Diverse forms of religious music have always been important to the cultural fabric of the Lone Star State. In both black and white communities, gospel music has been an influential genre in which many musicians received some of their earliest musical training. Likewise, many Texans have played a significant role in shaping the national and international gospel music scenes.

Despite the importance of gospel music in Texas, little scholarly attention has been devoted to this popular genre. Through the years, gospel has seen stylistic changes and the development of subgenres. This article focuses on the subgenre of Southern gospel music, also commonly known as quartet music. While it is primarily an Anglo style of music, Southern gospel influences are multicultural. Southern gospel is performed over a wide geographic area, especially in the American South and Southwest, although this study looks specifically at developments in Northwest Texas during the early twentieth century.

Organized efforts to promote Southern gospel began in 1910 when James D. Vaughn established a traveling quartet to help sell his songbooks.1 The songbooks were written with shape-notes, part of a religious singing method based on symbols rather than traditional musical notation. In addition to performing, gospel quartets often taught music in peripatetic singing schools using the shape-note method.

The roots of shape-note singing lie in English country parish singing, which began to take hold in America with the publication of James Lyon's *Urania* in 1764 and William Billings's *The New England Psalm Singer* in 1770. However, the first shape-note book, *The Easy Instructor* by William Smith and William Little, appeared in 1801. In 1844, the Sacred Harp singing tradition began with the publishing of Benjamin Franklin White and Elisha J. King's *The Sacred Harp*. The Sacred Harp tradition, also commonly known as Fasola, is still popular in America, and many events and conventions take place throughout the country each year. The advantage to shape-notes is that they help singers easily find song pitches without using the more complex key signature method. The shape-note system is commonly based on two structures—four notes or seven notes—and Southern gospel quartets utilize the seven-note system.1

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Figure 1. Seven Shape-Notes Symbols

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The Lubbock Texas Quartet and Odis “Pop” Echols: Promoting Southern Gospel Music on the High Plains of Texas

Curtis L. Peoples

The shape-note instruction method helped promote white Southern gospel, increased book sales, and boosted concert attendance in rural areas.

The record was made possible by the group’s connection with people such as Odis “Pop” Echols. Echols was a member of the original Stamps Quartet. The record was made at the Stamps Barn in Louisiana.

The Lubbock Texas Quartet and Odis “Pop” Echols: Promoting Southern Gospel Music on the High Plains of Texas

Through his associations with gospel music publishers, Dyess helped lay the foundation for the creation of groups such as the Lubbock Texas Quartet.

Promoting Southern Gospel Music on the High Plains of Texas

The Lubbock Texas Quartet and Odis “Pop” Echols: Promoting Southern Gospel Music on the High Plains of Texas

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L.M. Brooks's tenure and extent of involvement with the Home Brew Quartet is unknown, since very little biographical information about him exists. However, his name appears often in listings of performers at various functions in Lubbock. For instance, he performed at the Baptist Church on April 12, 1924. The program lists a quartet comprised of "Windell, Holland Gunn, and Brooks." The Gunn listed is Annual Peddlers Jubilee on June 27, 1927, but it is unclear if Brooks filled in for Dyess, who may have been ill at that time and would be dead within two months. The Sixth Annual Peddlers Jubilee is the last reference to a Home Brew Quartet consisting of Dyess, Holland, Wendell, Wilson, or Brooks.

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The Lubbock Texas Quartet—also known as the Lubbock Quartet or Lubbock Stamps Quartet—enjoyed about 10 years of success with the Stamps-Baxter Publishing and Printing Company.

The bulk of the money the quartet made came from teaching singing schools and selling songbooks.

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while the others taught in nearby Lockney. At a two-week singing school, students learned basic music theory and shape-note singing. The singing schools brought music to rural communities and helped develop local music leaders to lead choirs. After about a year, the group returned to a community and taught advanced courses. The quartet taught year round, but the summer months proved better because children were out of school, and crops were still in the fields.

The Lubbock Texas Quartet represented the Stamps-Baxter Publishing and Printing Company. In return, Stamps-Baxter supplied the quartet with songbooks and money. The group sold the songbooks for $2.50 per copy and received some free copies from the company. Profits from the songbooks helped to defray travel expenses.72

Publishing and Printing Company. In return, Stamps-Baxter helped. For instance, the group once was stuck in an Oklahoma hotel room for three weeks with no business because of constant rain. Although Clyde Burleson had $20 stashed in its kind in the United States, attracting members from 40 counties across Texas and New Mexico.79

