



40th Annual International Country Music Conference

Belmont University
Nashville, Tennessee

30 May - 1 June, 2024

THURSDAY 30 MAY 2024

Pre Keynote Sessions

10:00AM REGISTRATION OPENS

Bring your instrument. Pick a little if you will.

11:45 AM - 1:00 PM LUNCH

Luncheon Talk: "The Hank Williams Era"

Dr. Don Cusic. Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM DR. PAULA BISHOP, PRESIDING

Dr. Holly Riley. University of Montana. Missoula, Montana.

"The Sounds, Statements, and Symbols of Leaving Country Music."

Taylor Swift, Kacey Musgraves, and now Maren Morris are three stars with one thing in common: at critical points in their careers, they "left" country music. I examine the exits of these and other formerly-country artists through multiple lenses: the sonic differences between the same artists in multiple genres of their careers, the lexicon used to describe an artist's "getting the hell out of country music," and the visual, political, and aesthetic symbols used to define being either 'authentically' country or decidedly not. I argue that many artists use tools such as visual and social cues, costumes, lyrical tropes, social media posts, and vocal aesthetic as a primary factor in demonstrating what is often promoted as an aural shift. Through this inquiry, I bring up questions of gender and agency, asking whether or not this door of country music is "Exit Only" for contemporary female artists of a certain level of fame, and how the sonic freedom of genre-blending is afforded more easily to artists already born into the hegemonic demographic categories that dominate the genre's airwaves.

Dr. T. Alan Holmes. East Tennessee State University. Johnson City, Tennessee.

"Wicked Feleena": Marty Robbins Revises His Most Famous Story."

Marty Robbins' "El Paso" (1959) reached the top of the country and pop charts with its first-person account of a young cowboy who kills a rival in jealousy over the attention of Feleena, a dancer in an El Paso cantina. Robbins returned a generation later to Feleena and the unnamed cowboy in his last original number-one hit, 1976's "El Paso," another first-person account where a traveler who has heard the song of the ill-fated couple speculates what his personal connection might be to them. However, Robbins had released a song that provides significant backstory to his El Paso legend. "Feleena (From El Paso)," from the 1965 LP, *The Drifter*, offers through third-person lyrics a more detailed explanation of Feleena's past and her relationship to the young cowboy. As a result, Marty Robbins' El Paso Trilogy contradicts itself. "Feleena" reveals how the unnamed cowboy and the unnamed traveler interpret themselves as romantic figures.

Dilan Bat-haee. University of Alabama. Tuscaloosa, Alabama. "I Sang Dixie: Confederate Memory in Classic Country and Bluegrass Music."

This presentation highlights how classic country and bluegrass musicians sang about the Confederacy, its leaders, and broader themes surrounding the Civil War and its memory. It examines how the Lost Cause is tied to country music and how some country music echoes Lost Cause sentiments. It also calls attention to how themes of nostalgia, defeat, and glorification (of individuals) are important attributes of both country music and Lost Cause mythology respectively. In addition to analysis of a plethora of country songs featuring Civil War-themed lyricism, this study includes oral history interviews with country and bluegrass legends (Rhonda Vincent, Larry

Sparks, Tim O'Brien, Pete Anderson, and Peter Wernick) in which the artists discuss the role of Civil War music in their own careers. This presentation builds on previous scholarship by synthesizing discourse on nostalgia and defeat, while establishing the concept of glorification as a further connection between country music and the Lost Cause.

2:45 PM - 3:15 PM BREAK

3:15 PM - 4:15 PM

**Dr. Kate Ngai. Glasgow Caledonian University. Glasgow, Scotland. UK.
"Beyond Charley Pride: Examining the Forgotten Black Women in Country Music."**

The massive success of Charley Pride in the mid-1960s, and the impressive achievements of Freddy Fender, and Johnny Rodriguez, suggests that the audience for country music was more diverse than the industry envisioned; and even ready to embrace a wider variety of non-white artists (Martinez, 2020). During this time a handful of Black female vocalists including La Melle Prince, Lenora Ross, Ruby Falls, Virginia Kirby, and Barbara Cooper, all tried to claim the title of the 'distaff to Charley Pride' (O'Donnell, 1976; 1975). While previous scholarship fittingly focuses on Linda Martell, country music's highest charting Black woman, very little explores these overlooked pioneers. La Melle Prince became the first Black woman signed to a major label, while Ruby Falls still holds the record for most charted songs by a solo Black female country artist. Examining these forgotten women's experiences sheds light on the struggle for diversity in country music, both then and now. Although decades have passed, present-day Black women artists still face intersectional hurdles. The erased legacy of these women poignantly symbolizes the ongoing need to dismantle systemic inequalities – and to explore overlooked stories that reflect the continuing effort still needed to make country music more inclusive.

