



The Handbook of Texas Music, Second Edition

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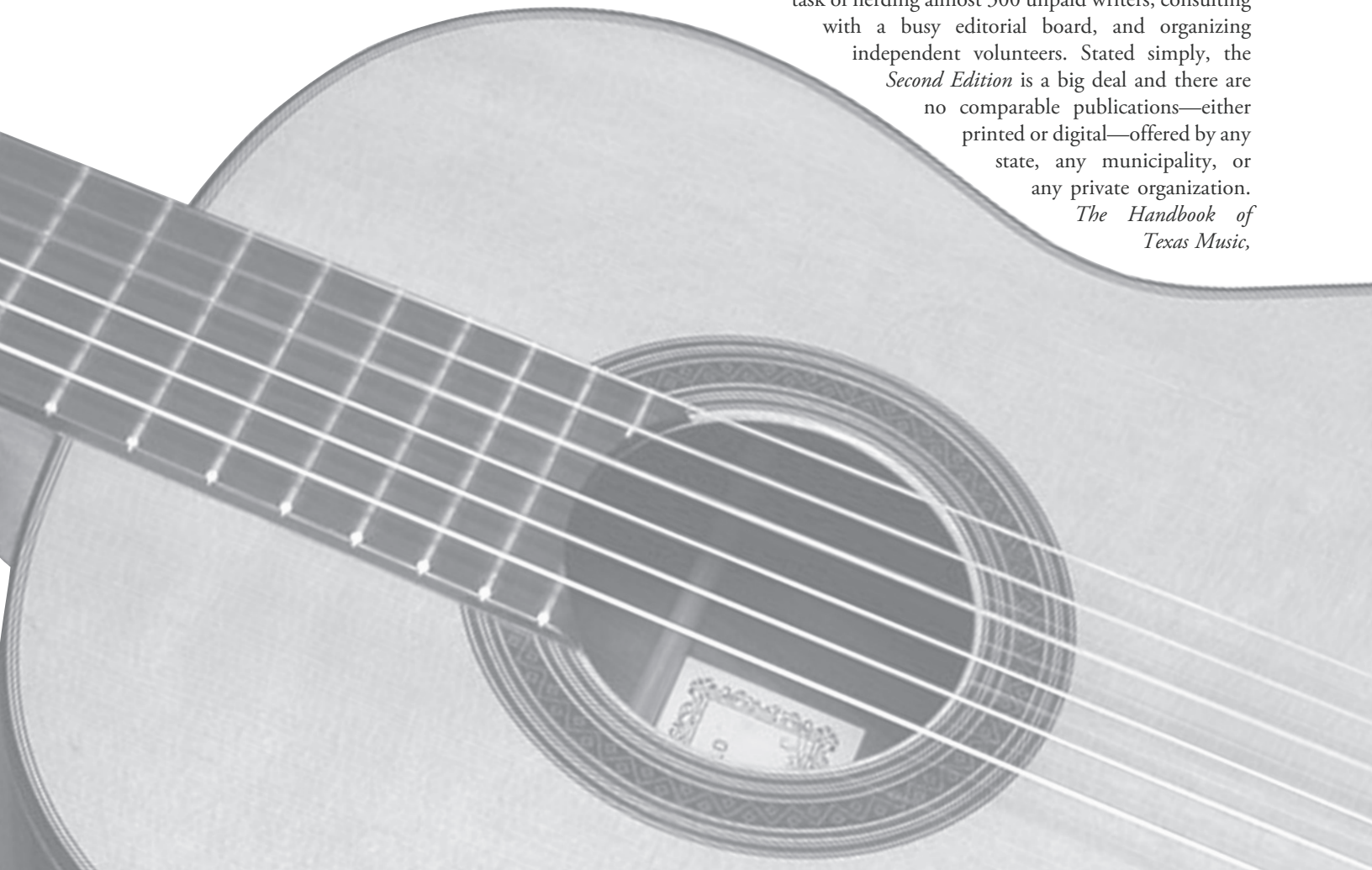
The Texas State Historical Association released *The Handbook of Texas Music, Second Edition* in March 2012. According to the TSHA website, this large new volume is built on the original 2003 *Handbook* and “offers completely updated entries [as well as] new and expanded coverage of the musicians, ensembles, dance halls, festivals, businesses, orchestras, organizations, and genres that have helped define the state’s musical legacy.” The website mentions that there are “more than 870 articles, including more than 410 new entries” coupled with “264 images, including more than 180 new photos, sheet music art, and posters that lavishly illustrate the text.” As was the original volume, this new TSHA publication is a partnership with the Texas Music Office and the Center for Texas Music History.