By the fall of that year, the Lubbock Vaughn Quartet had become a local crowd favorite. In September 1922, the Lubbock Avalanche reported that the Lubbock Vaughn Quartet gave a seating performance at a Kiwanis meeting.73 The newspaper reported that the Kiwanians were treated in “splendid music” and that “Lubbock has something to be proud of in that orchestra, and when you hear that Vaughn is just as much in the singing world as [John Phillips] Sousa is in the band business, don’t take it for naught, for that bunch proved that Vaughn bunch know their business.” The article goes on to say that the “Kiwanians were not willing to let their fellows off with one song, but brought them to their feet again with cheer upon cheer…and of course they delivered the goods in their usual manner, to the delight of all present.”80

From 1910 to the 1950s, the James D. Vaughn Music Publishing Company had several male quartets that performed under the generic name, the Vaughn Quartet. By the late 1920s, the Vaughn Music Company sponsored as many as 16 groups that performed primarily throughout the South and Midwest, appearing at revivals, singing conventions, church gatherings, in concert, and on radio and records in order to promote seven shape-note Southern gospel, Vaughn songbooks, and Vaughn normal singing schools.74

James David Vaughn was a pioneer of modern Southern gospel music, and some even consider him the “father” of the modern gospel quartet. His development of the professional gospel quartet helped to transform provincial Southern gospel music of the late nineteenth century into a widespread and flourishing industry. Vaughn was born December 14, 1864, in Gales County, Tennessee. He attended private school and excelled academically. He began a career as a schoolteacher, but he also had a keen aptitude for music. As a teenager, he attended shape-note singing schools and was well versed in Southern-style harmony. His love of music and his teaching abilities led him to become a music teacher. At eighteen, he began teaching music in his local church. He soon organized the Vaughn Boys Quartet, which included Vaughn and his three brothers. In 1883, he enrolled in the Ruehbs-Kieffer Normal School in New Market, Virginia, in order to further his knowledge about gospel harmony. His efforts paid off, as the local success of the Vaughn Boys Quartet confirmed the power of performance harmony to publicize gospel music.75

In May 1890, shortly after marrying, James Vaughn moved to Cisco, Texas, and continued his work as a schoolteacher. In 1892, he met Ephraim Hildebrand of the Hildebrand-Burnett Music Company based in Roanoke, Virginia. Hildebrand traveled the country teaching advanced normal schools and convention singing schools. Many potential students had domestic commitments or little time and money to travel long distances to attend music schools, so such traveling teachers as Hildebrand provided opportunities for those living in more remote areas to pursue a musical education. Hildebrand not only further kindled Vaughn’s love of music but also inspired Vaughn to begin composing original material. The two men collaborated on several songs that they published. After a tornado destroyed most of the town of Cisco and everything they owned, Vaughn and his family left Texas and moved back to Tennessee, where he continued his work as an educator in the public schools. However, with his penchant for music, he soon shifted his focus back to music and music education.76

In 1900, James Vaughn printed his first songbook—Gospel Chimes—and within two years he started the James D. Vaughn Publishing Company in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. In 1911 he started the Vaughn Music School. He also began traveling and training instructors to teach in rural singing schools—teachers instructors he hoped would promote his musical publications. A year earlier, Vaughn had begun sponsoring a quartet to travel and promote his gospel songbooks. The use of the quartet as a promotional tool paid off, and by 1917 Vaughn had expanded his company and established three additional branches in Greenville, South Carolina, Midlothian, Texas, and Fitzgerald, Georgia.77

Vaughn was quick to recognize the mass marketing potential of new technology, including the radio and phonograph. In 1921, he established the Vaughn Phonograph Company and sent a quartet to Wisconsin to make some custom recordings. While there, the quartet cut several songs, including Virgil Oliver (V.O.) Stamps’s “Look for Me.” In November 1922,
vaughn received a license to begin broadcasting on radio in tennessee under the call letters WOAJ. By the mid-1930s, he had sold his radio station and discontinued his record company, but his publishing company remained strong. James Vaughn died on February 9, 1941. The Vaughn Company established connections with Lubbock quartets through V.O. Stamps, who ran the Vaughn Music Company branch office in Jacksonville, Texas. Building on the experience he gained by working for James Vaughn, V.O. Stamps eventually quit the Vaughn Music Company and started his own music company in Jacksonville, which grew into the hugely successful Stamps-Baxter Publishing and Printing Company. Indeed, before his sudden death in 1940, Stamps helped create one of the largest gospel music empires in history.

In 1926, Echols successfully auditioned for Frank Stamps's original Stamps Quartet and moved to chattanooga, tennessee.

