The Roots of Texas Music

By Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2003

As Gary Hartman points out in his introductory chapter to *The Roots of Texas Music,* the fact that Texas was settled by many different ethnic groups who brought diverse music and culture with them, makes a book of this type a challenge to assemble. *The Roots of Texas Music* is not a chronological history of Texas music, nor is it truly a study of the roots of Texas music; rather it is a collection of specific essays dealing with limited subject areas, and written by contributors with varied specialties and viewpoints. Nonetheless, it is a good source book and a valuable contribution to Texas music scholarship.

There are but limited new ideas presented in these collected essays. For the most part, the contributors have sifted through existing major sources or, as in the case of the chapter on Texas jazz, reduced a monograph into a single chapter; however, this type of activity is important in that most general readers do not have the time or expertise to consult major sources for themselves. Someone who will not pick up an entire book on Texas jazz may be inclined to read one chapter on the subject.

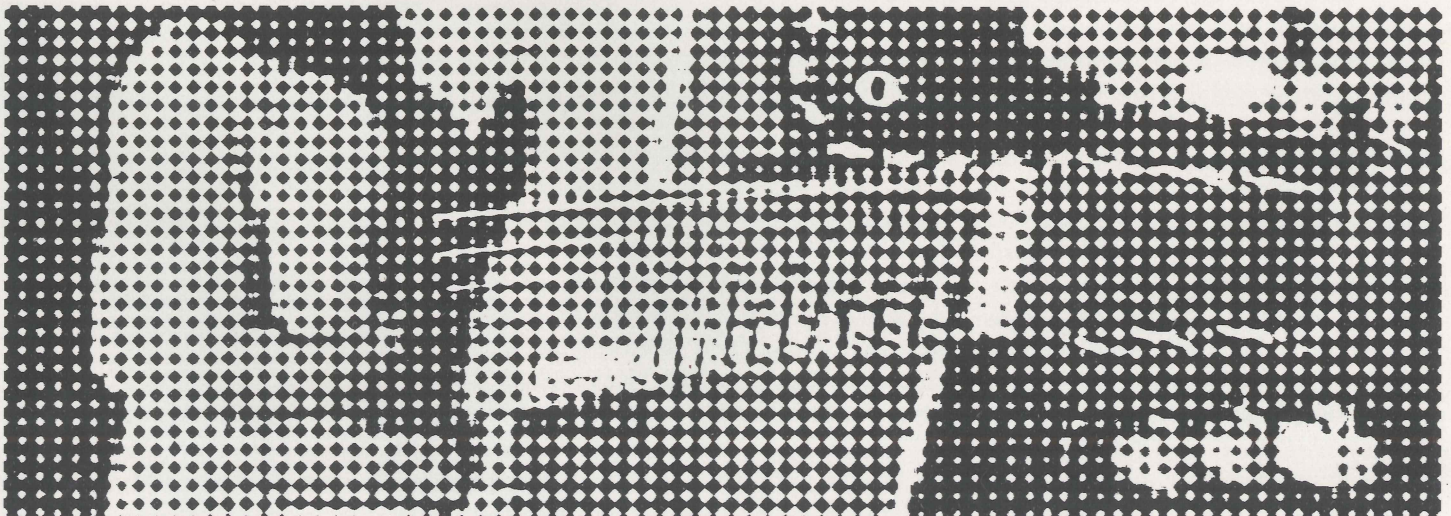
The newest information comes from the chapter entitled "Black Creoles and the Evolution of Zydeco in Southeast Texas." It will come as a shock to most people, including this reviewer, that Zydeco was not entirely a product of French-speaking African Americans in Louisiana, but that there was a key Texas connection in the making of this music. It is doubtful that this chapter will compel most people to incorporate Zydeco into the catalogue of forms of Texas music, but it was a daring move on the author's part.

The only chapter that really addresses specific roots of Texas music is the one entitled "Chicano Music, Evolution and Politics to 1950." However, it is more about politics and race relations in the Southwest than music.

It is nice to see a chapter devoted to classical music in Texas, although the author limits himself to a discussion of the German immigrants' contribution to the establishment of classical music and classical ensembles in the state. Much could have been added about composers, performers, and training programs in the state in the first half of the twentieth century.

It was a nice move to position the chapter entitled "Texan Jazz, 1920-50" near the beginning of the book, since so few people recognize Texas as a jazz center. It is unfortunate, however, that the author focused on those musicians who left the state and made their careers elsewhere, rather than on those who remained in Texas and created jazz for Texans.

One of the longest chapters in the book is devoted to Texas country music. As was the case in the jazz chapter, the author of the country music contribution focuses on country music performers who left the state rather than on those who remained in Texas. Little is said of the tradition of cowboy ballads that fed into country music in Texas, or of the unique Texas fiddle tradition; and though the author claims unequivocally that western swing belongs to the "family" of country music, he does little to present this very important form of Texas music to his readers. Western swing is a type of fusion, a combination of country, jazz, and many other genres of music co-existing in Texas. Western swing, like other hybridized art forms, is often misunderstood. Jazz scholars ignore western swing because they consider it "country" music, and country music scholars limit it to the country field. Both sides miss an opportunity to fully address the most important and prominent form of music in Texas in the 1930s and 40s. Furthermore, this music never completely died out and has undergone a renaissance that is restoring its popularity with many Texans.

Much credit must go to Gary Hartman, whose introduction to *The Roots of Texas Music* created a framework that put all of these disparate essays into perspective. As is often the case with a book of collected essays, the writing styles and depth of information provided are not consistent throughout, but there are valuable chapters, and some new and daring viewpoints.

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