's mother was a distant cousin to Doc's mother, both being descendants of the Kilgore generation. That makes us even a little more akin.

We grew up about four miles from each other (the way the crow flies), with two ridges and about a couple of valleys separating us. By car, around the road, it was a distance of around ten miles and back. In those days, there were only a few miles of blacktop road in the mountain area, especially here in Scott County. These were mostly narrow, rough, dirt roads.

This being true, Doc and I never had met until the summer of 1932. Doc came over to my home one Sunday afternoon, with his neighbor and close friend, Lester (Groundhog) Addington, who was dating my oldest sister, Irene.

On this occasion, Doc didn't come in the house. He sat out in the car, parked close to the front porch. I walked out and interrupted the little tune he was whistling, by saying "hello" and asking him to come in the house while he was waiting. He said that he would just sit there and wait on "Groundhog," who was in the parlor with Irene. He right then started

whistling this same little old tune. He seemed to be more interested in being left alone and in whistling than he was in talking to me. Ha!

It sort of worried me a bit because he wouldn't get out of the car and come on into the house, so I thought I'd go into the parlor and see if I could get "Groundhog" to go out and try persuading him to come on in. Groundhog sort of laughed and said, "Ah, he is bashful and stubborn, too. Let him sit out there."

This didn't satisfy my mind and, pondering over the situation another minute or so, I made up my mind to give it another try. I walked back out to the car and found Doc still whistling that same tune. So, ill-mannered me, I broke in on his whistling again to say "Doc, I wish you would get out and come in the house." He said, "No, thanks, I'll just sit out here." Then, quickly, I asked him some other question, with the hope of getting him started into a friendly conversation.

He just answered back with as few words as possible, and instantly started right back whistling. To me, that was a pretty firm hint that he just didn't care too much about getting any better acquainted with me. I hastily turned and walked back into the house. In about an hour, I saw "Groundhog" step off the front porch and crawl under the steering

VALLEY VIEW

SUNDAY, JULY 28th, 1:00 P. M.

— Starring —

The **CARTER FAMILY**

The Original Maybelle Carter Family featuring Maybelle playing the Zither, one of the oldest instruments in existence, Her 3 clever daughters June, Anita and Helen, Dock and Carl, The Virginia Boys. This Internationally famous mountain family broadcast for years on many of the larger stations in Texas and have been heard on Transcriptions everywhere.

THE COO COO COWHANDS

Featured NBC entertainers from Philadelphia.

REIDEL THE MAGICIAN

With a Company of Six People doing some of the original Houdini stunts with a bit of modern deceptive dexterity added.

BLONDIE THE HORSE

A beautiful blonde, 2 men and a horse with more intelligence than Webster's Dictionary performing some almost unbelievable things including a tap dance.

THE NORTH CAROLINA RIDGERUNNERS

The Gazette and Daily News York,
PA July 26, 1946

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The Gazette and Daily News York,
PA July 26, 1946

KENTUCKY PLAY PARTY

**Tonight At 8 O'clock
and Every Saturday Night**

GIANT STAGE & RADIO SHOW

Largest array of radio talent ever to appear on any
Louisville stage, featuring

SUNSHINE SUE
and her Rangers

UNCLE HENRY
Kentucky Mountaineers

BUDDY BROCK
DOC and CARL

THE SIZEMORES
RANDY BLAKE

**RESERVED
SEATS**

41^c

**CHILDREN
AND BALCONY 27^c**

Reservations for future shows at WHAS, or write Kentucky
Play Party, Louisville, Ky.

NATIONAL THEATRE

The Courier-Journal Louisville, KY
December 21, 1939

VALLEY VIEW PARK

1 Mile South of Hallam, Penna.

Sunday, May 26, 1:00 P. M.

—Starring—

THE CARTER FAMILY

Clever Mountain Family of National Radio Fame featuring
MAYBELLE, her daughters ANITA, JUNE AND HELEN to-
gether with DOCK AND CARL. AUNT POLLY Girl Comedienne
and Dancer. MAYBELLE Plays the only ZITHER heard on radio
programs in the country.

NORAY SISTERS

Beautiful Dance Routines

MUNRO AND ADAMS

Novelty Juggling Act

POP MELCHOIR AND MARIE

Trameline Acrobatic Specialities

NORTH CAROLINA RIDGE RUNNERS

10 - - STAGE SHOWS - - 10

We are proud to present for your entertainment this large array
of talent the Original CARTER FAMILY AND 3 ACTS of Vaude-
ville in conjunction with our own show. At great expense we
are able to bring you these famous artists so be with us Sunday
to help us give them a real Valley View Park welcome.

DON'T MISS THIS BIG SHOW

Lancaster New Era, Lancaster,
PA May 26, 1946



WHAS Kentucky Play - Circa 1939,

Row 1 (L-R): Gordon Sizemore, Little Betty, Joohnny Ford,
Chuckwagon Joe. Row2: Sunshine Sue, Howard Sizemore, Mrs.
Sizemore, Mary Lou, Uncle Hery, Pauline, Randy Blake. Row3:
Geroage and Sam Workman, Randall Atcher, John Workman, Curly
Bradshaw, Doc and Carl, Rufus and Sally.

4th Row: Accordion Al, Coonhunter, JimShea, Barn Dancer, Hilly Foy.

5th Row: Wanda Sizemore and Barn Dancers
Photo courtesy of Ron McConnell, son of Carl McConnell

COMING — — IN PERSON!
Radio, Recording and Stage Stars of the



CARTER FAMILY

Famous for many years over the World's Largest Radio Stations, XERA, XENT, WBT, WHAS, WROL, and Others.

Hear the Guitar masterfully played by
MAEBELLE
Undisputably one of the best and most popular on the air or stage.

Hear
SYLVA
Playing the Auto Harp, and Singing.

HELEN, JUNÉ and ANITA
THE CARTER SISTERS
Playing the Guitar, Mandolin and Auto Harp, with Singing

DOCK and CARL THE VIRGINIA BOYS
of WHAS, XENT, WHAM, WCFL, WKRC, and others. Playing the Guitar and Banjo, with their own singing.

BUTLER, TENN.
HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING 8:00 P. M.
SATURDAY NIGHT, AUGUST 17, 1940

Promotional Poster, Carter Family
Doc and Carl, The Virginia dBoys, Butler,
TN, August 17, 1940
Photo copy courtesy of Ron McConnell,
son of Carl McConnell

VALLEY VIEW

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**THE NORTH CAROLINA
RIDGERUNNERS**

The Gazette and Daily News York,
PA July 26, 1946

wheel of his 1923 Model T Ford Touring car. I rushed out to invite them to come back again. I got out on the porch in time to see them take off like a ruffled grouse and to hear Doc, still whistling the same tune. By this time, he was setting it afire. This was my first acquaintance and experience with Doc Addington.

“I had heard quite a lot about Doc’s fancy guitar picking for about a couple of years. Up until this

time, I had never had the chance to hear him. The following fall, he and “Groundhog” dropped in one night at the home of our neighbors, Boyd and Will Quillin. A big bunch of us had gathered there for one of our usual musical parties. After a lot of insisting from me and the rest of the musicians, (he kept saying that he couldn’t pick), Doc was persuaded to take the guitar and he picked and sang about a half-dozen songs, with me backing him with the banjo.

I will never forget the expressions on the faces of the crowd, (and especially the musicians looking on), as he was about the middle of the first song, “Coney Isle.” You talk about a display of raised eyebrows and staring eyes, with mouths half open, all set on Doc and the guitar. No doubt I looked even worse stunned than they did because I think that I even dropped out and forgot to pick the banjo at times. He also picked and sung “The Brownie Blues,” “My Dear Old Southern Home,” and one of Jimmie Rodger’s “Blue Yodels.”

When he had finished the fourth and last song, he handed the guitar back to its owner and requested a continuation of the music. If my memory serves me right, there was no response.