Virgil Oliver Stamps was born September 18, 1892, in Upshur County, Texas. He had five brothers, one of whom, Frank, also would play a significant role in the gospel music business. At an early age, both Virgil and Frank demonstrated a passion for music. Virgil attended his first singing school in 1907. Between 1911 and 1914, he continued studying music at the University of Mississippi School of Music, where he learned the craft of songwriting. After graduating in 1914, Virgil worked for several music publishers, including James D. Vaughn's music company in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. From 1915 to the 1920s, Virgil Stamps ran the Vaughn Publishing Company office in Jacksonville, Texas. While Virgil pursued a career in music, his brother Frank Stamps acquired a formal education and served in the United States Navy during World War I, all the while continuing to study music. After the war, James Vaughn offered Frank a position with his company in Tennessee. The two Stamps brothers worked well with Vaughn but decided to leave and pursue their own music ventures. In 1924, Virgil Stamps opened the V.O. Stamps Music Company in Jacksonville, Alabama. By 1936, it was clear that the growing business required larger facilities, so the company moved to the Dallas subdivision of Oak Cliff. After the death of Virgil Stamps in 1940, his brother Frank stepped in to help run the company; however, Frank soon split with J.R. Baxter to form his own company. Baxter continued to run the company until his death in 1960. At that point, Baxter's wife Clarice "Ma" Baxter ran the company for 12 more years until she died. She willed the company to Lonnie B. Combs, Clyde Roach, Videt Polk, and Dwight Brock, who turned over operations to the Zondervan Corporation of Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1974. Harper-Collins Publishers acquired Zondervan in 1988 and subsequently ended its music publishing in 1992.

At an early age, both Virgil and Frank demonstrated a passion for music. Virgil attended his first singing school in 1907.
formed the Odis Echols’s All-Star Texans Quartet with Denver Crumpier (later famous with the Statesmen Quartet), Marlin LeMaster, and Don Smith.

In January 1936, the All-Star Texans joined Harley Sadler’s 18th Annual Texas, which began in Abilene, Texas. Odis Echols settled in Abilene and taught music at the Hall Music Store. He also held singing schools in the area and performed on local radio programs, including a 30-minute program on KRBG that featured Echols and several other well-known entertainers. The first quarter hour offered sacred songs such as “If I Needed You” and “I’m Telling You.” The second quarter hour offered songs by prominent secular artists as Pee Wee King and the Golden West Cowboys.

In July of that year and began work with Echols on various programs, including singing schools. In 1938, Echols organized the Stamps Melody Boys in Hot Springs, Arkansas, to perform on radio station KTHS. Later that year, Echols moved to WLAC in Nashville, Tennessee, to host a Saturday Night All Gospel Show. One of Echols’s biggest fans was a young Ernie Ford from Bristol, Tennessee, who would later have a very successful country music career using the stage name “Tennessee” Ernie Ford.

In 1939, Echols moved the Stamps Melody Boys to Louisville, Kentucky, to radio station WHAS, a CBS affiliate. Included in the quarter was Don On, who later gained fame with the Statesmen Quartet. The Stamps Melody Boys became popular so quickly that, during its first week of broadcasting on WHAS, the group received 1,746 thank-you cards and letters in one day, setting a record for a CBS station. With the Melody Boys success, Echols convinced radio executives to let his group broadcast a gospel music show coast to coast on the Mutual Radio Network. The group broadcast over 150 stations, a first for a gospel group. The Melody Boys continued their daily broadcast on WHAS under the sponsorship of Sieberling Tires. During the summer months, the group played test shows throughout Kentucky and Indiana, sharing the bill with such prominent secular artists as Pee Wee King and the Golden West Cowboys and Eddie Arnold, and drawing large crowds wherever they performed. However, with the onset of World War II, the group disbanded.

Odis Echols returned to West Texas and bought a farm 16 miles south of Lubbock. Because local farmers were beginning to use improved irrigation techniques, farming in the normally arid region seemed a promising venture for Echols. He and his family worked the farm from 1942 to 1943, most likely growing “fertalia,” a type of sorghum native to Sudan in Africa. However, in 1943, Odis Echols decided that farming was not for him and moved back to Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Echols reorganized the Melody Boys Quartet to perform on KTHS and formed the Harmony Boys to sing on either KLRA or KARK in Little Rock. He also bought the Hartford Publishing Company, and his quartets traveled a four-state area performing and selling Hartford songbooks. Hartford Publishing Company became the second-largest gospel music publisher at the time, surpassed only by Stamps-Baxter in Dallas and Chattanooga. In 1946, Echols sold his interest in Hartford Publishing and moved to Shreveport, Louisiana.