**Emma Hathaway Bruce. Florida State University. Tallahassee, Florida.
"You're Just Visiting the Way I Live": Patsy Cline, Class & Queerness in Desert Hearts."**

In Donna Deitch's cult classic *Desert Hearts* (1985), two women—a visiting university professor and a local casino worker—fall in love on Nevada dude ranch. The film's soundtrack, composed of 1950s country and rockabilly hits, features two songs by Patsy Cline. Drawing from recent work on queerness, class, rurality, and country music, this paper considers the discursive function of Cline's song "Crazy" within the film. It finds that while *Desert Hearts'* narrative arc does not offer insight into how class, rurality, and queerness interlock, Cline's music, deployed within the film, has the effect of naturalizing queer desire to the film's rural setting. In doing so, it attempts to locate an early example of a trend in filmic representation scholars of queerness and country music have observed and thus seeks to offer further insight into queerness' potential to both extend and disrupt the meanings of country music in popular culture.

4:15 PM - 4:30 PM BREAK

4:30 PM - 5:30 PM

Will Day. JMC Academy. Brisbane, Queensland. Australia. "Australian Country MusicAca: A Changing Landscape in Production Techniques."

Since its emergence in the 1930s, Australian country music has had a unique and defined sound, as exemplified by artists such as Smoky Dawson, Tex Morton and Slim Dusty. As anyone with a love for country music knows, it always starts with the song and the story, and this is no different in

Australia. The Australian country song has traditionally been inspired by way of life and landscape. In today's scene, this is generally still prevalent. Over the last several decades, however, sound production techniques have evolved significantly thanks to advancements in technology. Modern pop/rock production techniques are now frequently employed by Australian artists to create a modern country sound. The use of these modern production elements has been integral in my own work as an Australian country music recording and touring artist. In this paper, I explore the role of these advancements on Australian country music artists aiming to reach international markets. My examination will consider whether these developments have impacted the identifiable character of Australian country music.

Brian Peterson. Shasta College. Chico, California. "Country Collaboration and Close Harmony Crossover: The Andrews Sisters, Ernest Tubb, and the Decca Sides of 1949."

The Andrews Sisters—LaVerne (1911-1967), Maxene (1916-1995), and Patty (1918-2013), endure as a signature sound of the World War II era in American popular music. Their distinct vocal harmonization, strong stage performance, and active participation in the United Service Organization (USO) in support of military personnel contributed to their high visibility and market success. Decca Records, eager to sustain the commercial viability of the trio in the postwar period, paired the sisters with another well-known star on the label's talent roster: country artist Ernest Tubb (1914-1984). The session (February 15, 1949) produced a single 45 RPM with two sides, "I'm Bitin' My Fingernails and Thinking of You" (24592A, L-4989) and "Don't Rob Another Man's Castle" (24592B, L-4897). This paper explores critically how these two songs (each charted in 1949) exhibit country music conventions and performance practices along with sonic outcomes reflective of the prevailing mainstream/popular style. To what extent do these sides tend toward or away from country? How does this singular, historical collaboration between these artists of the same company engage larger themes of authenticity and market commerce in the recording and presentation of country music?

5:30 PM REGISTRATION & SOCIAL HOUR

Bring your instrument.

6:30 - 8:30 PM DR. TRAVIS D. STIMELING MEMORIAL KEYNOTE

Another Country: Gender, Voice, and Songwriting at Country Music's Crossroads

In November 2023 we lost our dear friend, mentor and long-time ICMC member Dr. Travis D. Stimeling. This year's keynote celebrates their career and contributions to country music scholarship through two presentations by former advisees and colleagues that engage with key writings by Travis, and offer models for extending their research.

