An idea hatched in a barbecue joint in Austin has blossomed into a recognized haven for music history.

by Ann Friou

Listening to Merle Haggard croon “The Fightin’ Side of Me,” Gary Hartman and Gregg Andrews shared a couple of beers at Stubb’s Barbecue in Austin. As the two Texas State history professors talked, the conversation wandered to academics. Was there an academic program anywhere in Texas that focused on the preservation and study of Texas music history, they wondered.

They had that conversation in 1998, and the Center for Texas Music History was born the following year. Today it is recognized by PBS, National Public Radio and the Smithsonian Institution. It has attracted tens of thousands of supporters from around the world who are interested in Texas’ unique musical heritage. And 2009 is its 10th anniversary.

“I still have the ticket stub,” Hartman says of that 1998 Haggard concert. That was the night Andrews pitched to him the idea of creating the center.

“It still sounded like a good idea the next morning,” Hartman, now director of the center, said, “so I started making some phone calls.” He soon discovered that, indeed, there was no such academic institution. So, Andrews presented the history faculty with a proposal to establish one.

The center took off like a rocket, and Hartman and Andrews say they had no idea that it would accomplish so much in a decade. ➤
“The response has been overwhelming,” Andrews said. “It particularly surprises — and pleases — musicians to find themselves the subject of historical study. They don’t expect it because they’ve never thought of themselves as making history. Yet, Texas musicians — in all genres — define the state’s culture, and people around the world love Texas music. In fact, we get requests from as far away as Australia for our Journal of Texas Music History.

Perhaps the center’s most important accomplishment has been to build a bridge between the university, musicians and music fans,” Andrews continued. “The center has done that in a way you can’t measure. Most people think of university music in terms of classical concert music and orchestras, but we’ve focused on popular music. This music is our culture, and what we’re doing to promote the music and its history makes many people feel a more personal connection to the university.”

One of the main goals of the center is to educate students, scholars and the general public about how the tremendous ethnic diversity represented by Texas music reflects the unique history and multi-ethnic culture of the Lone Star State. As part of its educational mission, the center offers a variety of courses on Texas music history, examining the musical traditions of African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Anglo-Americans, German-Americans and other ethnic groups in the Southwest. The center also is involved in
several major projects around the country that are drawing attention to Texas State and its students.

Recently, the prestigious Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., featured an exhibit on Texas history that included *The Handbook of Texas Music*, which the center co-produced with the Texas State Historical Association. One-third of the articles in the *Handbook* were researched and written by Texas State students. The exhibit also featured Hartman’s new book, *The History of Texas Music* (Texas A&M University Press, 2008), the first book in the center’s John and Robin Dickson Series in Texas Music. The series honors the Dicksons, who organize music festivals through their company Dickson Productions and who have provided major support to the center over the years.

In January, the center launched a national PBS television series called *Texas Music Café*, in conjunction with film producer Chris Ermoian of Waco. The monthly program features Texas musicians such as Billy Joe Shaver, Marcia Ball, Joe Ely, Shawn Colvin and Joel Guzmán, performing at Cheatham Street Warehouse in San Marcos, on campus and at other venues. As part of the *Texas Music Café* series, the center weaves in interviews, historical film footage and photographs that help place the artists in historical context. Deirdre Lannon, director of programs for the center, creates the documentary component, while Texas State students help film

No part of our culture is more important than the music of the people. Our music reveals who we are. We owe an incredible debt to the Center for Texas Music History for documenting and preserving this valuable aspect of our history.

– Kent Finlay
Owner, Cheatham Street Warehouse, San Marcos
We’ve been able to do many wonderful things that involve students and that have drawn national and international attention to them and to the university,” Hartman said. “I can’t imagine any greater student accomplishment than to be featured in a major publication on display in the Smithsonian or to be involved in a PBS program that is being broadcast throughout the U.S. and Canada.”

Most of the center’s other projects also have an impact far beyond the campus.

In addition to the PBS series, the center airs a weekly show on National Public Radio called This Week in Texas Music History. The 90-second programs, written and voiced by Hartman, feature snippets of Texas music history that most fans don’t know; for example, superstar and Texas State alumnus George Strait was turned down by a number of nightclubs and recording companies before becoming the most successful country singer in history. Kent Finlay, owner of Cheatham Street Warehouse, helped launch Strait’s career by giving him a regular gig during the mid-1970s, at a time when most other club owners considered Strait too “traditional” for their venues. This Week in Texas Music History can be heard every Monday morning at 6:30 and 8:30 on Austin’s KUT-FM 90.5 and on other Texas NPR affiliates. Archived shows can be downloaded from http://texasmusicmatters.kut.org/category/this-week-in-texas-music-history/.