This was the beginning of mine and Doc’s musical career. I believe the next time we met was at

Doc's home place, in the month of May, 1933, on a Saturday night. He had sent me word a few days ahead of time to come over on that particular Saturday night and bring my banjo. He said they were going to have a musical party, or a music making, I believe he called it. “

Doc and Carl, The Virginia Boys

Barnett writes of the beginning of the career of Doc and Carl, the Virginia Boys.

As Maybelle became part of the Carter Family singing group in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Doc was singing and playing with a young banjo picker, Carl McConnell, who became his lifelong friend. Doc and Carl were third cousins and they first played music together at Uncle Mil's house on Copper Creek. Very soon after this singing debut, Doc and Carl began calling themselves “The Virginia Boys” and played together regularly at social gatherings throughout the area. Their reputation as musicians increased and soon they were playing and singing on WOPI in Bristol.

As the demand for the country music of the Appalachian area increased around the country, due mostly to the popularity of the recordings of Doc's sister, Maybelle and his cousin, Sara Dougherty Carter, and her husband A. P. Carter, Doc and

Carl were offered work on WCFL in Chicago, Illinois by their new sponsor, the Consolidated Drug Company. Over the next few years, Doc and Carl played on radio stations in Rochester, New York; Louisville, Kentucky; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Richmond, Virginia. Doc sang tenor and played lead guitar while Carl played rhythm on his 5-string banjo and sang soprano. As their popularity grew, they returned to WCFL in Chicago and recorded 84 individual 15 minute transcriptions that were sent to some of the more powerful radio transmission stations in North America, including XERA operating in Mexico across the border from Del Rio, Texas. Although Doc and Carl were popular musicians who had consistent work, with the low pay and frequent travel, they soon tired of the “road life” and decided to find jobs outside the music business. Carl returned to Scott County and established a barbering business and Doc went to work for the Firestone Corporation in Indiana. On November 1, 1937 Doc married Leota Mae Rich in Indiana and they soon started their family. During the next eight years, they were blessed with 5 children: Shirley, Jack, Sue, Kay, and Dale.

Carl shed some light on the origins of them working together musically.

In the midst of all the corny mountain music making, Doc and Fiddlin' Jimmy D. Cress spent the months of August and September 1934 at our home. They helped us work on the farm, and each night after supper, we would fiddle and frolic until late bedtime. Most of these nights, we had a bunch of neighbor visitors as an audience. This always stimulates a musician somewhat and makes him put a little more into his picking. As I have already stated, Jimmy D. Cress was a top old time fiddler on a few of the old tunes such as "Cumberland Gap", "Cackling Hen," and others. He also had a couple of tunes on which he did some nice trick fiddling. These two tunes were: "The Drunken Hiccups" and "Pop Goes the Weasel."

In May of 1934, Doc and I went on our first personal appearance. Sara Carter was booked for a Saturday night appearance at the old Odd Fellow's Hall in Bristol, Virginia. She asked us to go along and share this program with her. Of course, we welcomed the opportunity. Sara opened the program by singing about six or eight of the old favorite ballads and hymns that she was so noted for singing. Then Doc and I came out and sang possibly a half dozen duet numbers. I don't recall but a couple of these, the "Browns Ferry Blues", and "I'm Goin'a Quit My Rowdy Ways". We played a couple of instrumentals,

with Doc in the lead on the guitar. I sang a couple of sad songs. This was good experience for us.

Our first radio broadcast was on Station WOPI, Bristol, Va.-Tenn., the first part of the year 1934, on "The Saturday Afternoon Matinee". We appeared on this program nearly every Saturday afternoon thereafter, until the early part of 1936.

Let's go to a humorous episode Carl wrote about when Doc asked him to come to a 'music party' they were going to have; Doc told Carl to bring his banjo. But getting to that party was quite the effort and perhaps typical of traveling musicians - they all have their road stories.

"My brother Kenneth and I saddled our dappled gray, half-percheron, work horses, old Frank and Bird, and started on the four-mile rough trail across the two ridges and valleys. At the halfway mark, across the first ridge and down into the valley, in the west end of Taylor town community, we stopped by Beacher Smith's home place. He met us at the yard gate. He was headed for the party also. As we were approaching Beacher's home, we noticed a black looking storm cloud rising from the west and coming in our direction.

I called Beacher's attention to this bad looking thunder cloud and requested that we wait a few minutes to see if it was going to rain before going any further. Beacher turned his head and looked

at the black cloud and said, “I declare, Carl, I don’t believe it’s going to rain here.” He repeated this statement at least three or four times as I kept insisting that we wait there at his place until after the rain had passed.

I let him out talk me and, against my better judgment, we started on toward Copper Creek Valley, about two miles away. Beacher was then and still is a good old time fiddler, but he taught me that night that he was a poor weather prophet. By the time we had gone half a mile to the top of the next ridge, (where Joe Addington’s new home place is now) the hard part of this rainstorm overtook us. We tried to keep under the biggest trees as much as possible so they might shield us, but to no avail. The rain was coming down like pouring out of a tub. All of us enjoyed a genuine drenching, including my old banjo, even though I tried to protect it.

When we arrived at the Addington residence, about 9 p.m., we found a house full of neighbors and a host of musicians as well. The music was already going in full swing. I held my Supertone banjo over the globe of the old kerosene lamp. The calfskin head was soon dry enough to pick. I tuned up with the boys, and instantly the fiddler, Jimmy D. Cress, took off on the old tune “Cackling Hen.” Then, without a pause, he tore right into another old tune,

“Cumberland Gap.” Those old tunes were favorites of Jimmy’s and he could do a job on them, as well as many others that was second to no one else. Jimmy D. was a brother-in-law to Beacher.

Mill Nickels, who lived just a hop and a jump across the field, was another old time fiddler included in the crowd. He was an excellent, smooth, clear noting fiddler as you rarely ever hear, to say the least. He had a whole line of pretty waltz tunes that he played very beautifully, so as to almost make the hair stand on end.

After the three fiddlers had played about a couple of dozen tunes each, backed up by mine and Doc’s picking, Doc’s oldest brother, Dewey, dug out his old five string banjo and rendered about a dozen of the old tunes in the old fashioned “hoe-down” way, which he is so noted for. He played such tunes as “John Henry,” “Cripple Creek,” “Sally Goodin’,” “Sugar Hill, etc.

Then Doc and I rattled off a few instrumentals with Doc in the lead on the guitar. Doc sang a couple, like “Coney Isle”, and the “Brownie Blues.” I tried singing possibly four or five of my favorite sad songs and tried to pick a couple or so, such as “Shortenin’ Bread” and “The Spanish Fandango.”

The greatest thrill of all that I experienced at this particular gathering was the honor of seeing for

the first time, the greatest country singer that this country ever had, in my opinion. She had the truest and most beautiful voice of all. The person that I am referring to is the great Sara Carter, of the famous Carter Family, who did all of the lead singing in their recordings and elsewhere.

By that time, it was getting near midnight and voices all over the house could be heard requesting Sara to sing. Doc handed her the guitar. Since I never had the pleasure of hearing her in person, but only on records, this was indeed a treat to me. It only took about a verse and the chorus of the first song of her singing to convince me that the old saying was true; she was the best there by ten country miles and was saved for the last.