Engaging the 2016 chapter "Taylor Swift's 'Pitch Problem' and the Place of Adolescent Girls in Country Music", **Dr. Phoebe Hughes** explores how Taylor Swift's and Carrie Underwood's first major radio singles employ contrasting modes of songwriting and country vocality. Drawing from *Opioid Epidemic in US Culture: Expression, Art, and Politics in an Age of Addiction* and Travis' work on inclusive dance calling practices, **Dr. Jacob Kopcienski** examines how Adeem the Artist uses narrative, sound, and voice to work within and against norms of southern and Appalachian regional culture in country music. In a session whose title nods to [Karen Pittleman's work](#), these papers consider the complex ways that artists navigate contested cultural spaces from mainstream commercial country music to regional music and activist practices.

FRIDAY 31 MAY 2024

7:30AM REGISTRATION & BREAKFAST

Bring your instrument. Pick a little if you will.

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM DR. RENE RODGERS, PRESIDING

**Dr. Gregory Hansen. Arkansas State University. Jonesboro, Arkansas.
“Richard Seaman’s Tall Tales, “Fisherman’s Luck,” and Ethnopoetics.**

Dorsey Dixon released his song “Fisherman’s Luck” in 1938 with his brother, Howard. This Dixon Brothers’ tune remains a clever novelty song in country music. The song actually has older roots as a tall tale. Lowell Thomas included the tale in his 1931 compilation under the title “The Convivial Snake.” The story also is presented in a range of collections of Florida folklife, and it was told by storytellers into the 21st century. An excellent rendition of the “Convivial Snake” was told by the Florida Folk Heritage Award winner, Richard Seaman, who was recognized by the State of Florida for his fiddling and storytelling. The use of ethnopoetic interpretation as well as the application of performance theory within the study of folklore elucidates subtle qualities in the aesthetics of storytelling that illustrate connections between musical form and the nuanced artistry of Seaman’s storytelling.

**Dr. Paula Bishop. Bridgewater State University. Bridgewater, Massachusetts.
“Country Music Month: Language, Imagery, and Power.”**

Beginning in 1964, the US Congress and/or President regularly designated October as Country Music Month. Their proclamations used language and imagery that mirrored the nostalgia employed in the lyrics, marketing materials, and iconography of country music, while glossing over oppressive power structures of that past. Country music’s nostalgic imagery, and indeed the genre itself, became a shorthand for nostalgia for the “good old days.” Politicians—both Democrat and Republican—used the nostalgia of, for, and in country music to construct and uphold a vision of a particular past as a tool to capture the attention of voters. For the country music industry, a national country music month gave the industry a stamp of legitimacy, one they could point to as needed. Being legitimized by presidents and the Congress likely encouraged the country music industry to preserve its nostalgic viewpoint.

9:30 AM - 9:45 AM BREAK

9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

Dr. Stan Erraught. University of Leeds. Leeds, United Kingdom. “Back Where We’ve Never Been: Daniel O’Donnell and the Country ‘n’ Irish Imaginary.”

Country ‘n’ Irish was a marriage of ‘soft’ mainstream country music and specifically Irish themes, inflected with Irish ‘folk’ instrumentation adopted from the céilí bands that preceded the showbands in the ballrooms that skirted small towns and villages in Ireland from the 1950s to the 1970s. 1 The ballrooms that nurtured country ‘n’ Irish are long gone, but the form survives in the music of Daniel O’Donnell and younger exponents such as Nathan Carter. I argue that this survival is not symptomatic of a regression to country idiocy, but, in fact, a distinctively modern inflection of the earlier form, one that exploits a kind of nostalgia for nostalgia.

Dr. Kris McCusker. Middle Tennessee State University. Murfreesboro, Tennessee. "You Can Have Him, Jolene": Black Female Musicians and Their Dolly Parton Covers.

This paper will examine the Black musicians who have covered Dolly's songs. So far, I have found nearly three dozen covers from Dolly's oeuvre, from artists as diverse as Chapel Hart to Tina Turner and Meshell Ndegeocello to Beyonce, Gloria Gaynor and (most obviously) Whitney Houston. I have found that when Black women cover Dolly, they are staking a broader claim to being country musicians in a genre that has erased them. Dolly makes this possible because of her fluid representations of gender that merges the trashy whore and the sentimental mother (a key stage trope that helped secure the genre's popularity in the 1930s), ably described by scholar Leigh Edwards. But Black women especially bring a real gut check to the genre in ways that unmask country music's nostalgia, forcing us to ask was the past really that great? Certainly, when examining the sentimental mother, one must consider that there was nothing sentimental about being a Black mother, who long have had higher rates of maternal mortality and poverty than white women. These Dolly covers have, in turn, changed how we see her music, particularly in pseudo covers by groups like Chapel Hart, who cheekily tell Jolene to keep the cheating spouse.

