

The New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music:

A New Showplace for the Arts in Texas

Anthony Lyle



Ted Daffan. Photo courtesy of Dorothy Daffan Yamuzzi and Geronimo Treviño III

The New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music, located at 1259 Gruene Road in Gruene, Texas, will soon open a new 10,000 square foot exhibit and performance facility as part of its ongoing efforts to encourage the preservation and study of the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the Lone Star State. Although the museum is only three years old, it already has compiled a very impressive list of accomplishments, including a number of highly acclaimed and well-attended exhibits, a variety of educational outreach programs in local schools and community venues, and a very successful fundraising drive made possible through grants, donations, and other sources.

The New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music (NBMA&M) originally opened in 2000 in the old Hummel Museum next to the Comal County Courthouse on the main plaza in New Braunfels. The Hummel Museum, which opened its doors in October 1992, was established to exhibit a collection of the original paintings and sketches created by Sister Maria I. Hummel, a Franciscan nun who died in 1946 of tuberculosis. The museum also showcased a large collection of ceramic figurines the nun's work had inspired, along with an interpretive exhibit of Sister Hummel's art classroom from the Siessen Convent in Germany. Although the Hummel Museum attracted tourists from throughout the United States and abroad, the institution had little historical connection with the community. In 1999, the Nauer Family, which owned the licensing rights to

entitled "Uniquely Texas Icons," celebrated the creative works of twenty Texas artists in music, visual arts, decorative arts, and crafts in the newly revamped galleries that had been the Hummel Museum. It was during this initial exhibit that museum organizers decided to amend the museum's name to reflect the important role music was to play in the institution's focus on Texas culture and history. With this in mind, the current name, New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music, was chosen.

Immediately following the "Icons" exhibition, the museum presented "Gruene Hall: A Texas Legend." This exhibit emphasized the unique cultural heritage of Gruene, a picturesque village settled by German immigrants in the mid-1800s directly across the Guadalupe River from New Braunfels. This historic community of artisans, shops, and the world famous music

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Hummel's work, requested the return of the original Hummel artworks. Without these works as an artistic centerpiece, the museum seemed destined for closure.

Despite this setback, however, the Hummel Museum's Board of Directors decided to reorganize the museum and try to secure its place within the community. In May 2000, the Board recruited Charles Gallagher, who had created and directed "DiverseWorks," a highly successful, multidisciplinary arts center in Houston, featuring exhibition, performance, and studio space, and Charlene Rathburn, who currently works with the Abilene Fine Arts Museum, to help define a new mission for the Hummel. Rathburn spent two months researching museums around the state and gathering ideas for a strategic reorganization plan.

Gallagher contacted John Paul Baptiste, who, at the time, was Executive Director of the Texas Commission on the Arts, to help draw up a list of achievable goals for the museum. For the first year, these goals were to address three main issues: the diverse historical traditions of Central Texas; the creation of exhibitions focused equally on visual arts, music, folk history, and community; and a survey procedure to gauge public opinion regarding exhibits and programs. Other suggestions included hosting community forums on the new mission and goals and integrating public comments into short and long-range plans. In addition to these suggestions, Baptiste stated that a museum had to do two things: be accepted as a part of the local community and develop financial profit centers to help sustain the institution. Following these initial meetings, Gallagher was appointed Development Director and eventually became Executive Director of the newly transformed museum.

By August 2000, the museum's new name, the New Braunfels Museum of Art, was made official, and its new mission to help preserve and exhibit Texas art, music, and other forms of folk culture and history was well underway. The first exhibition,

venue, Gruene Hall, was celebrated through an eclectic display of artifacts and documents on loan to the museum from the Gruene family and the Sophienburg archives, a stage-set of country music instruments, sketches of Gruene Hall performers, and memorabilia from past Gruene Hall performances. In conjunction with this exhibition were museum programs that included educational art and music workshops.

Throughout 2001, the museum continued its successful run with other exhibitions, such as "Picturing Here," "American Fiddler's Collection," "Made in Texas," and "The Texas Accordion Legacy: 100 Years of Music and Community." In May 2001, the museum produced its first annual "Texas Music and Arts Festival," a very popular three-day series of events showcasing Texas musicians from Americana to Zydeco.



London Hall #5, "Sunday Lovers." Oil on canvas. Painted by Gail Wendorf.2

Education and Outreach Programs

In addition to serving as an important exhibit facility for Texas history and culture, the museum has made a strong commitment to arts education in New Braunfels and Comal County. In 2001, the museum raised over \$50,000 in grants for the implementation of an "Arts in Education Program." Since its inception, this program has served over 5,000 local youths with professional artist workshops, residencies, field trips, and musical performances. In addition, a \$15,000 "MetLife-Museum Connections" grant allowed the museum to expand this project to work in conjunction with an "Art After School" program for children residing in public housing. This combined outreach program continued in 2002 and is expected to expand during 2003-04 through collaborations with a local charter school and other non-profit organizations. The museum continues to develop arts programs in order to reach out to specific populations in the community that are traditionally underserved. For example, more than 50% of the New Braunfels population is over 65 years of age, and the museum is currently organizing a program to provide free art appreciation and history classes at the local Senior Center.