Dewey Addington, Carl McConnell
Mabel McConnell
Photo Courtesy of Ron McConnell,
Son of Carl McConnell



Doc Addington, Carl McConnell,
Mabel McConnell
Photo Courtesy of Ron McConnell,
Son of Carl McConnell



Home Folks Hour. Radio Station
WHAM (Rochester, NY)
Home Folks Hour (3:45pm - 4:45pm)
Doc and Carl (back row, plaid shirts)
Rural Radio Magazine - January 1939

City, Buffalo Programs Tomorrow

Hour	WHEC 1430KC—210M	WHAM 1150KC—260.7M	WSAY 1210KC—248M	WBEN 900KC—331.1M
12:00	Kate Smith Talks	Hit of Day	Piano Recital	Houseboat Hannah
12:15	Al Sigi. news	Here and There	Noontime Melodies	O'Neills
12:30	Heim Treat	Farm-Home Hour	Noontime Melodies	News Reporter
12:45	Our Gal, Sunday	Farm-Home Hour	Market Reports	Voice of Farm
1:00	Goldbergs	Farm-Home Hour	Luncheon Concert	Consumers' Service
1:15	Beautiful Life	Farm News	News Review	Owen McBride
1:30	Road of Life	School of Air	Matinee Frolic	Words, Music
1:45	Variations	School of Air	Matinee Frolic	Dollars and Sense
2:00	Irene Beasley	Betty and Bob	Social Register	Betty and Bob
2:15	Light's Orchestra	Grimm's Daughter	Lullaby Time	Grimm's Daughter
2:30	Cooking School	Valiant Lady	Rhythm Rhapsody	Valiant Lady
2:45	Cooking School	Hymns of Churches	Rhythm Rhapsody	Hymns of Churches
3:00	Cooking School	Al Sigi. news	Music of Masters	Mary Martin
3:15	Cooking School	Bob Hemmings	Music of Masters	Ma Perkins
3:30	Music Hour	Council Women	Music of Masters	Pepper Young
3:45	Her Honor, James	Home Folks Hour	Music of Masters	Guiding Light
4:00	Al Sigi. news	Home Folks Hour	Ten Time Tunes	Backstage Wife
4:15	Afternoon Bulletin	Home Folks Hour	Tango, Rumba	Stella Dallas
4:30	Afternoon Bulletin	Home Folks Hour	Int. Hour	View and Sade
4:45	Afternoon Bulletin	Your Family, Mine	Int. Hour	Girl Alone
5:00	Questions in House	Dog Lovers	Musicale	Uncle Ben's Club
5:15	Frontier Fighters	Sing Me A Song	Musicale	Your Family, Mine
5:30	Waltz Time	Don Winslow	Revue	Jack Armstrong
5:45	With Music	Tom Mix	Revue	Orphan Annie

All programs subject to change.

Radio Program Listing Radio Station WHAM
Home Folks Hour (3:45pm - 4:45pm)
The Democrat and Chronicle Rochester,
NY, January 11, 1939



Publicity Photo: Carter Family & Doc and Carl, The Virginia Boys L-R: Carl McCannell, Doc Addington, Maybelle Carter. June Carter, Helen Carter, Anita Carter Circa June 1946, Byra & State Theater – Richmond, VA

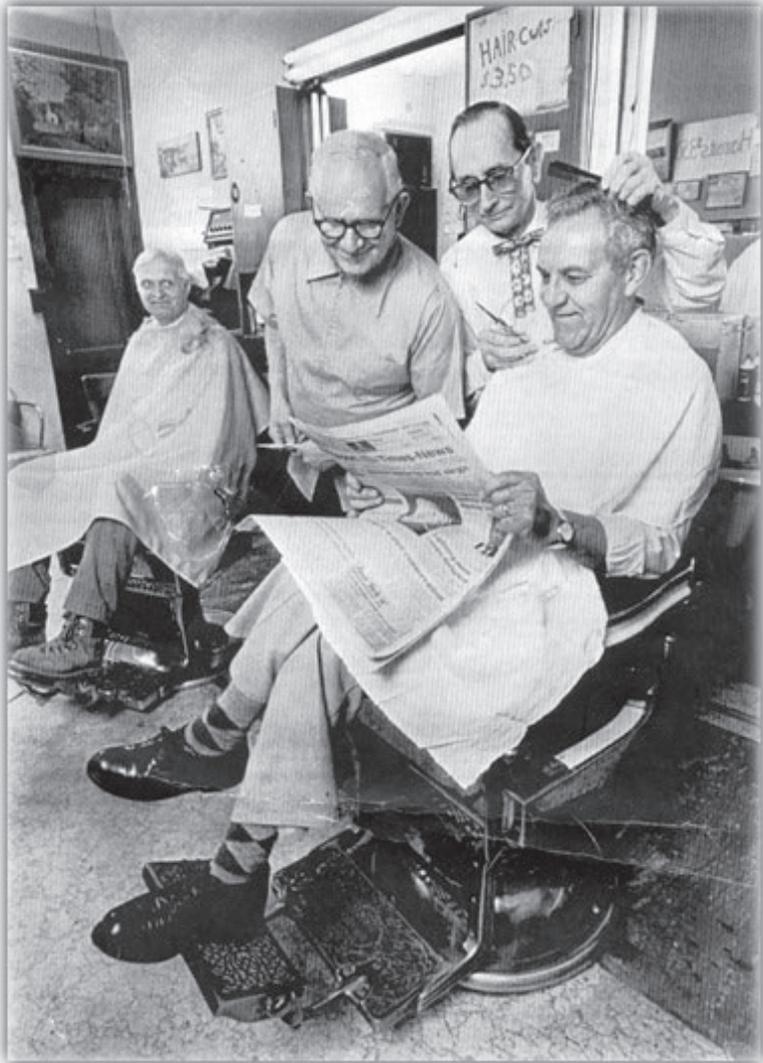
Photo courtesy of Ron McCannell. son of Carl McCannell



The Carters with Doc and Carl (Circa 1940)
Back Row: Hugh (Doc) Addington, Sylvia Carter,
Mother Maybelle Carter, Carl McConnel
Front Row: Anita Carter, June Carter, Helen Carter,

Note: A cropped version of this photo appeared
in Country Song Roundup in December
1965 - Issue No. 91

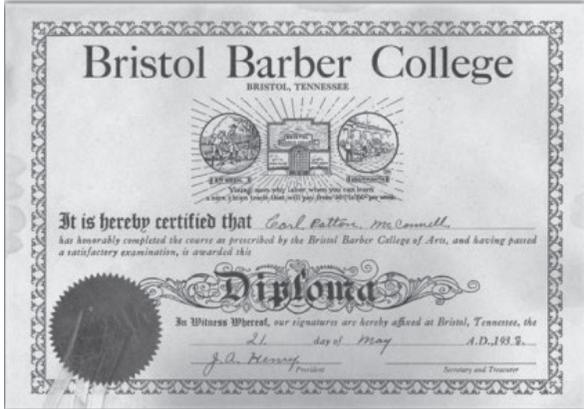
Photo courtesy of Ron McConnell. son of Carl McCannell



Scott Barber Shop L-R: Walter Peak, Tom Culbertson, Carl McConnell, Clayton Williams

Kingsport Times - News, Kingsport, TN
February 10, 1988

Photo courtesy of Ron McConnell. son of Carl McConnell



Bristol Barber Collage Diploma Carl Patton
McCannell May 21, 1938

Photo courtesy of Ron McConnell. son of Carl McCannell



Doc and Carl Wolf Trap Farm Park 1973

Photo courtesy of Ron McConnell. son of Carl McCannell

Sara sang several of the beautiful old songs and hymns. I don't recall all of them. To name a few, I do remember that she did sing the following: "The Last Roundup," "Why There's A Tear In My Eye," "On A Hill Lone And Gray," "When I take My Vacation In Heaven," "One Step More," "No Telephone In Heaven," and "The Old Rugged Cross."

I had never before heard these songs sung so beautifully and with such real true meaning, as their writers had intended them. I'm quite sure that this was another occasion on which I was caught with staring eyes and mouth half open. I was so carried away with her beautiful singing that I just forgot everything else.

Sara chose for her concluding number an old favorite sacred song that I thought was very fitting. Her choice was "Will The Circle Be Unbroken." When she finished the last chorus of this touching old song, the crowd began to rise, one by one, reaching for their hats and milling through the crowd to shake the kind hand of Doc's mother, Mrs. Margaret Addington, and bid her good night and thanks for her allowing us to come into her good home on this occasion.

Mrs. Addington was one of the kindest persons that I ever knew. She was as good to me as a mother. I felt perfectly welcome in her home. She

was another good banjo picker, the old fashioned “hoe-down” style.