11:00 AM CHARLES K. WOLFE MEMORIAL PANEL DISCUSSION

Honoring legacy through (re)building museum practice

Angela Stefano Zimmer of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, **Rene Rodgers** of the Birthplace of Country Music Museum in Bristol and **Bryan Pierce** of the National Museum of African American Music will join us for an important discussion on the ongoing work these museums are doing to highlight the legacy of Black music and musicians in the Country music industry. Learn about their strategies for (re)building museum exhibits, and find out how they engage the community through public programming and educational outreach activities!

12:00 PM AWARDS LUNCHEON

The Chet Flippo Award for Excellence in Country Music Journalism.
Honoree: **Scott B. Bomar**

The Belmont University Curb Music Industry Award for Country Music Book of the Year.
Honoree: **Country & Midwestern: Chicago in the History of Country Music and the Folk Revival** by **Mark Guarino**

1:30 PM - 3:00 PM DR. KRIS MCCUSKER, PRESIDING

Samuel Parler. Baylor University. Waco, Texas "Jazz Historiography and Western Swing"

Developed by white Texas musicians in the 1930s, western swing combines elements of early country music and jazz. Since the 1970s, western swing has endured through the work of revivalist musicians, dance societies, and historians. These groups often advocate for western swing's status as jazz, citing stylistic elements like improvisation. However, jazz historiography has largely ignored western swing. This paper examines the conflicting ideological motivations for western swing's inclusion or exclusion within jazz histories. While both sides agree on jazz's stylistic tenets and artistic cachet, western swing contradicts dominant jazz discourses regarding race, class, and region. Contemporary assertions of western swing as jazz echo early performers by refuting the working-class stigma attached to country music. Yet these assertions now operate

anachronistically, claiming the prestige that jazz has accrued over the past seventy years while marginalizing the cultural and racial politics that go with it.

Archival interviews, monographs, and fan newsletters establish western swing's jazz aspirations. Historians like Charles Townsend and Jean Boyd interviewed dozens of western swing musicians and quoted them liberally, although sometimes critically, in biographies. Fan communities like the Western Swing Society likewise promote a jazz identity to bolster the music's respectability. I weigh these claims against the cultural turn in jazz historiography as exemplified by scholars like Lawrence Levine and Ingrid Monson. Occasional discussion of western swing in jazz monographs, such as Gunther Schuller's "The Swing Era," suggests the genre's incompatibility within jazz history's larger sociopolitical frameworks. This tension thus illuminates the ever-shifting stakes of genre boundaries.

Dr. Rene Rodgers and Dr. Julia Underkoffler. Birthplace of Country Music Museum. Bristol, Virginia. "Piecing Together an Audio Puzzle: Utilizing Cutting-Edge Technology to Recover a Broadcast from Our Past."

In early 2017 a donation of a badly delaminating transcription disc that was found in the garbage was offered to the Birthplace of Country Music Museum. The label indicated that the audio content was of bluegrass pioneers the The Stanley Brothers & the Clinch Mountain Boys from a local radio show called Farm and Fun Time that ran from the late 1940s through the 1950s. Through a crowd-sourced win of grant money, the museum was able to work with the Northeast Document Conservation Center to access and preserve the sonic content of this disc, despite its state of deterioration. The audio results are amazing and surpassed expectations, and the disc and its contents are now an important part of the museum's collections. This presentation will share the story of the disc's discovery and restoration, exploring how audio works, the advances in preservation technology, and the impact of this type of work.

Dr. Charlie B. Dahan and Chris Richardson. King Records Legacy Foundation and Zero to 180 Music Blog "Henry Glover: The Musical Alchemist of King Records."

One of Syd Nathan's earliest hires for this new Cincinnati label in the late 1940s was Henry Glover to work as King Record's staff songwriter, producer, and A&R person. Glover became one of the first African American executives in the record business and at King he produced, arranged, and composed many R&B and country classics. Because of his musical prowess, Glover often rearranged country songs for the R&B audience and vice versa. Glover shaped the "country boogie" sound with the Delmore Brothers that heavily influenced rockabilly and rock in the 1950s. Some of the notable artists Glover produced at King include the Delmore Brothers, Little Willie John, Bullmoose Jackson, Moon Mullican, Grandpa Jones, Hank Ballard, and Bill Doggett. Glover told Billboard magazine, "We at King worked with white country singers as well as black R&B artists. It seemed a natural thing to cross boundary lines. We weren't afraid of intermarriages." Glover's work helped King Records become one of the largest independent record labels in the 1950s.