The Center for Texas Music History also has helped organize several exhibits and performances at public schools, universities and museums, including the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, where it is working to develop a permanent exhibit on Texas music history.

In addition, the center hosts the annual Texas Music History Unplugged concert at Texas State, through which notable Texas musicians from a variety of genres play to standing-room-only crowds and talk about their careers in music. The center produces a series of compact discs, which include music donated by numerous Texas musicians. And not least, several graduate students in history are writing their master’s theses on Texas music history.

The center’s work has been funded from gifts from individuals and foundations. Planning is under way to determine the level of endowment needed that will support the center in perpetuity.

“With an endowment, we can develop more classes, including a course on Texas Mexican music that we’ve wanted to offer for a long time,” Hartman said. “We need a faculty member to teach that course, to direct student theses, and to do research and publication. We need to be able to offer student scholarships and to provide expense money to students who travel to conduct interviews for the Texas Music Oral History Program. We need funding to continue with the PBS television series, the NPR program and to publish the Journal of Texas Music History. We’re also

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Discover Texas Music History Online

Texas has a wealth of historic dancehalls in its rural communities, and soon you’ll be able to watch a 10-minute documentary film about them. Perhaps you’ll even want to plan a trip to see them.

Deirdre Lannon, director of programs at the Center for Texas Music History, is building a Web site called Texas Music History Online (http://ctmh.its.txstate.edu/). It will feature a massive database that provides information on “anything and everything you want to know” about Texas music history. The Web site includes biographies, scholarly articles, photographs, audio and video clips, and lots of other information about the people, places and events that have helped shape Texas music history.

The Web site is useful to both scholars and fans of Texas music history, and, via the documentary films — written and produced by Lannon — it also serves as an interactive classroom teaching tool, as well as a resource to promote heritage tourism related to Texas music history.

In addition to the film on historic dancehalls like La Villita in Alice, Anhalt Hall in Anhalt, and the Eldorado Ballroom in Houston, other films will feature aspects of Texas music history, such as the development of the electric guitar, Texas’ mariachiitos or youth mariachi bands, and a history of Houston’s Sugar Hill Studio, which has been in existence since the 1950s and more recently recorded such famous Texas artists as Beyoncé and Destiny’s Child.

Lannon calls her film on Texas’ Route 14 “a musical mother lode.”

“If you follow the part of Route 14 that lies east of Waco for 60 miles, you’ll find the birthplaces of Bob Wills (Kosse), Cindy Walker (Mexia), Blind Lemon Jefferson (Worthingham, Lefty Frizzell and Billy Joe Shaver (Corsicana) and Lightnin’ Hopkins (Centerville) — just a little jog off of Route 14,” Lannon said. “It’s interesting that so many people who influenced Texas music in such a cross-section of genres were born in this area.

“Visitors can use the Web site to plan a weekend trip or a longer trip across Texas to hear different types of music, visit historic dancehalls and museums, go to a festival, and learn something about the music as they go,” Lannon said. ★
Music festival organizer and Texas State alumnus John Dickson ’85 has promoted a lot of young Texas artists — including Pat Green — helping them to become well known. A donor to the Center for Texas Music History, Dickson has also given the center a lot of high-profile exposure.

“During the festivals, John invites me to come up on stage and talk about the center,” said center director Gary Hartman. “He has helped us with fund-raising by getting musicians to autograph guitars to sell, and he donates a portion of the festival proceeds to the center. He’s also made CDs and donated funds from those to the center. In addition, the center co-hosts a special Tribute to a Legend concert, which honors pioneers in Texas music, at Dickson Productions’ annual MusicFest in Steamboat Springs, Colo.

“Recently, the center launched a new book series with Texas A&M University Press,” Hartman continued. “We named it the John and Robin Dickson Series in Texas Music, as a way to pay tribute to a Texas State graduate and his wife who have done so much to nurture Texas music and to support the center.”

When asked what drew him to support the Center for Texas Music History, Dickson said, “The center’s work to recognize Texas musicians and to preserve their stories is extremely important. “Texas music influences music around the world, and Texas musicians help define what Texas is. So many of them — such as Floyd Tillman — had the opportunity for commercial success, but they remained independent artists, staying close to home and true to their music. Others, such as Johnny Gimble (fiddler for Bob Wills’ Texas Playboys), didn’t play traditional music but created a new art form through their instruments.