Now getting back to the breaking up of this musical party: It was then about 12:30 am., Sunday morning. After all well wishes and good nights were said, everyone was soon making their way toward home on foot, through the fields and in the pathways. You could see the lights from the kerosene lanterns and flashlights going in several different directions.

In the meantime, Kenneth and I had already mounted our horses and were starting on the long narrow, rough trail across the ridges and valleys that would lead us back home. We were accompanied by Beacher and Jimmy D. Cress, walking along by our side. They said they would rather walk than ride.

Along the way, we were discussing back and forth the enjoyable time that we had just experienced with this group of wonderful mountain people. The sound of the good old mountain music, and the singing as well, was still ringing in our ears. We had thoroughly enjoyed all the music that had been produced in those short four hours.

At this time, we were passing by Beacher’s home and he and Jimmy D. left us for the night.

The thought ran through my mind wondering if this would ever happen again, at the same place, and

with the same people meeting back there together. I was just dreaming and hoping, of course. All of these pleasant memories seemed to help the time fly by. In no time at all, it seemed that Kenneth and I were riding up in the hallway of the old barn, at our old home place, in Big Moccasin Valley, at the foot of Clinch Mountain. It was then about a quarter until 3 o'clock, Sunday morning.

Doc and Carl began playing for the folks in their area at other musical gatherings. The newspapers of that era often contained little tidbits of the comings and goings of people and enjoyable times. In June of 1936, Doc and Carl visited the home of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Quillin in Lone Star. Other guests were present as well. Doc and Carl entertained the folks with their music and, "the music was enjoyed by all."

A couple of months later, they were playing for folks at the home of Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Moore. By this time, they were known as 'radio musicians'. Again, the unnamed author noted, "the music was very much enjoyed by all."

In Snowflake, Virginia, we read that "...quite a crowd gathered at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Quillin on an August night in 1936. They were there to hear Doc Addington and Carl McConnell make music."

Even when they were just visiting relatives, it made the local news. On one occasion in August 1936, the 'musicians

of Maces Spring, Virginia were visiting relatives in the section of Nickelsville, Virginia.

Doc and Carl were sent to WHAS in Louisville, Kentucky for a time by the Consolidated Drug Company in February of 1939. According to Carl's essay, they were on the "Early Morning Jamboree" show from 6:30am to 7:30am. He wrote that the jamboree consisted of Uncle Henry's Kentucky Mountaineers, Sally and the Coonhunter, Sunshine Sue and Her Rock Creek Rangers, Gordon Sizemore and Little Betty, Joe and Al - The Chuckwagon Boys and Pat McAdary.

Carl mentions they were supposed to work at the station from September through May with June through August being a summer vacation break for them. The Kingsport Times in Tennessee documents occasions where Carl drove back to visit his family in Snowflake, VA. A search on Google maps shows that today it is nearly a 300 mile drive, taking almost 5 hours.

Doc and Carl were transferred by the Consolidated Drug Company to Station WKRC in Cincinnati, Ohio, They had two fifteen minute programs each day, until the last of May when the usual summer vacation season started.

A group of nine entertainers left Chicago in January 1939 to start a new program called the "Home Folks Hour" over radio station WHAM in Rochester, New York. The show was to air from 3:45pm to 4:45pm Monday through Friday. It was suggested by Art Kelly in the Rural Radio magazine that 'down-to-earth' type of show were few

and far between. The show was to feature old time songs, hoe-downs, hillbilly ditties and ballads of the plains and hills. This appears to have resonated with the Rochester listening audience.

Mr. Kelly reported to readers that the ensemble included Doc and Carl, the Kasper Sisters, Chuckwagon Boys and Chuckwagon Joe, Barbara and Larry, Little Bett, Gen Kasper, Fiddlin' Larry Jeffers and Accordion Al.

He wrote that Doc and Carl hailed from the hills of old Virginia. Together they sang hymns and songs of the hill folks. Little Betty Jeffers, all of six years old, was considered the sweetheart of the gang and known for her yodel specialties. Barbara and Larry Jeffers were born in Jackson, Florida and had a 'colorful record' in both radio and vaudeville. Barbara and Larry were twins and Little Betty was their sister. The Kasper Sisters had previously been with the National Barn Dance, Pappy Cheshire's Barnyard Jamboree and had already been on nine radio stations. The girls, Betty and Gen did harmony, with Betty playing the guitar. Then Joe Franks who was from Chicago, had the role of "Chuckwagon Joe." He had been on the radio for four years up to that point. He was said to play guitar and thumped a mean doghouse bass. Finally, Elmer Witte who was known as Accordion Al, was born in San Francisco, California, had traveled with the WLS road shows and appeared on the Barn Dance with Hal O'Hallaran.

Doc recalls that the first part of June 1940, Doc and Carl hooked up with Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters” Helen, June, and Anita, along with A. P. Carter’s youngest sister, Sylvia, who was a good singer as well as a good guitar and autoharp picker. All summer long, they made personal appearances in the eastern half of Tennessee, southwest Virginia, and all down through North Carolina, clear to the coast, playing school houses, court houses, lodge halls, and an occasional theater. They continued making those shows, right on up into the month of September, when they had to quit in order for the Carter Sisters to attend school at Hiltons, Virginia.

Carl’s son, Ron, related a humorous incident by email from his memories when his mom cooked up a breakfast for the band.

Sometime during 1944-1945 when Curley Bradshaw was a Blue Grass Boy, Doc Addington was in the military (Note: According to online records Doc registered in the U. S. Army on November 27, 1942 and was discharged on September 27, 1945), and Daddy was at his barbering, and Bill Monroe had a gig in Gate City, VA.

I (Ron) was between 3 and 4 years old. I heard the story many times from Mother. We lived in the east end of town. The show was in one of the three theaters in the west end. Daddy knew “Curley” Bradshaw, Bill and others.

After the show Daddy went backstage to meet his friends. Without asking Mother, Daddy invited them to breakfast and a jam session at our house the next morning. Daddy may have been carrying me home, so he lived.

Mother spent the rest of the night cleaning and preparing a big country breakfast for the band.

The next morning, 8 a.m. came,

9 a.m. came,

10 a.m. came,

11 a.m. came,

Noon came.

Finally, maybe between 1 and 2 p.m., the BBGs showed up. They had slept late and had eaten a big breakfast at a restaurant downtown. Only Curley ate any of Mother's food. Curley could eat anytime.

For the rest of the afternoon the musicians jammed while Mother steamed.

Note: After reading that story, you wonder why the musicians would pass up a home cooked meal and instead pay for restaurant cooking.

Doc and Carl met up with Mother Maybelle Carter and her daughters again in the summer of 1946. The Carters had returned to Richmond and were heard on WRNL. A promotional picture taken helps date the picture

as it is advertising a movie called Renegades that was to be shown at the Byrd and State Theater on Wednesday, June 19, 1946. The movie starred Evelyn Keyes, Willard Parker, Larry Parks and Edgar Buchanan. While the newspaper ads for the film do not indicate folks would see entertainment, the signboard in the picture indicates they were going to perform at 5:45pm. Later, on November 30, 1946, Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters (Helen, June and Anita) debuted as regular cast members of the WRVA Old Dominion Barn Dance.

WRNL Promo Picture - June 1946 - Doc and Carl; Maybelle Carter; Carter Sisters

In September 1946, Doc and Carl returned to Scott County after making a few local personal appearances with the Carters.

Doc and Leota and four of their children - Shirley, Jack, Sue, Kay, (Dale was born in October) - returned to Indiana where Doc resumed his job at the Firestone Rubber Company.

By then Carl and Mabel had started a family with the birth of their son, Ronald, in 1941 and were hoping for another addition to their family. Theresa, their daughter, was born the next year in late 1947. Once more their music career was on hold and Carl returned to the barber business at the Scott Barber Shop in Gate City.

During the next twenty-five years, they only played together occasionally when Doc and his family returned to Virginia for brief visits with his kin folks. Carl would play

three or four times a year with Mabel's brothers, Howard, Edd and Glen Moore.