3:00 PM - 3:30 PM BREAK

3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

LaDawn Fuhr. Arkansas State University. Jonesboro, Arkansas. "Six Degrees of Cash and Chips: Exploring the Musical Alliance of Johnny Cash and Chips Moman."

Johnny Cash and Chips Moman were quite similar. Both had humble beginnings in small Southern towns. Both were transfixed by the music coming out of the all-important home radio.

Both received their first guitars, as children, from their mothers. Both moved to music Mecca, Memphis, to pursue their shared musical dreams, and both would prove to be extremely talented. But their paths would not cross professionally for multiple decades.

In 1984, Columbia records secured Chips Moman to produce Johnny Cash's next album. Chips was riding high on country music success from his work with Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Tammy Wynette, and others. The pairing was serendipitous, garnering five albums, television specials, the making of a super group, a Memphis homecoming, a Grammy, and more. Moman's alliance with Cash would help smooth the rocky road that would put Cash on the path to an incredible career resurgence, in what would be his final musical hooray. This piece will examine the relationship between the Man in Black and the Do Right Man, and their combined impact on country music.

Dr. Kitty Ledbetter. Texas State University. San Marcos, Texas and Mr. Scott Foster Siman. "A Relationship Made in the Ozarks: Si Siman and Wayne Carson."

Hit songwriter Wayne Carson was only eight years old when he claimed Springfield, Missouri music publisher and television producer Si Siman as his manager. Carson's parents were performers Odie and Olivia Head, better known during the 1940s as Shorty and Sue Thompson on KWTO radio in Springfield, where Siman worked in promotions and eventually produced the first live continuous network country music television show, ABC's *Ozark Jubilee*.

Their first break came with Carson's #1 RCA single for Eddy Arnold in 1966, "Somebody Like Me." A few months later Carson's career took a decidedly upward turn when his song "The Letter" was recorded by the Box Tops and became an international hit in 1967. The partnership continued on its successful drive throughout the 1970s with hits by Gary Stewart such as "Drinkin' Thing," "She's Actin' Single (I'm Drinkin' Doubles)," "Whiskey Trip," and "Out of Hand," followed by Conway Twitty's "I See the Want To in Your Eyes." But the best was yet to come when Willie Nelson recorded Carson's "Always on My Mind" in 1982.

Our presentation will be a history of Siman and Carson's success, along with a series of anecdotes from Si Siman's son Scott.

6:00 PM SPECIAL CONFERENCE EVENT

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

Latino Influence on Country Music

Latino culture has long influenced Country music from the music to the wardrobe to the myths. Artist Manager and Consultant **Rick Rodriguez** and Country artist **Orlando Mendez** join us for a panel celebrating that influence, touching on pivotal moments in the industry development, the contributions of Latino artists and the role of language and different regional styles to the evolving sound of the music, and sharing contemporary initiatives to spotlight this rich history. Following the discussion, Orlando Mendez will perform a selection of songs.. Moderated by **Dr. Greg Reish**, Director of Center for Popular Music

SATURDAY 1 JUNE 2024

7:30 AM REGISTRATION & BREAKFAST
Bring your instrument. Pick a little if you will.

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM DR. HOLLY RILEY, PRESIDING

Dr. Jim Clark. Barton College. Wilson, North Carolina. ““A Bizarre Collection of the Most Unusual Songs”: Taking Stock of John D. Loudermilk as Performer and Songwriter.”

In some ways, Durham, North Carolina, native John D. Loudermilk can be seen as the consummate Music City insider, having built a highly successful songwriting career during the heyday of “The Nashville Sound” and the subsequent “Countryopolitan” style. His songs provided big hits for such country music stars as George Hamilton IV, Johnny Tillotson, the Everly Brothers, Chet Atkins and Boots Randolph, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Glen Campbell, Jerry Lee Lewis, Crystal Gayle, Skeeter Davis, and Little Jimmy Dickens. However, much like Roger Miller and Ray Stevens, Loudermilk was far more eclectic, eccentric, and iconoclastic than your typical Music Row songwriter, and also provided hits for rock and pop artists such as Marianne Faithful, Paul Revere & the Raiders, The Blues Magoos, Eric Burdon & War, Jefferson Airplane, Lou Rawls, and David Lee Roth. I will briefly explore Loudermilk’s early career as a performer (both as “Johnny Dee” and under his own name), and then focus on Loudermilk’s eclectic career as a respected, if unique, Nashville songwriter.