“This says a lot about the musicians and about Texas,” Dickson continued. “These people need to be recognized, and the Center for Texas Music History is researching and preserving these stories for future generations. It’s a pleasure to be involved in the center’s projects to get the word out about Texas music. The center is a great asset to the university and to Texas.”

John Dickson: Taking pleasure in getting the word out about Texas music
The Texas Music Oral History Program

Students of Texas music history find out that there’s more to Texas music than Pat Green and Willie Nelson. Under the supervision of the Center for Texas Music History, students in the Texas Music Oral History Program interview musicians, record producers, festival organizers and club owners who have had an influence on Texas music. The interviews are archived at Texas State for future students, scholars and fans of Texas music history. The following are synopses of two interviews conducted by students.

Clifford Antone: Resurrecting the blues legends

Clifford Antone started the club Antone’s, the blues mecca in downtown Austin, helping to launch the careers of countless young blues artists, such as Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimmie Vaughan and the Thunderbirds. What most people don’t know is that Antone also resurrected the careers of such blues legends as Muddy Waters and B.B. King.

“Those guys had been pretty much forgotten,” said center director Gary Hartman. “Most lived in Chicago and played in their neighborhood.” According to the student’s interview, Antone was 19 or 20 years old and too young to know better. “He found these old blues musicians,” Hartman continued, “and he called them and said, ‘Look, I’m going to open a club in Austin, and would you come and play for it? I think we can pay you some money.’

“Guys like Muddy Waters came down here and played, and lots of young people showed up and were going nuts over these bluesmen, and Muddy Waters and B.B. King loved it so much they asked if they could stay and play a few more nights. And the next thing you know, Antone’s had become a hotspot. People came from all over the country to hear these blues legends, and young guys like Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jimmie Vaughan were sitting wide-eyed at the stage, becoming inspired to go out and have their own careers.”

Jerry Naylor: Meeting John and Paul

Jerry Naylor from San Angelo replaced Buddy Holly as the lead singer of the Crickets after Holly died in a plane crash in 1959.

The Crickets, who were hugely popular in Europe, played in London in the early 1960s. In an interview with a Texas State student, Naylor said the band members were relaxing in their hotel room one afternoon, waiting for their evening performance, when they got a call from the hotel’s front desk saying that a couple of young fans had asked permission to come up and see them. Naylor told the desk clerk to send the fans up.

A few minutes later, he opened the door to find two young fans who were lugging a reel-to-reel tape recorder and who introduced themselves as John and Paul. They came inside tentatively, Naylor said, expressing their honor in meeting the Crickets. They said they played in a band, too, and wrote and recorded their own songs, and they asked whether the Crickets would listen to their songs and tell them what they thought. John and Paul turned on the tape recorder, and out came several songs that would later become Beatles hits — one incredible song after another.

Naylor said he and the other Crickets were blown away, and they asked the young men — who of course were John Lennon and Paul McCartney — if they had a recording contract. When John and Paul said no, Naylor offered to take the songs to Los Angeles to discuss them with the Crickets’ producer. The following year, the Crickets recorded an entire album of Lennon’s and McCartney’s songs, but by the time they finished the recording in 1962, the Beatles had come out with their own album. In 1964, they appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show and soon became world-famous. So, the Crickets’ album was shelved until the 1990s, when it was finally released.
As far as we know, German and Czech immigrants brought the accordion to Texas in the early 1800s, perhaps through Mexico. Within just a few years, Tejanos or Texas Mexicans had adopted the accordion, French-speaking blacks and French-speaking whites in eastern Texas had adopted the accordion, and so had some Anglo groups.

“Another example is the blues,” Hartman continued. “The blues is an African-American musical form rooted in old African musical traditions, but every ethnic group has adopted the blues. Anglos adopted the blues as a foundation of country music and rock and roll. Texas Mexican music adopted blues from African-Americans, and polkas, waltzes and schottisches from the Czechs and Germans.

“Music bridged these different ethnic communities, creating the music we listen to today, yet music is often overlooked as a dominant means of communicating their history and culture. Think about it,” Hartman said. “Did you spend more hours this week reading a book or listening to music? Most Americans will answer ‘listening to music.’”

Steve Jordan, photo courtesy of Al Rendon