Ron McConnell wrote of Doc and Carl,

“In the present era, the Doc and Carl songs might be called old-time country as contrasted to the Nashville country sound. June Carter referred to Doc and Carl as the “jazzy side of the family.” It was pre-bluegrass since Bill Monroe was still working out his bluegrass sound during that time and had it essentially done by late 1946. Charlie Monroe was playing at another Louisville radio station and contacted WHAS to have Doc and Carl stop performing Monroe Brothers songs. They never performed them again. Some years later Carl invited Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys over for lunch and a jam session the day after their show in Gate City - much to Mabel's surprise.”

In the 1950s Carl had filled a notebook full of song lyrics that he had written and hoped one day to play and maybe record with Doc. Like many mountain musicians, neither Doc nor Carl read or wrote music. The melodies for their songs were all stored in their heads. However, the notebook of song lyrics disappeared from his banjo case at a gig in Nickelsville. He never wrote the songs down again. One wonders what lyrics and tunes were lost that night.

The Barber / Dog Breeder

Ron wrote of his father's later years,

“Although his music career was on a long-term hold, Carl was a man with many other interests and those who knew him well were aware of his passion for breeding mountain cur dogs but few likely knew that Carl was one of the organizers of the Mountain Cur Club in 1957 or that he was a cofounder of the Stephens’ Breeders Association. The Mountain Cur Club was later renamed the Original Mountain Cur Breeders Association. Carl is credited with being instrumental in helping to save these old mountain hunting dogs from extinction. These faithful working dogs were/are used to hunt raccoons and bears. His love for these mountain dogs continued throughout his life. Scott County is home to folks descended from immigrants from Ireland, Scotland, England and Germany. There are also now many four legged residents descended from Florida immigrants. By the mid-1950s, after 150 years of hunting, raccoons in Scott County were rare. Carl and the coon hunting club purchased many crates of raccoons in Florida and shipped them by train to Gate City for release around the county. The great-great-grandparents of that raccoon in your backyard probably came from some of Carl’s Florida raccoons.

Carl is probably best known in Scott County for working at the Scott Barber Shop. In Compton’s hotel on Moccasin Avenue across from the

courthouse in Gate City. About 1980 he moved the shop across the corner on West Jackson Street (“Main”) to Dr. Grigg’s old office with more space. Carl was not satisfied until every hair on a customer’s head was the correct length. Rev. Paul D. Argoe, a friend for more than forty years said at Carl’s eulogy that Carl was the slowest barber in Scott County. For Carl, the barber shop was much more than a way of making a living after his musical career, it gave him a chance to visit with his friends and customers every day.”

Doc’s Return To Indiana — One More Round Music Making

After Doc left Virginia and returned to Indiana, music continued to be a dominant force in his life. When he wasn’t working at the Firestone Rubber Company, his days off were frequently spent “jamming” with local musicians who were constantly dropping by his house to do a little picking and singing.

Doc and Leota divorced in the early 1970’s. After Doc retired from Firestone in 1971, he returned to Scott County and he and Carl once again began to play together on a regular basis.

In 1973, Doc married the widow of Barnett McConnell, Sr., Georgia Hartsock McConnell, and they lived in the Addington Frame community near his birthplace.

In the early 1970s, Doc and Carl recorded an album at Johnny Cash's studio in Hendersonville, Tennessee. However, the mix was wrong with Carl's banjo being prominent and Doc's guitar in the background. It was not the signature "Doc and Carl" sound and they were not happy with the result. Doc, Carl and Mabel recorded a gospel album, but the master tape was lost when the producer's studio was flooded and the record was never issued.

During the next few years in the 1970s, Doc and Carl played and sang with Janette Carter at the Carter Fold; The Smokey Mountain Folk Festival in Cosby, Tennessee; The National Folk Festival at Wolf Trap Farm, Vienna, Virginia; The Cumberland Gap Jubilee, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee; Clinch Valley College, Wise, Virginia; Blue Grass Festival, Nora, Virginia; and numerous family reunions, homecomings, churches, and parties throughout Scott County.

They also performed on Jimmy Smith's television program on Channel 19, WKPT, in Kingsport on Cas Walker's television program on Channel 10, Knoxville, Tennessee. Carl's wife, Mabel, an excellent vocalist, appeared with Doc and Carl on most of these programs.

Doc and Carl's last paid performance together was likely the A. P. Carter Memorial Festival in Maces Springs, Virginia in August 4 - 6, 1977. Coincidentally, that marked the 50th anniversary of the Carter Family recordings with the Victor company.

The reader might wonder, ‘whatever happened to those border radio transcriptions’? Ron shares the history behind it, pieced together over the years.

“The most that Carl could learn from his research was that the Doc and Carl Border Radio show recordings had been worn out from the 20 years they were played. The discs were thrown out and used for roofing shingles by the local folks but some recordings did survive. Amazingly, some WRNL Richmond recordings from 1946 with Mother Maybelle, the Carter Sisters, and Doc and Carl were recovered from a garbage dumpster during a rain storm about year 2000, long after the families believed that all of the old Doc and Carl music had been lost forever. “

Ron sent along some other photos during our email exchanges. One included Doc and Carl performing at the Wolf Creek Trap Farm in 1973. He also sent along a photo of Carl at his ‘Scott Barber Shop’ from a 1988 Kingsport Times-News promotional ad for the paper.

The newspaper ad went on to quote Carl’s support of the paper.

“Of all the reading materials I’ve put out for customers here at “Scott Barber Shop,” I’d say the Times-News gets more attention than anything else.

Lots of customers read it while they're in the chair — sometimes that gets a little distracting — and about all of them read it at home.

Of course, I'm just as interested as any of our customers, why I've been reading the Times-News myself for several years. I start my day with breakfast and the Times-News. I'd say no matter what time of day you read, the Times-News cuts it."

Ron also wrote of some of the options or choices that Doc and Carl made along the way that might lead to 'what if' or was it the 'right choice'. Doc and Carl felt they let two opportunities slip away that could have significantly altered their careers. In 1939 and again in 1940 they were invited to make recordings for The Bluebird Recording Company, owned by RCA. They declined the invitation.

In the spring of 1940 they were invited to accompany Dick Hartman, originator and leader of the famous "Tennessee Ramblers," to Hollywood to appear in two movies; one with Gene Autry and one with Tex Ritter. Again they declined the invitation.

Carl had another brush with Hollywood in 1983 when a scene for the movie *The River* starring Mel Gibson and Sissy Spacek was filmed with Carl chasing away a drunk from in front of the barber shop. That scene ended up on the cutting room floor.

Had Doc and Carl pursued these opportunities their lives and those of their families may have been completely different. For good or worse, who can say?



The Addington Siblings
(Nine of Ten)

Photo courtesy of Ron McConnell, son of Carl McCannell

Last Chords

Doc's health began to fail in the late 1970s. When his wife, Georgia, died in 1981 he moved back to Indiana. Doc was living with his son Dale and his family in Bloomington, Indiana when he passed away on July 4, 1988. He was buried in the family cemetery near his boyhood home in the Addington Frame community, Nickelsville, Virginia.

Carl finally retired from the barber business in 1993 after he became too ill to work. He passed away on May 27, 1994 and is buried in the Holston View Cemetery in Weber City, Virginia.

Ron writes that Doc and Carl were humble men with kind and gentle personalities. They both loved life and they loved people and never spoke unkindly of anyone. In all their years of working and traveling together, they never had a serious disagreement. Many people throughout Virginia and numerous other States enjoyed the music of Doc and Carl over the years. Some of the "Doc and Carl" songs include:

- "Brown's Ferry Blues"
- "Blue Railroad Train"
- "Tell Me Which Way Red River Runs"
- "Salty Dog Blues"
- "The Weary Lonesome Blues"
- "Home Coming Time In Happy Valley"
- "Waiting the Boatman"
- "Precious Memories"

- “Just A Closer Walk with Thee”
- “Now I’m Coming Home”
- “I Have Found the Way”

Whenever these old songs are sung their fans will remember Doc and Carl, The Virginia Boys, and the entertainment and pleasure they brought to so many people.