**Dr. Mike Longan. Valparaiso University. Valparaiso, Indiana.
“The Changing Nature of Nature in Country Music.”**

Despite the fact that country music is inspired by rural places and lives lived close to nature, very few mainstream country songs seem to be about nature and even fewer address environmental issues. This presentation reviews several discourses of nature in country music. Nature has traditionally entered country music indirectly through ideas about agrarianism, rurality, and escape from modern life. A discourse of wild nature associated with Colorado’s mountains appeared in the 1970s and is potentially being revived today. Changing rural lifestyles have influenced recreational images of nature. Emerging demands for greater inclusion in country music may be altering the way that the genre envisions nature. Contrary to popular perceptions, country music is not anti-environmental, but instead offers an alternative, environmental ethic. Awakening ourselves to the latent environmentalism in country music can help us to imagine new ways of living and working with nature.

9:30 AM - 9:45 AM BREAK

9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

Dr. Randall D. Williams and Dr. James E. Akenson. Tennessee Tech University. Cookeville, Tennessee, Mr. Andrew K. Smith. Independent Scholar. Hobart, Tasmania. Australia. “The Sacred and Profane: Post 1957 Country Music.”

The Sacred and Profane represents a dichotomy common in all cultures, but is particularly pronounced in the Evangelical Protestant Christian culture of the U.S. South. Country Music developed with deep roots in the U.S. South. The metaphorically and literally important 1927 Bristol

Sessions, the *Big Bang of Country Music*, reflected the Sacred and Profane dichotomy in the music and the personae of The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers, *The Father of Country Music*. This discussion extends the Sacred and Profane discussion to contemporary Country Music songs since the 1957 development of *The Nashville Sound*. Into the third decade of the twenty-first century artists from Keith Urban, Megan Moroney, Tiera Kennedy, Amanda Kate Ellis, and Sophia Scott offer Sacred and Profane tensions the likes of "Jesus, My Mama, My Therapist," and "Tequila and Jesus," and "Boots, Jeans, and Jesus." The discussion links authenticity, existentialism, historical memory, and the Sacred and Profane from their seemingly disparate roots to form a decentered unity.

Dr. Taylor Atchley. Brandeis University. Waltham, Massachusetts. "New Songs, Same Old Hat: Towards the 21st Century Cowpoke."

A masked figure in a cowboy hat, cowboy boots and denim stands against a blinding white background pointing his finger in the classic quick-draw pose. This image could be straight from a 1960s, spaghetti-western poster if not for the bare male legs Orville Peck stares through as we listen to his operatic baritone in the 2019 music video "Hope to Die." In her 2015 song "Dime Store Cowgirl" Kacey Musgraves references Willie Nelson, Gram Parsons, a trailer park and the rodeo over the top of a rolling banjo and a tremolo drenched electric guitar, Combining a long tradition of expressing identity through country music. How is it that cowboys, cowgirls and cowpokes, figures whose visual style and iconography were developed nearly a century ago from an imagined mythology of the frontier west, continue to be foundational to the visual and sonic styles of contemporary artists from a diverse range of backgrounds?

This paper builds upon the work of scholars who explore the history of singing cowpokes and the role of western imagery and fashion including Fox, Malone, Doyle and Vander Wel to consider how the sights and sounds of the imagined west became useful tools for constructing identities for early country artists. It then traces the influence of film makers like Kurosawa and Leone in shifting the image of the cowboy in popular culture from its squeaky clean start to a troubled outsider who resonated with countercultures of the mid 20th century. Finally this project draws on scholarly discussions of music and identity, particularly regarding class, race and queerness, in the work of Hubbs, Stimeling and Zandy to explore how artists in the 21st century have drawn upon the rich yet messy history of singing cowpokes to create new musical expressions of marginalization, resistance and belonging.