In Shreveport, Echols and his Melody Boys began performing on KKKH radio on March 19, 1946. Their show ran Monday through Saturday at 8:30 a.m. By April 10, the group was broadcasting twice daily at both 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Echols leased the Shreveport Municipal Auditorium for Saturday night events, and KKKH’s management approached him about starting a new show that could compete with Nashville-based WSM’s increasingly popular live music program, The Grand Ole Opry. Echols rose to the challenge, and soon regular KKKH entertainers, including Echols, Harmie Smith, and the Shelton Brothers launched The Red River Valley Round Up. Echols served as emcee and brought in talented but relatively unknown entertainers, such as Pietro Leon, Hank Locklin, Johnny Horton, Jim Reeves, Webb Pierce, and Tommy Sands. After some time, Echols and others changed the name of the show to The Louisiana Hayride, which would help launch the careers of Elvis Presley and countless other entertainers. In late 1947, KKKH bought Pop Echols’s interest in the show, so he briefly moved his family back to Lubbock.

Ever restless, Echols moved on from Lubbock to Los Angeles, appearing with his Melody Boys on Bob Crosby’s Club 15 on CBS radio. Echols also made other personal appearances at churches and gospel concerts, and he taught gospel schools in Fresno and Los Angeles, occasionally reuniting with friends for causal singings. These informal sessions included such notable musicians as Ernest Ford, Merle Travis, Jimmy Wakely, and others.

In 1949, Echols was back in Lubbock, where he formed a new version of the Melody Boys Quartet. KSEL radio featured the quartet with Bob Nash as the announcer. The group performed often, including the annual event for visiting dignitaries such as U.S. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson and various state governors. Echols continued working at KSEL into the early 1950s as an announcer and often hosted events throughout the area. At KSEL, he auditioned numerous up-and-coming musicians. One such talent was Bobby Keys, a young saxophone player from Slaton, Texas. Echols told Keys that if he kept practicing, he could make it in show business. Keys eventually became a highly sought-after studio session musician and also played saxophone for many years with the legendary rock-and-roll band, the Rolling Stones. Many years later, Odis Echols, Jr. contacted the Rolling Stones to ask for tickets to a concert at the Rose Bowl. Keys met Odis Jr., at the Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles with four tickets and...
backstage passes to the show, saying, “These tickets are a thank
you for Pop Echols.”

Another entertainer who credits Pop Echols for influencing
her career is Charlene Condray Hancock, born in Morton,
Texas, into a musical family that encouraged her to sing both
religious and popular country music. Hancock first studied
with Pop Echols at the Four Square Gospel church in Lubbock.
Although not a member of the church, she attended shape-
ote singing schools there and took a few private lessons from
Echols. Hancock said that Echols taught her voice projection
and to avoid yodeling, so she would not ruin her voice. He
also taught her how to be comfortable on stage by telling her,
“When you look at the audience and see them intently looking
at you, smile and they will smile back. It will make you more
comfortable, they want you to do well.”

Echols invited Hancock to perform several times at high school auditoriums
and churches. One major event was the grand opening of
the Nu-Vue Theater in Abernathy, Texas, on June 15 and 16,
1950. Talent for the grand opening included Echols and his
Melody Boys Quartet, Charlene Condray (Hancock), and
Bill Myrick and the Mayfield Brothers, who had been hosting
the KSEL Jamboree on Saturday Nights at Sled Allen’s theater.
The Mayfield Brothers performed “Orange Blossom Special”
and Condray sang “A Perfect Day.”

By the time she was 16, Charlene Condray performed
regularly on KDUB’s Circle 13 Dude Ranch Show. Because
KDUB was Lubbock’s only television station at the time,
she was a local celebrity and was nicknamed “Lubbock’s
Sweetheart.” Local bandleader Tommy Hancock saw her
perform and asked her to join his popular Western swing
band, the Roadside Playboys. Within a few years, the two
married, had children, and started a successful family band
that performed all over the state and had a major influence on
Lubbock’s music scene. The case of Charlene Condray Hancock
is yet another example of how, if not for Pop Echols, the history
of music in West Texas might be quite different today.

In 1953, Echols moved back to Clovis, New Mexico, and
purchased KCLV radio. At KCLV, he started a Saturday
Breakfast Club that featured many regional and national
celebrities, including such politicians as Senator Clinton
Anderson and Governor Jimmy Davis.

In 1957, Pop Echols appeared on national television’s This is
Your Life at the request of Tommy Sands, who credited Echols
with starting him in show business. That same year, Echols
met a young Farwell, Texas, farmer named Charlie Phillips,
and began managing his career and building a successful
songwriting partnership. The duo collaborated on two songs,
“Sugartime” and “One Faded Rose.” They cut demo records of
the songs at Norman Petty Studios, with local Lubbock artists
Buddy Holly on guitar, Jerry Allison on drums, Joe B Mauldin
on bass, Jimmy Blakely on steel guitar, and Charlie Phillips
on vocals. In 1958, Bob Thiel produced the song “Sugartime”
with McGuire Sisters vocals; the song went gold and reached
Number One on the pop charts.