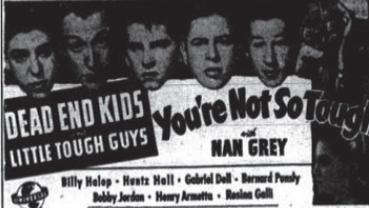
Since this is about a tale of two storied families, it is appropriate to document the other siblings in Doc and Carl’s family to show the family circle / ties.

The Ten Children of Hugh Jackson and Margaret Elizabeth Kilgore Addington

Names	Date of Birth	Date of Death
Addington, Dewey Lee (Duke)	12/21/1898	6/8/1993
McConnell, Ava Madge Addington	5/28/1902	12/20/1928
Addington, David Jesse (D. J.)	5/29/1903	5/24/1974
Addington, William Brooks (Willie/Sawcat)	5/2/1905	3/19/1971
Addington, Norma V Addington	2/18/1907	7/29/1979
Carter, Maybelle Addington	5/10/1909	10/23/1978

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ON THE SCREEN

"The Secret 4"

Based on the Edward Wallace Novel "Four Just Men"

The News Leader, Staunton, VA
September 3, 1940
First Stage Show to be broadcast in Staunton

Fuller, Lyna Muriel Addington	8/19/1911	3/21/1982
Addington Jr., Hugh Jack (Doc)	11/2/1913	7/4/1988
Addington, Milbern Brooks (Toobe)	12/28/1915	10/18/1988
Addington, Warren McConnell (Bug)	2/6/1918	5/11/1989

**The Seven Children of James Morris and Myrtle Lillie
Francisco McConnell**

Names	Date of Birth	Date of Death
Sweet, Edna Irene McConnell	9/19/1908	4/3/2000
Addington, Audrey Lee McConnell	9/21/1910	7/10/2003
McConnell, Carl Patton	1/24/1913	5/27/1994
McConnell, Veleta Jane	4/15/1915	5/22/2012
McConnell, James Kenneth	11/5/1917	4/15/1996
Moore, Geneva Mae McConnell	12/26/1919	1/25/2003
Thomas, Faye Marie McConnell	12/14/1925	2/12/1998

Credits and Sources

- Hillbilly-Music.com would like to thank Ron McConnell, son of Carl McConnell for contacting us and providing us with information and photos of Doc and Carl's career and of the Addington family, which included Mother Maybelle Addington Carter.
 - A Brief History Of My Family And An Autobiographical Sketch of My Musical Life; Carl P. McConnell; January 24, 1976; Gate City, VA
 - Doc and Carl, The Virginia Boys; By Ronald McConnell (Carl's Son) and Barnett W. McConnell, Jr.
 - Remembering Doc Addington; Barnette McConnell, Jr. (Doc's stepson)
 - Mabelle Addington Carter Siblings; By Ronald McConnell
- Wednesday Radio Program; May 8, 1949; Cincinnati Enquirer; Cincinnati, OH
- Lone Star; June 18, 1936; Kingsport Times; Kingsport, TN
- Snowflake, VA; August 5, 1936; Kingsport Times; Kingsport, TN
- Snowflake, VA; August 12, 1936; Kingsport Times; Kingsport, TN
- Nickelsville, VA; August 20, 1936; Kingsport Times; Kingsport, TN

- Two New Acts To Be Added By Old Dominion Barn Dance; November 29, 1946; The Times-Dispatch; Richmond, VA
- Home Folks On The Air; February 1939; Rural Radio Magazine; Rural Radio, Inc.; Nashville, TN

NOTE: I first received an email from Ron McConnell back in 2006. In 2009, our late ICMC friend, Dr. Wayne W. Daniel, told me of a site that had some information on Doc and Carl. But I set it aside. Finally, a few years ago, after about the 4th or 5th email from Ron, the time was right to tackle this essay. Perhaps it was meant to be to delay it until I could absorb it and take advantage of what I had learned in the years of research, attending ICMC in Nashville and getting to know people and the history better.

A “hidden legend” steps into the spotlight: Arnold Shultz Fund launched in honor of influential western Kentucky musician

by Nancy Cardwell

Arnold Shultz (1886–1931) was an African American musician from western Kentucky who had a profound influence on Bill Monroe’s music and the development of bluegrass music. “Arnold Shultz is long overdue for recognition because of his influence on bluegrass music,” said Dr. Richard Brown. “Arnold played with Bill Monroe’s fiddling uncle Pen Vandiver as a guitarist. Shultz was also a sought-after fiddler and later hired Bill to play guitar for him at dances. Bill Monroe told me about Arnold Shultz and their dance gigs more than 50 years ago, when I was in my twenties. The stories would always end with Bill saying, ‘Now, isn’t that something?’ Yes, it’s time to take Arnold Shultz, one of our hidden legends, out of obscurity and into the mainstream.”

Bill Monroe’s first paying gig as a 12-year-old musician was when one of his first musical heroes, Arnold Shultz, hired him to play guitar for a local dance. In Robert

Cantwell's book, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), Monroe is quoted as saying, "There's things in my music, you know, that come from Arnold Shultz—runs that I use a lot in my music, I don't say that I make them the same way that he could make them 'cause he was powerful with it. In following a fiddle piece or a breakdown, he used a pick and he could just run from one chord to another the prettiest you've ever heard.... Then he could play blues and I wanted some blues in my music too, you see."

After learning from local musicians and a few who were traveling through, Shultz became a road musician himself. It's likely that he heard and played with a variety of musicians who worked on the steamboat lines that cruised the Mississippi from St. Paul to New Orleans and the Ohio River from Cairo to Pittsburgh, docking at Evansville, Louisville, Cincinnati and Owensboro, Kentucky—the latter only a few miles from where he grew up. During his travels between 1919 and 1922, Shultz heard musicians like Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong and any number of Dixieland jazz, blues and ragtime musicians from St. Louis, Louisville, Cincinnati, and New Orleans.

In her chapter about Shultz in the anthology, *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* (Duke University Press, 2013), Erika Brady quotes an interview folklorist William E. Lightfoot did with Shultz's nephew, Malcolm Walker. "He traveled a whole lot. He would leave and we wouldn't know where he was. He didn't write or

anything. But, somehow or another, we'd all be around the house there and the first thing you knew, you'd hear that guitar. And you *knew* it the minute you heard it." Arnold would be in the area for a while, and then he'd take off for months at a time.

"He'd play as he walked away," Lightfoot asked, "and wander off?" "That's right; that's the way he was," Walker reported. "He'd just kind of ease on away."

"Whatever his sources," Lightfoot wrote in articles for the Oxford University Press and the African American National Biography, "Shultz assimilated the music of the 1920s—popular (both old standards and contemporary), blues, rags, religious music, old-time fiddle tunes and breakdowns, and jazz—as well as several instrumental techniques: flat-picking, finger style, and the open-tuned slide method on the guitar and both long-bow and short-bow fiddling styles. He became, in other words, a textbook example of a 'musicianer,' one who specializes in a wide variety of instrumental styles."

Born in February of 1886 in the Cromwell precinct of Kentucky's Ohio County near Rosine, Arnold was the eldest son of David and Elizabeth Shultz. His dad was a former slave, and his mom was just 16 years old. According to the 1900 census, Arnold could read and write at age 14 and was working in the Ohio County mines with his father. He picked up the guitar from an uncle and by the age of 25 was playing for square dances in a family band with his cousins, Ella (later Griffin) on fiddle, Luther on bass,

and Hardin on banjo. Various family members would fill in over the years. There were 12 children in Ella Griffin's family, and Arnold had several brothers and sisters.

He was never recorded, but thanks to the research of Lightfoot, Keith Lawrence, Charles Wolfe and Wendell Allen, who Erika Brady credits, we know that Arnold was a multi-instrumentalist, proficient on banjo, piano, and mandolin, as well as guitar. Bill Monroe's oldest brother, Birch, remembered Shultz as playing a "good, old-time fiddle" in a 1980 article by Lawrence for the *Messenger-Inquirer* in Owensboro, Kentucky.