10:45 AM - 11:00 AM BREAK

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Lee Brentlinger. Independent Scholar. Victoria, British Columbia. Canada. "The Early Life of Steel Guitarist Jerry Byrd: Sifting Fact and Hearsay."

My presentation in 2023 concerning the renowned steel guitarist Jerry Byrd, who was so important in Country Music of the middle 20th-century, sets the stage for this year. Last year I provided details showing that Byrd misstates lifelong the date of what he considered the key moment of his musical life; rather than 1933, the date given in his published memoirs, Jerry attended the performance of a visiting troupe of Hawaiian musicians in August, 1930, at the age of ten. The ramifications of this are significant, as the years 1930-33 were full of musical activity for the youngster. Jerry's descriptions of this period, however, are rife with problems--evidence conflicts his assertions at every turn. We can see that he was not marooned in the middle of nowhere nor was his first steel guitar teacher a musical hack. Most striking is his utter silence concerning his earliest public performances as well as the musical buddy who was so important to him during these formative years. But just whose life is it, anyway? Reconfiguring these three years of Jerry Byrd's musical childhood brings to light correlations with an important innovation in American popular music.

Dr. Ingrid Gustafsson and Dr. David Falk. Stockholm University. Stockholm, Sweden. “Collective Distortion: A Tale of Resistance in the Alternative Country Music Scene.”

Our paper enters new territory as it sets out to combine organization theory with country music studies. There are many studies today about the institutionalization of the Nashville industry, but hardly any studies about the organization of small scale, alternative scenes hosting the subgenres Americana or alt.country. Our focus lies on the growing scene in Fayetteville, Arkansas – a scene in both metaphorical and factual sense – constituted by musicians, DIY-record labels, venues, agents and managers. We ask: “how is the alternative field of country music organized in defiance of the dominant field”? and explore the actors’ modus operandi: how they mobilize, communicate, co-ordinate and make decisions as part of their resistance to the dominant ideals. Propelling such organizing efforts is an explicit idea about being an alternative geo-cultural and political place in relation to the Nashville industry, putting questions about gender, power, history, commercialism and “real” country at the fore.

12:00 PM LUNCH

Luncheon Talk: **Lisa Sorrell. Lisa Sorrell Design. Guthrie, Oklahoma. “Ernest Tubb: Walking the Floor and Waltzing Across Texas in Cowboy Boots”**

Cowboy boots have long been the standard footwear of country music, both for the performers and their fans. Touching briefly on the history of cowboy boots and how they evolved from the plain black boots cowboys of the trail drives wore to the brightly colored, high-heeled, pointed-toe footwear we recognize today, this presentation will approach the topic through a photo of Ernest Tubb wearing a pair of cowboy boots. Given that the early boot makers were more interested in making boots than writing about what they were doing and thinking, and considering that there is little academic research on cowboy boots and investigations about stage wear typically stops at the wearer’s knees, I will bring my own knowledge acquired from over thirty years of making cowboy boots and exploring their unique history.

Various and Sundry Door Prizes

1:30 PM - 2:45 PM SHARON THOMASON, PRESIDING

Dr. David Pruett. University of Massachusetts. Boston, Massachusetts. “Mic Drop: The Impossible Life of Marc Oswald within Commercial Country and Nashville’s Entertainment Industry.”

Although one of Nashville’s most influential insiders, most industry outsiders have never heard of him. His name is Marc Oswald. Since the early 1980s, Marc has produced tours and events for some of country music’s biggest acts, including Hank William Jr., Merle Haggard, Jewell, Willie Nelson, and Alabama. His television credits include the *MuzikMafia* TV series, the *Gone Country* tv series, most music videos and documentary films for Big & Rich and Gretchen Wilson, *The Song* tv series, *Nashville Star*, and *Big Kenny’s Crank It Up Garage*, all while working closely with his brother Greg Oswald who is currently co-head of William Morris Endeavor in Nashville. This paper will examine key contributions that Marc has made over the past forty years to the development of the commercial country music industry, including several backstories behind some of the most notable faces and milestones in commercial country music’s history.

Cade Botts. Independent Scholar. Nashville, Tennessee. “Only Three Chords?: The Untold Truth of the Complexity of Bluegrass.”