I reference this promotional information to illustrate the encyclopedic scope of the project. The *Second Edition* is an intrepid undertaking that highlights an array of topics defining the historical DNA of a grand Texas music scene. Much like an individual organism or an ecosystem, the music scene is an animated, interdependent affair that evolves by

embracing certain characteristics from its forebears. A typical scene survives and thrives by sampling its available gene pool. Whereas many states troll in the shallows of their musical reservoirs, Texas casts a wide net in an ocean of intrinsic creativity and innovation. This extended effort in the *Second Edition* yields a large catch of notable historical topics beyond the abbreviated list above; other topics include music teachers, schools, colleges, museums, research centers, and radio and television stations and their music related programs, as well as record producers, sound engineers, production companies, record labels, and comprehensive articles about our state’s multiethnic musical heritage. Taken as a whole, this vast collection of topics provides the fundamental components for a map of the Texas music genome.

The broad academic sweep of the *Second Edition* suggests a substantial logistical challenge. Consider the state-based triumvirate—the TSHA, the Texas Music Office, and the Center for Texas Music History—working together to facilitate the project, powered by meager budgets and the dedication of a core group of participants. They were charged with the task of herding almost 300 unpaid writers, consulting with a busy editorial board, and organizing independent volunteers. Stated simply, the *Second Edition* is a big deal and there are no comparable publications—either printed or digital—offered by any state, any municipality, or any private organization.

The Handbook of Texas Music,



Second Edition is a unique contribution to contemporary cultural historiography.

That said, there are certain nits I'd like to pick and alternative historical interpretations I'd like to offer. Why is jazz innovator Tony Campise—with six first-rate album releases and a Grammy nomination—completely overlooked? Why isn't there a specific essay on cowboy songs? There are numerous references to cowboy songs and Western ballads throughout the book, but a comprehensive treatment of the musical representations of the American cowboy—certainly one of the world's most powerful and ubiquitous mythological figures—would be most helpful. Progressive country, a media-generated label, is not a country-rock musical hybrid; it is more accurately described as a coalescence of folksingers and young rockers who shared a reverence for high-quality original compositions. Moreover, Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter was not a "blues great"; he was a "great songster" in the tradition of his contemporary Mance Lipscomb. My "nit list" goes on, but it's only one of many lists that inevitably follow a public offering that surveys the broad and controversial scope of Texas music.

Regarding "historical interpretations," I focus on a wonderfully compact and informative essay about Austin's iconic honky-tonk, The Broken Spoke. The essay is accompanied by a full-page reproduction of Micael Priest's 1975 poster advertising the Original Texas Playboys at the venue. Joe Gracey, the initial talent consultant for *Austin City Limits*, along with Spoke proprietor James White, produced this show to offset the band's expenses associated with their reunion and their appearance on the first season of *ACL*. The event at the Spoke was a huge success. The band more than covered its expenses, and the following night in Studio 6A on the University of Texas campus, the *ACL*

production crew captured the reunion of one of the most significant ensembles in Texas music history. The show at the Broken Spoke set an important logistical precedent. Musician's fees for this yet-to-be-broadcast television series were quite small during the incubation years, and Gracey reasoned that a lucrative support gig in Austin—then, as now, a hotbed of live-music activity—could be a determining factor in enabling certain acts to appear. I mention this episode to stress the combined historical significance of the show at the Broken Spoke, the poster, Gracey's practical ingenuity, and Austin's powerful live-music scene in the evolution of the longest-running live-music television program in broadcast history. This interesting side story might play well as a caption for Priest's 1975 poster in future volumes.

For an excellent example of "historical significance" in an essay, consider public historian Ruth Sullivan's piece on music historian/archivist, performer, and producer Tary Owens (1942-2003). Sullivan effectively assembles the fundamental "who, what, where, and when" of Owens's multi-decade career and then goes on to consider "why" these observations are important and "how" they flow into the larger currents of Texas music historiography. She illustrates, for example, how Owens's focus on the fledgling field of folklore at the University of Texas in the early 1960s led to a new phase in the ethnographic field recordings originally inspired by John and Alan Lomax. Owens's subsequent work led to the discovery of previously unknown or forgotten Texas fiddlers, songsters, and blues players. Sullivan then explains how Owens shaped this resurrection of roots music into a new wave of commercial recordings and a career renaissance for veteran musicians, such as T.D. Bell, Ervin Charles, and Snuff Johnson, as well as Roosevelt "Grey Ghost" Williams, Erbie Bowser, and Lavada "Dr. Hepcat" Durst, whom Owens cleverly labeled the "Texas Piano Professors." Sullivan does an outstanding job of depicting the strategic significance of Tary Owens's life on the Texas music trail.

The Handbook of Texas Music, Second Edition is an outstanding publication. It is an essential tool for students of Texas music history, an insightful interpretation of one of the world's most prolific and enduring music scenes, and a splendid adventure in American cultural history. It deserves our unconditional support and I encourage Texas music enthusiasts to buy the book and sing its praises (or simply brag about it) to friends, family, and music fans from all points of the compass.

Craig Hillis