Along with music and coal mining, Arnold worked as a deck hand on riverboats, traveling from the Ohio River in Kentucky down the Mississippi to New Orleans. By the late teens and early 1920s he was performing in hillbilly and Dixieland bands with both Black and white musicians, including a lead guitar job with a group headed by Forest "Boots" Fought, a 20-year-old drummer from McHenry, Kentucky. They played dances and some rather sketchy bars. In an interview with Lawrence, Faught remembered a place on the Green River that was built high on a bluff with a railing around it: "It wasn't nothing to see people sailing over that railing into the river." Faught had a five-piece band, and Arnold was the only Black musician. "Back then we would go to play for a dance and somebody would say, 'Hey, you've got a colored fiddler. We don't want that.' I'd say, "The reason I've got the man is because he's a good

musician. The color doesn't mean anything. You don't hear color. You hear music.'”

Arnold was a showman. He knew how to draw a crowd and keep their attention. Based upon a 1979 interview with fiddler Tex Atchison, William Lightfoot wrote: “As he got older, Shultz began to spend more time in the region, wandering around like a minstrel with his huge guitar attached to his shoulders with a rope. He played at street corners, railroad crossings, company stores, family gatherings, taverns and roadhouses, house parties, square dances (both Black and white), and churches. Atchison, the fiddler with the Prairie Ramblers [stars of Chicago's National Barn Dance in the 1930s] has said that when he was a young boy in Rosine his mother would give him a dime for the movies, which he would in turn give to Shultz to play him a tune. Shultz, who carried his guitar on his back, would execute a kind of twisting motion with his hips that brought the guitar around into playing position in one fluid move. Shultz's fiddling also impressed Atchison: ‘I picked up that [swing] stuff from Arnold Shultz, hearing him play that stuff. When I got to playing with the Prairie Ramblers, that would come back to me.... Arnold Shultz was fifty years ahead of his time.’”

On guitar, Atchison was mesmerized by Arnold's ability to produce rhythm, melody, bass, and harmony by using just a thumb and a forefinger. He liked to use a lot of extra “passing” chords and runs. No one played a song with more than two or three chords in that part of

the country before Arnold showed them how, according to Faught.

Faught told Lawrence that Shultz “was way ahead of his time on that guitar. It was just an old common flat-top guitar that probably didn’t cost over \$20. It was a large guitar and I’m sure that it had a round sound hole and the old-time pegs that hung down under it. He had an old grass rope for a cord around his neck.... It’s a shame we didn’t have sound systems back then. In the noise of a dance hall, if you got 40 feet from a band, you couldn’t hear them. If Arnold had gotten on records, he would have been in a class by himself.”

Nolin Baize ran the Gold Nugget coal mine in Horton, Kentucky, from 1925 to 1926 and called square dances around the area. Baize, who worked with Arnold day and night, told Lawrence: “He was a guitar picker; I’ll tell you. He could come nearer to making it sound like a piano than anybody I ever heard. He knew a lot of chords on that thing and where to put them in. He just used his fingers too. He could play anything you could name. If he heard a record, he could sit down and play it in a little while. But I never heard him sing a lick.”

In 1927 Shultz was playing in the Horton area with clawhammer banjo player Clarence Wilson and fiddler Pendleton Vandiver (Bill Monroe’s “Uncle Pen”). Wilson’s daughter, Flossie Hines, told Lawrence she remembered hearing them play at a store in Rosine. “Oh, he was a guitar player. He could play music. He was something else.

It's a pity that anybody that could play like that had to die. When you heard anybody else play after him it was just like sawing [wood] or something. It just sounded awful."

Shultz is credited by some researchers as an early influence on the development of Travis-style fingerpicked guitar. Guitarist Mose Rager taught Ike Everly (the father of the Everly Brothers), who then taught Merle Travis, who influenced Chet Atkins. Rager said he couldn't remember ever seeing Arnold Shultz but that his music influenced him anyway. "Kennedy Jones, the man that taught me to play, learned a lot of chords from Arnold Shultz," Rager said. "He knew Arnold very well. I used to hear him talk about him. The thumb-pick style was Jones's innovation. Arnold played with his thumb and finger. He didn't have no (thumb) pick." Bill Monroe remembered the same thing, adding that Arnold Shultz would sometimes use the edge of his pocketknife to play slide guitar.

Shultz lived in a two-room house in Coal Bank Hollow near Horton, Kentucky. He never married. He was known to make home brew. Photos of Arnold are rare. His cousin, Ellie, told Lawrence he didn't like to have his picture taken. "He said if he ever did any devilment, he could get away and nobody could find him," she laughed. Shultz was a short man, a little overweight, and good looking. People commented on what a nice person he was. He always wore a black coat and a big black hat, and he hung it on the back of a cane back chair when he sat down to play the fiddle, according to Boots Faught.

Shultz performed with the (all-Black) Walter Taylor Band in the late 1920s, but by 1931 he was living with the family of a butcher named Beecher Carson in Butler County, playing music out of Morgantown, Kentucky. In April 1931 Arnold spent a week in Prentiss, Kentucky, with his relatives, leaving on a Saturday night with three other musicians to play for a dance in Morgantown. “That’s the night they said he got some poison in his whiskey,” Ellie Griffin told Lawrence in 1980. “Yes sir, I do think he was (murdered). He drank whiskey all the time before that and he never got sick over it. He drank that and he took sick and died. People were bragging on Arnold for playing better than the (other musicians) did. So they thought they’d fix Arnold and put him out of the way — and they did. He drank that whiskey and died.”

According to medical records, Arnold Shultz died at 45 of a mitral lesion in his heart. He was buried in an unmarked grave in a Black cemetery, now called the Bell Street Cemetery in Morgantown. The Great Depression was going on, and his relatives didn’t know about his death until after he was buried. The city of Morgantown erected a grave marker for Shultz on May 28, 1994, with the month and year of his birth and death, a carving of a guitar in the stone, and the lines: “He was famous for his guitar picking” and “Dedicated to thumb picking and finger cording.”

Shultz was inducted into the National Thumb Pickers Hall of Fame in Drakesboro, Kentucky, in 1998 for his contributions to the Travis guitar style, but he has not yet

been recognized for his contributions to western swing, bluegrass music, or (indirectly) rock ‘n’ roll – where Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly both credited Bill Monroe as a direct influence on their styles.

Almost 90 years after his death, fans and musicians in western Kentucky still remember Arnold Shultz’s wildly impressive and widely influential music. Those of us who study him wonder what he could have accomplished if he had lived longer than a short 45 years, and sadly wish for recordings that were never made. In Keith Lawrence’s 1980 article, Wendell Allen said: “Little did Arnold Shultz know that his guitar style and musical contribution to Bill and Charlie Monroe and others would one day be the object of intense research by writers, music scholars and historians from Washington, Nashville, New York, and other faraway places, seeking insight into the self-taught musical abilities of one Black man in the country villages of Ohio County.”

In July 2020, the IBMA Foundation established the Arnold Shultz Fund to support activities increasing participation of people of color in bluegrass music. Back in 2017, Rhiannon Giddens, in a keynote address at the IBMA Business Conference in Raleigh, had challenged the bluegrass music community to “tear down those artificial divisions and let bluegrass and string band music be the welcoming place that it has, and can be, and, in more and more places. The idea for the fund grew out of an online conversation among alumni of IBMA’s Leadership Bluegrass program. In less than two months the Shultz Fund

had raised more than \$31,000, thanks to the enthusiastic support of the bluegrass community—including a major unsolicited gift from banjo player/comedian Steve Martin. A group of Denver, Colorado-based musicians organized a June 26 live-streamed concert with a portion of proceeds donated to the Arnold Shultz Fund. Band members included Andy Hall and Chris Pandolfi (The Infamous Stringdusters), Paul Hoffman (Greensky Bluegrass), Greg Garrison (Leftover Salmon), and flatpicking champion Tyler Grant.