Pop Echols continued to work in the music business while
living in Clovis. In addition to his far-reaching musical impact,
he also influenced the appearance of an entire generation of
gospel quartet singers. Well-known for his carefully groomed
pencil-thin mustache, Echols once stated, “The Beatles started
long hair. I started the mustache.” In fact, many gospel quartet
 singers began sporting mustaches similar to Echols’. He was
a well-loved, highly respected, and very influential figure in
gospel music during the first half of the twentieth century. He
had a very good attitude, was very outgoing, and everyone
liked him. Although Odis “Pop” Echols died on March 23,
1974, in Clovis, New Mexico, his influence is still evident
in religious and secular circles, especially throughout the
American Southwest.

For 80 years, little attention has been paid to the Lubbock
Texas Quartet and the profound impact of gospel music
on Southern rural populations. Providing inexpensive
entertainment and bolstering social cohesion in perilous times,
groups such as the Lubbock Texas Quartet traveled extensively,
teaching seven shape-note gospel music to communities that
otherwise might not have had access to music education. ★

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4 James R. Goff Jr., “Testament to the Late J. Howard Rogers,” http://theparisnews.com/article/09/02/10/rogers20.html; Charles Wolfe references Randle’s coupling notices statistics in his Journal Windell is most likely L.L. Wendell and is misspelled.

5 According to the Excursion Outing of the Lubbock Home Brew quartet to Wichita Falls and Amarillo and consisted of R.I. Wilson, and R.A. Holland get together with their well-blended voices on some of their catchy songs, everybody sits up and takes notice. Come again boys. It was fine and worlds cannot express how the club members attended meetings. We have notes here in Saint Monica, Saint Maline and Saint Shallower to collect raisins and pluot trees; the Saint Shallower group is part of the Lubbock Library.

6 The Lubbock Texas Quartet and Odis “Pop” Echols, “The Lubbock Texas Quartet and Odis “Pop” Echols:

7 James R. Goff Jr., “Testament to the Late J. Howard Rogers,” http://theparisnews.com/article/09/02/10/rogers20.html; Charles Wolfe references Randle’s coupling notices statistics in his Journal Windell is most likely L.L. Wendell and is misspelled.

8 Tony Dyess was also active in the community. Dyess became a Mason and a member of the South Plains Odd Fellows, 1925.

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10 Tony Dyess was also active in the community. Dyess became a Mason and a member of the South Plains Odd Fellows, 1925.

11 This date is found in the appendix of Twenty Years of the JEMF Quarterly, American Folk Music and Musicians. See John W. Rumford, ed. and compiled by Homer Morris, Twenty Years of the JEMF Quarterly, American Folk Music and Musicians (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979), 64; “Columbia (USA) 15000D Series Numerical Listing,” http://www.78discography.com/COL15000D.htm (accessed June 9, 2010).

12 “The Lubbock Texas Quartet and Odis “Pop” Echols:

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57 Tony Dyess was also active in the community. Dyess became a Mason and a member of the South Plains Odd Fellows, 1925. The Lubbock Texas Quartet and Odis “Pop” Echols: Promoting Southern Gospel Music on the High Plains of Texas, 62.
The Lubbock Texas Quartet and Odis "Pop" Echols: Promoting Southern Gospel Music on the High Plains of Texas

1976, p. 51. Much of the confusion over the owner of the copyright may come from the fact that sheet music sales were high in Lubbock during the 1920s. Typical songs were those of the Southern Gospel genre, such as "I'll Fly Away," "To the Heart of the Father," and "Going Home." These songs were popular among the Lubbock populace and were often played in local churches and gospel conventions.


59 "Echols Will Present Two Programs on KCRD," Athlete Reporter News, November 15, 1936, p. 3.


61 "Echols Presents Two Programs on KCRD," Athlete Reporter News, November 15, 1936, p. 3.

62 "Echols Presents Two Programs on KCRD," Athlete Reporter News, November 15, 1936, p. 3.

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105 "Echols Presents Two Programs on KCRD," Athlete Reporter News, November 15, 1936, p. 3.

106 "Echols Presents Two Programs on KCRD," Athlete Reporter News, November 15, 1936, p. 3.

107 "Echols Presents Two Programs on KCRD," Athlete Reporter News, November 15, 1936, p. 3.