Country music and its associated subgenres, such as bluegrass, have been described as “three chords and the truth” with most of its music being described as “simple.” The purpose of this paper

is to not undermine music with only three chords as less than, but rather, to portray the unknown complexities within the harmonies found within bluegrass music. This paper will take a pedogeological approach by describing the harmonic progressions used while also teaching subjects of music theory. From modal mixture, secondary dominants, and instances that do not have a classical music definition, bluegrass contains many of the subjects that are taught in the music theory curriculum, yet this music is not studied. The truth is that there are many chords used in bluegrass music that have been part of the genre since it's conception with Bill Monroe. Unfortunately, due to its stereotyped unsophistication and hillbilly perception, this music is grossly neglected from scholarly discourse and ignored for its untapped potential in teaching music theory in the classical classroom.

Scott B. Bomar. Fourth and State. Los Angeles, California. "Howdy Glenn: West Coast Country's Forgotten Black Pioneer."

In 1977, country singer Morris "Howdy" Glenn, a Black performer based in Inglewood, California, spent six weeks on the *Billboard* Country Singles chart with his recording of Willie Nelson's "Touch Me" on Warner Bros. Records. That same year, he was nominated for the Top New Male Vocalist award by the Academy of Country Music. Despite the high-profile nomination, the release of multiple singles for a major label, and a second *Billboard* country charter in 1978, Glenn slipped into obscurity by the mid-1980s. While Black contributions are inextricably intertwined with the formation of the genre, there is a very short list of Black country performers who made a splash on the national charts or the public consciousness in the 20th century. This presentation will highlight the career of Howdy Glenn and consider his overdue recognition as a pioneering artist.

2:45 PM - 3:00 PM BREAK

3:00 PM - 4:15 PM

Fiona Boyd. University of Chicago. Chicago, Illinois. Black Opry: Radiophonic Country off the Air."

In this paper, I explore how Black Opry musicians navigate country radio's systemic exclusion of Black artists from the airwaves. Through four months of ethnographic fieldwork in Nashville, at Black Opry Revue shows in the South and northeast, as well as online, I find that Black Opry musicians engage many radiophonic ideas, sounds, and memories in their music and performances. In this paper, I argue that, shaped by the comparatively diverse '90's country radio many of them grew up on, as well as the continued centrality of the medium in the genre's present, Black Opry musicians hold a radiophonic orientation to music and performance that helps build an alternative radio space off the airwaves. This paper seeks to add an ethnographic perspective to the emerging scholarly conversation on Black country music, and to explore notions of race, place, and radio in Nashville and beyond.

Dr. Dustin Dunn. University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, Michigan. "The Mask of Irony: Multimodal Analyses of the Music of Orville Peck"

"Rapidly rising singer songwriter Orville Peck entertains a unique place in the world of country music. Openly gay, deliciously camp, and slightly absurd – Peck enjoys anonymity while bringing queer expression to the fore. I apply a multimodal lens of analysis as defined by Lori Burns to examine how Peck constructs queer and absurdist narratives in both music and video examining such songs as "Dead of Night", "Queen of the Rodeo", and "Hope to Die." Relying on Genre Theory, Analytical Discourse, and Narrative Theory to dissect his work, I frame Orville Peck's embodiment and construction of "otherness" in relation to this genre."

Dr. Dustin Hixenbaugh, San Jacinto College. Pasadena, Texas and Dr. Rhonda Winegar. University of Texas at Arlington. Arlington, Texas. "What's That, Darlin'?: The Healing Potential of Country Music in Clinical Settings."

The growing body of music therapy research testifies to the many ways that listening to music can assist the treatment of mental health concerns including stress, anxiety, and depression. However, as at least one recent review demonstrates, the existing research is hampered by a strong bias in favor of classical music, particularly the compositions of Mozart (after whom the "Mozart effect" is named). In this paper, we argue that listening to country music in clinical settings might hold some of the same therapeutic benefits that have typically been attributed to listening to classical music. As we argue, certain country songs share classical music's soothing qualities. Moreover, they represent unique therapeutic advantages over classical music and other forms of popular music because their lyrics tend to tell relatable stories about stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as the circumstances that cause and are caused by them. For instance, Willie Nelson's "Hello Walls" and Conway Twitty's "Hello Darlin'" utilize comforting melodies and arrangements to discuss the depression and sleeplessness that accompanies heartbreak. Ultimately, we suggest that embracing country music as a therapeutic instrument benefits not only the patients facing these struggles but also the doctors, nurses, and other professionals who care for them.

4:15 PM CONFERENCES CONCLUSION

Happy Trails

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