Smithsonian Affiliations Program

On November 30, 2001 the NBMA&M became the 75th museum to be accepted as an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian's Affiliations Program Director, Michael Carrigan, acknowledged the NBMA&M's accomplishments by stating, "We hold in high regard the professionalism and expertise of the New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music staff and are confident that our affiliate relationship with the museum will help us better serve the entire country as 'America's Museum.'" The NBMA&M marked this important occasion with the unveiling of the first Smithsonian traveling exhibition to be shown at the New Braunfels facility. "Women of Taste: A Collaboration Celebrating Quilt Artists and Chefs" combined works by nationally recognized female quilt makers and chefs.

The Museum Moves to Gruene

By the end of 2001, the museum, its exhibits, and its many educational programs had outgrown the old Hummel Museum building. In addition to needing more space, the museum had to provide adequate facilities, including a new climate control system, in order to be fully compliant with all Smithsonian Affiliations requirements. The museum's directors eventually

found a very suitable location in historic Gruene. The new site included an existing restaurant overlooking the Guadalupe River and sufficient space for a new building and parking areas. Construction on the state-of-the-art museum facility began in earnest on August 15, 2002.

In the meantime, the staff moved into a room in the adjoining River's Edge Restaurant and continued developing exhibits and educational programs and conducting research and grant writing activities. The staff took advantage of the restaurant's spacious interior, with its grand forty-foot ceilings spanned by rustic beams and a massive stone



Quilt depicting Julia Child in "Women of Taste" exhibit.
Photo courtesy of Craig D. Hillis.

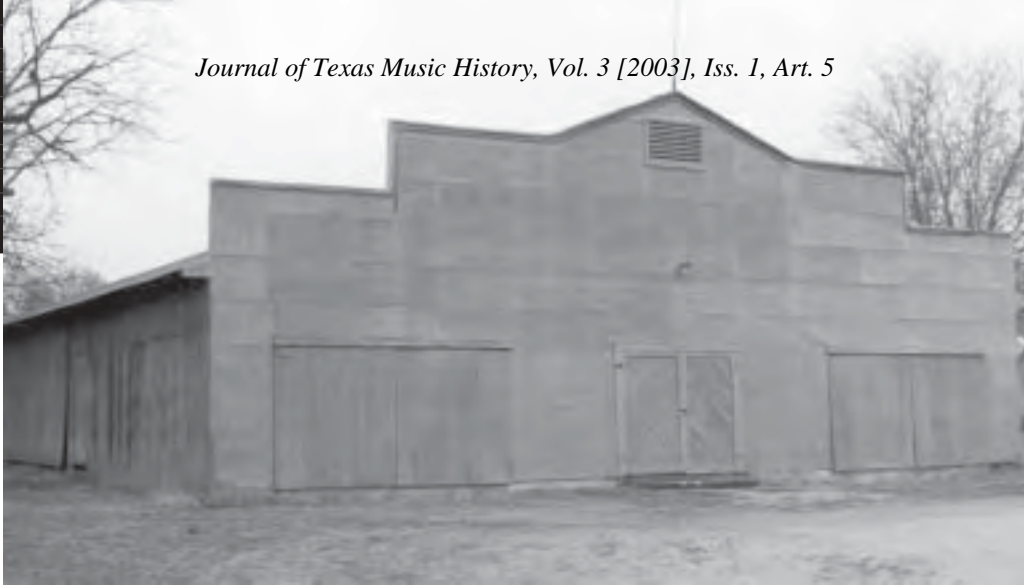
fireplace, to present additional exhibits and musical events while the new museum was being built next door. As part of these ongoing exhibits, the museum hosts regular live musical performances by a variety of Texas artists on the first Thursday evening of every month.

A Museum for the Twenty-first Century

The new museum will be a low maintenance, energy efficient 10,000 square foot facility housing exhibition space, a multi-use resource center (suitable for classroom and workshop activities), staff offices, and a gift store. The building has a large downstairs gallery with mobile walls that can easily convert the space into multiple exhibit areas, and a second gallery situated around the upstairs balcony. State-of-the-art security, climate control, and technology support systems are being installed to maintain the exact controls mandated by conservators for archival and historical materials.

