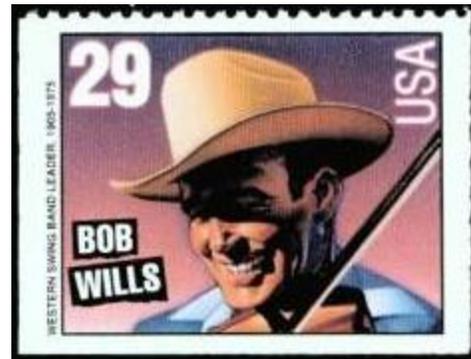


Bob Wills

James Robert (Bob) Wills was one of the originators of western swing music, and was by far its most famous figure, earning him the title of “Father of Western Swing.” He was born on March 6, 1905, into a musical family. His father was a fiddle player who along with his grandfather, taught the young Wills to play the fiddle and the mandolin. After moving west to Turkey Texas, Wills became a barber, but never stopped playing his fiddle. In 1915 he played at his first dance, and he played for local dances across West Texas for the next fourteen years.



In 1929, Wills decided to pursue his music full time. He moved to Fort Worth, where the diverse styles of the different ethnic traditions in Texas were concentrated, and began to amalgamate those influences into a style of his own. After meeting a like-minded young musician named Herman Arnspinger, he formed The Wills Fiddle Band. In 1930 Milton Brown joined the group, and thus began a musical partnership that created the genre of music now known as western swing. At the time, the two innovators were playing jazz music, but adapting the popular idiom to the unique influences of the region. Gaining sponsorship from Light Crust Flour, the band began performing on the radio under the name the Light Crust Doughboys. Brown left the band in 1932 to form the Musical Brownies, and added twin fiddles, tenor banjo and slap bass, pointing the music in the direction of swing, which they played on local radio and at dancehalls.

Wills remained with the Doughboys and replaced Brown with new singer Tommy Duncan. Unable to work with W. Lee O’Daniel, the authoritarian host of the Light Crust Doughboy radio show and General Manager of the parent company, Burrus Mill and Elevator Company, Wills and Duncan left the Doughboys in 1933.

After forming a new band, Wills soon settled the renamed "Texas Playboys" in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and began broadcasting noontime shows over the 50,000 watt KVOO radio station. By 1935 Wills had added horns, drums, and a steel guitar to the Playboys. Wills hired top-notch musicians, and gave them plenty of room to improvise, in the jazz tradition. He added his own fiddle, vocals and most notably, his trademark “hollers,” injecting comments and outbursts of appreciation throughout the vocals and solos.

Wills’s recording of his composition "New San Antonio Rose" (1940) was an enormous hit, catapulting him into the national spotlight. He went to Hollywood that year and made the first of his nineteen “horse operas,” or western musical movies. Wills joined the army in December 1942, and upon his discharge, relocated to California - first to Los Angeles, then to Fresno and finally to Sacramento where his enormous ranch and nightclub was known as “Wills Point.” He downsized his band into a smaller combo, and became an enormous draw in Los Angeles, where many of his Texas, Oklahoma and regional fans had relocated during World War II. During this

era, he recorded the “Tiffany Transcriptions,” radio transcriptions that many feel comprise his most exciting and best work.

In 1957 he was elected to the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, and in 1968 he was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame. Wills was married and divorced several times between 1935 and 1941. On August 10, 1942, he was married to Betty Anderson, and they remained married until his death; they had four children. Wills had two children by former marriages. In 1969 the governor and legislature of Texas honored Wills for his contribution to American music, one of the few original music forms Texas and the Southwest have produced. The day after the ceremonies in Austin, Wills had the first in a series of crippling strokes. By 1973 his health had improved to the extent that he could lead some of his former Texas Playboys in a recording session for United Artists. The album, *For the Last Time: Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys*, sold more copies than any other in Wills’ career and was awarded a Grammy Award by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, the highest achievement of any Wills recording or any other recording in the history of western swing. Bob Wills died on May 13, 1975, and was buried in Memorial Park in Tulsa, Oklahoma.