



Reviews

et al.: Reviews & Contributors



The Billboard Guide to Tejano and Regional Mexican Music.

By Ramiro Burr (New York: Billboard Books, 1999).

For aficionados, ethnomusicologists, and historians of Tejano music, highly respected music journalist Ramiro Burr, of San Antonio, has provided an indispensable reference guide to Tejano performers and producers and the transnational cultural influences that shaped their music. Using an encyclopedic format with the bulk of its approximately 300 entries in the form of brief biographical sketches of performers and groups, this handy resource also contains a useful introduction, glossary, Tex-Mex chronology, and Burr's Top Ten list of songs and albums.

In the context of the rising commercial success of Tejano music and the shocking murder of superstar Selena, Burr undertook this book to make the public more aware of the long evolution of Tejano music. In the introduction, he discusses this evolution in the political, social, and cultural context of Texas, northern Mexico, and the Greater Southwest from the late nineteenth century to the present. He emphasizes the blend of transnational cultural influences, including the incorporation and adaptation of German, Mexican, Czech, and Polish instruments and traditions, that have contributed to the distinctiveness of Tejano music.

Burr also recognizes class-based distinctions within this genre. He shows, for example, how Narciso Martinez and Santiago Jimenez ("Flaco," senior)-pivotal figures in the genesis of conjunto music

(Tejano's predecessor)-traveled around during the Great Depression, playing dances and taking manual labor jobs where they could find them. Much like their Anglo counterpart, Woody Guthrie, they performed songs that spoke to the shattered dreams and working-class struggles of down-and-out *obrerros* and *campesinos* in rural areas.

As Burr points out, although Tejano music has often expressed and reinforced a sense of identity, ethnic pride, and political consciousness, Mexican Americans face enormous pressures from the dominant Anglo culture to assimilate. In fact, tensions often surface between musicians and record labels that at times stifle creativity in the name of industry standardization and profits. Tejano music's evolution cannot be understood without taking into account such economic, social, and political pressures, not only on individual artists but on their audiences as well.

Written in a very lively style, this book should appeal to a wide audience of music fans, critics, and scholars. It is highly readable and engaging, and I strongly recommend it for libraries, music history collections, and music aficionados.

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ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Karl Hagstrom Miller

is a doctoral candidate in history at New York University. He is completing a dissertation exploring folklore, phonographs, and the segregation of southern music in the early twentieth century. He has also written about tourism and segregation in San Antonio's Market Square, the 1970s salsa scene in New York City, and the music of Charles Mingus. He currently lives and makes a glorious racket in the city of his youth, Austin, Texas

Roger Wood

is the author of the book *Down in Houston: Bayou City Blues* (a collaboration with photographer James Fraher), to be published in 2002 by University of Texas Press. He has contributed a chapter on zydeco (on which his article in this issue is based) to *The Roots of Texas Music*, forthcoming in 2002 from Texas A&M University Press. He has also written for *The Da Capo Jazz and Blues Lover's Guide to the U.S.* (3rd ed., 2001) and published feature articles on regional music history in various periodicals, including *Living Blues*, *Houston Press*, and *Arkansas Review*.

Telling Stories, Writing Songs: An Album of Texas Songwriters

by Kathleen Hudson, Foreword by Sam Phillips, Introduction by B.B. King, Austin: (The University of Texas Press, 2001).

During the past few decades, oral history has come to play an increasingly important role in the preservation and study of our nation's past. Not only does oral history permit us to document the lives and stories of those who, otherwise, might not have left behind easily accessible records of their existence, it also allows the people we are studying to speak "in their own words."

As important as oral history can be in documenting the historical evolution of society, it also can be problematic. Interviewers must be capable, objective, and well prepared in order to draw the most relevant and accurate information possible from the subjects interviewed. This is not as easy as it may sound. Some interviewers are guilty of focusing too narrowly, asking unfair or leading questions in order to elicit particular responses, or simply not being considerate enough to be quiet and allow the subject to open up and speak freely.

However, in this superb new book about Texas singer-songwriters, Kathleen Hudson does everything right. The result is a wonderful collection of interviews that is as historically significant as it is enjoyable to read. Hudson includes a colorful cast of characters, thirty-four in all, who represent a broad range of Texas music, literature, and popular culture. A foreword by Sam Phillips and an introduction by B.B. King help put Texas music and its impact on national and international musical traditions in proper perspective. In her conversations with Willie Nelson, Tish Hinojosa, Townes Van Zandt, Marcia Ball, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Johnny Rodriguez, Tanya Tucker, Lyle Lovett, Robert Earl Keen, and others, Hudson presents a broad spectrum of personalities, musical styles, and perspectives on the shaping of Texas music history.

In addition to having assembled a diverse and intriguing group of individuals, Hudson conducts the interviews with sensitivity, insight, and a deep understanding of the importance of these people and their

contributions to Texas music. Hudson asks the right questions, keeps them brief, and remains flexible enough to allow the conversation to develop organically, rather than trying to steer it into particular directions to suit her own needs. Perhaps most importantly, she does a great job of getting out of the way and letting her guests talk. Consequently, Hudson evokes a good deal of candid, amusing, and always informative responses from her subjects.

One of the best examples of Hudson's skill in interviewing is her conversation with Darrell Royal, University of Texas coaching legend and close friend of many prominent Texas musicians. At first, Royal is puzzled as to why anyone would want to interview him regarding the historical and cultural importance of Texas music. However, after Hudson explains that his lifelong support and friendship of Texas music and musicians makes him uniquely qualified to comment on such matters, Royal opens up immediately and ends up having far more to say about the subject than he probably ever even realized.

All of the other interviews are as fascinating and important in their own ways. Hudson digs deep and succeeds in drawing out the honesty, humor, and, in some cases, vulnerability of these prominent Texas figures. Although some readers might fault her for focusing mainly on "folk" or "country" artists, Hudson acknowledges that this study is not intended to represent all genres of Texas music. For such comprehensive coverage, she remarks, "perhaps a series" of such books is needed. Here's hoping that Hudson and/or others will continue working toward fulfilling that need and shedding even more light on the history and humanity behind Texas music.

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Joe Specht

is director of the Jay-Rollins Library at McMurry University in Abilene. In addition to presenting numerous papers on topics ranging from the Chuck Wagon Gang to the 13th Floor Elevators to Willie Nelson, he has contributed entries to *The Encyclopedia of Country Music* (Oxford University Press, 1998) and the forthcoming *Handbook of Texas Music*. His interview with and discography of Hoyle Nix was published in *Old Time Music* in 1980. A former host of his own radio show, "Burning Memories: The Texas Tradition," Specht has an extensive record collection devoted to all aspects of Texas music.

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