During the reorganization process, museum directors decided that housing permanent collections would be too costly and

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Weinheimer Dance Hall, Stonewall, Texas. Photo courtesy of Judy Treviño.

require too much space. The concept of a non-collecting facility was consistent with the NBMA&M's vision of focusing on the creation of temporary exhibits. With the technology available today, archives of all art exhibits displayed at the museum could be stored in digital formats for a permanent record and for future research. Museum staff have addressed this issue through the Interactive Digital Archives Project (IDAP). The IDAP involves all aspects of research from data collection, temporary object acquisitions, collection management, public outreach, and exhibitions. With this strategy, the NBMA&M can use its affiliation with the Smithsonian as an intermediate institution. Through this partnership, the museum can network with other Smithsonian affiliates to access materials and archival space in order to make educational exhibits available to the public. The NBMA&M also is active in the collection and preservation of historic photographs, sound recordings, personal interviews, and family histories.

In December 2001, the museum's Music History Curator Craig Hillis and I, staff Research Curator, spent two weeks in Washington, D.C., where we began the long process of

researching the Smithsonian Institution's extensive collections and established a good working relationship with members of the Smithsonian staff. We conducted research in the Museum of American History and several of its ancillary departments, including the Archives Center, the Cultural History Collection, the Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, and the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Meetings also included key staff at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, which is currently undertaking the "Save Our Sounds" program. The "Save Our Sounds" project, which is expected to serve as a template for the NBMA&M's development of its IDAP and digital archives, involves collecting and preserving early music and other sound recordings that are currently on deteriorating vinyl, acetate, or aluminum records, tapes, and other media, and transferring them to a more permanent digital format. The NBMA&M research team also spent time at the Library of Congress exploring national resources that deal with Texas arts, at the offices of the National Endowment on the Arts, and with a lobbyist, who offered advice on accessing federal funds.

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Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Craig D. Hillis.

Dance Halls and Last Calls

The newest exhibit to open at the NBMA&M, entitled “Dance Halls and Last Calls,” is a tribute to the great dance hall traditions of the Lone Star State. In collaboration with writer and musician Geronimo Treviño III, this exhibit celebrates the important role dance halls have played as centers for social activity in communities throughout Texas since the 1800s. Treviño has spent years compiling research on Texas dance venues. As a working musician, he has intimate knowledge of many of the halls and other venues in Texas, as well as the musicians and their families.

In his new book, *Dance Halls and Last Calls*, Treviño documents such dance hall performers as Ted Daffan. Daffan, who died in 1996, was one of the most influential, yet lesser-known, talents responsible for the rise in popularity of Texas country music. He was an innovative musician and songwriter who wrote hit songs for Cliff Bruner, Gene Autry, and Bing Crosby. *Dance Halls and Last Calls* also includes interviews with other great Texas musicians, such as Adolph Hofner, who was the first to record the dance hall standard “Cotton-Eyed Joe” in 1941. Hofner and his band, the Pearl Wranglers, enjoyed one of the longest careers in country music. Just prior to his death in June 2000, Hofner was inducted into the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame. The stories of Ted Daffan, Adolph Hofner, and many others will be told in the “Dance Halls and Last Calls” exhibition at the New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music, along with the colorful histories of the dance halls themselves and the communities they served.

The “Dance Halls and Last Calls” exhibit also will include works by Gail Wendorf, an artist who visited and photographed dancers in many dance halls across Texas. Wendorf painted over

one hundred oil-on-Masonite works and more than thirty larger-than-life images on canvas depicting colorful figures dancing in the dark interiors of these historic halls. The exhibit also will feature recent photographs taken by Austin-area photographer Bruce Jordan. Jordan’s high-resolution black and white photographs are from a selection of halls, including Weinheimer Dance Hall. Located in Stonewall, the hall was hit by a tornado in October 2001, which destroyed most of the structure.

In addition to the exhibit, museum staff have worked with Geronimo Treviño on related projects, which include a multimedia exhibit, a documentary film on Texas dance halls, a traveling exhibit, and a compilation CD of classic dance hall tunes, including Texas-Czech polkas, western swing, honky tonk, and Americana. The “Dance Halls and Last Calls” exhibit promises to be another in a series of very successful projects undertaken by this new and dynamic museum.

Recently Charles Gallagher and Debbie Voorhees, Financial Director and all-around-handy-woman for the NBMA&M, were watching contractors put the finishing touches on the roof of the new facility. A tourist strolling by stopped to ask if this new building was going to be a dance hall. Gallagher replied, “No, it’s a museum,” but then added, “and a dance hall!” This is truly a fine compliment for a twenty-first century institution dedicated to educating and entertaining its community in the Texas dance hall tradition. ■

For more information on the New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music call 830-625-5636 or visit: <http://www.nbmuseum.org/>