Arnold Shultz Fund co-chairs Richard S. Brown, DMD and Neil V. Rosenberg will appoint an advisory committee which will make decisions about how donations to the fund will be used. Examples might include scholarships (college, workshops, camps, individual instruction, or Leadership Bluegrass); awards; projects; or programs.

Dr. Brown is a nationally known Cambridge, Massachusetts-based mandolinist in the Bill Monroe style, a member of the IBMA Foundation's board of directors, and an African American. Dr. Rosenberg is a noted bluegrass historian, author, banjoist, and Bluegrass Hall of Fame member who taught Folklore from 1968-2004 at Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John's, Atlantic Canada's largest university. Two more members have been appointed to the committee: Dr. Erika Brady, a professor in the Department of Folklore and Anthropology at Western Kentucky University, and Trisha Tubbs, former director of SoftResources LLC in the Seattle area, the

2011-19 facilitator of the Leadership Bluegrass program, producer of the IBMA Momentum Awards show, and a longtime member of the Wintergrass production team. Tubbs is originally from Hawaii.

“We have to see where bluegrass music can go, where it hasn’t gone before,” Dr. Rosenberg said, “by paying attention to people who are sometimes seen as on the fringe or outsiders. The Arnold Shultz Fund seeks to welcome people of color into bluegrass. As a musician I’ve always appreciated the progressive nature of this music. It’s never the same. Here’s an important opportunity for us to develop, to take new directions.”

Bluegrass has not forgotten Arnold Shultz, and the IBMA Foundation is proud to honor his name with the creation of a new fund that has the potential to welcome a more racially diverse group of musicians and fans into our community. Some of us may have forgotten or never knew, but people of color were a part of the family from the beginning, according to Bill Monroe. And who wants to argue with Bill Monroe? Certainly not this writer.

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Bios

Mikael Backman started playing harmonica in the late 1980's. In 1995 he joined blues-band Ramblin' Minds and has been with them ever since, releasing six albums and touring extensively. Mikael took his Masters of Education in 2006 and a Masters of Music Performance in 2017. Since 2019 Mikael has been a PhD student in Music Performance at the School of Music in Pitee, Lulee University of Technology. His PhD project is focused on the deliberate transformation of a performer's voice through the process of transcription and imitation. In 2017 Mikael was one of sixteen presenters at the World Harmonica Festival in Trossingen, Germany. In August 2020, Mikael was one of the featured performers at the annual SPAH (the Society for the Preservation and Advancement of the Harmonica) convention.

Hannah Blackwell is a citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. She recently completed her PhD at the University of Oklahoma, and is currently working in grants serving underrepresented populations. Her research interests include country music, as well as, Indigenous, material, class, and rural cultures.

Nancy Cardwell is originally from the Missouri Ozarks. She grew up in a family bluegrass/old-time/gospel band. She is the author of a book published by ABC-CLIO/Praeger about Dolly Parton's songwriting and has written about music for a number of publications since the late 1970s. Cardwell served on staff with the International Bluegrass Music Association for 20 years, and she is the current executive director of the IBMA Foundation, the philanthropic organization that supports programs and initiatives that foster the future of bluegrass music. She plays acoustic bass, guitar, hammered dulcimer, writes songs, and sings. Nancy is the 2021 recipient of IBMA's Distinguished Achievement Award, the 2006 Charlie Lamb Award for Excellence in Country Music Journalism, and a Kentucky Colonel. She makes her home in Burlington, North Carolina.

Guy Cundell is a composer, educator, and picker from South Australia. A self-taught guitarist, he began a music career in the mid 1980s as a performer and arranger. Completing a music degree majoring in composition in 1994, he subsequently lectured in music at Adelaide University and the South Australian Technical and Further Education college, eventually

taking the role of Principal Lecturer for Performing Arts at the Adelaide College of the Arts. His interest in steel guitar was sparked in the 1980s by David Lindley, Ry Cooder, and Lowell George. After experiencing the frustrations of pedal steel guitar taken on as an instrument double, Guy went back to basics, exploring the origins of the non-pedal instrument as a means of building technique. Captivated by the music of Mike Auldridge, Jerry Douglas and Earl “Joaquin” Murphey, and Hawaiian master Sol Ho’opi’I, his informal study became research projects, first a Master’s dissertation on the early history of the instrument, followed by a doctoral study on the steel guitar in western swing. Retired from teaching, Guy continues to compose, arrange and gig occasionally while continuing to study the steel guitar in its various forms.

Don Cusic is Curb Professor of Music Industry History and Professor of Music Business at Belmont University in Nashville. He is the author of over 30 books and his songs have been recorded by Bobby Bare, Ray Stevens, Jeannie Seely, Jim Ed Brown and others. Cusic is co-host with James Akenson and Greg Reisch of the annual International

Country Music Conference held at Belmont University the weekend after Memorial Day. Linda J. Daniel was born on a farm on Daniel Road in Southwestern Ontario where her love for country music began. While teaching elementary school, she earned a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Toronto with a dissertation entitled *Singing Out! Canadian Women in Country Music*. She has been published in *The Women of Country Music: A Reader* in addition to the *Grove Dictionary of American Music, Second Edition*. She has presented several papers on Canadian country music artists at the International Country Music Conference, Belmont University, Nashville, as well as contributing articles to the *International Country Music Journal*. Recently, she became a Contributing Editor of internationalcountrymusic.net. She resides in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

Tim Dodge has served as History and Political Science Librarian at Auburn University since 1992. He holds a Ph.D. in History (University of New Hampshire) and Master of Library Science (Columbia University). His most recent published books are *Rhythm and Blues Goes Calypso* (Lexington Books, 2019) and *The School of Arizona Dranes: Gospel Music Pioneer*

(same, 2013). With radio experience dating back to 1975, Dodge has been broadcasting the Golden Oldies on WEGE—Auburn, Ala FM 91.1 since 1998. He also enjoys playing boogie woogie, blues, gospel and country piano.

Carl Eddy is an independent writer, singer-songwriter-guitarist, and learning and development consultant. His paper, *The Absurdity and Irony of the Hillbilly Shakespeare* was published in the *2018 International Country Music Journal* (Don Cusic, Editor, Brackish Publishing, 2018). His essay, “The Hillbilly Shakespeare,” and accompanying monthly highlights appeared in the 2020 Hank Williams Museum calendar, *The Hillbilly Shakespeare: Poet of the People*. Carl is also the host of WXRL Radio’s (WXRL.com) annual Hank Williams tribute. He lives in Lancaster, NY and welcomes readers’ comments at Phantom309@rochester.rr.com.

Kathryn “Kitty” Ledbetter is Professor Emerti at Texas State University. She is the author of five books and many scholarly articles and book chapters. Before entering academia she was a country music disc jockey for 25 years at radio stations in Missouri, Texas, Louisiana

and North Carolina. She is a native of Springfield, Missouri

Rissi Palmer is a recording artist and host of Apple Music Country's "Color Me Country Radio with Rissi Palmer. She was in the documentary "Waiting in the Wings: African Americans in Country Music."

Dave Sichak is a semi-retired auditor (both financial and Information Technology). He scratched an itch back in April, 2000 to use technology to document country music's history. Over 67,000 pages of country music history from old publications in his collection have been digitized along with a searchable database. He is a voting member of the CMA and ACM. His itch has resulted in many artists and families sharing their history, a source of obituaries, online auction references and help to other writers and researchers. That itch in 2000 resulted in www.hillbilly-music.com

Frankie Staton is a singer, songwriter and producer who has been involved with promoting African-American artists in country music.

Kenichi Yamaguchi graduated from the mechanical engineering department of Gifu National College of Technology. He worked

at a Subsidiary Company of Engine Parts in Toyota City for over 40 years as a design engineer and finally as the senior managing director. Yamaguchi has given presentations at the Bluegrass Music Symposium at Western Kentucky University and at the International Country Music Conference six times. He has contributed to *Moon Shiner*, a monthly Japanese bluegrass journal many times.