

The Women There Don't Treat You Mean: Abilene in Song

by Joe W. Specht. (Abilene: State House Press, 2006. Pp112. Acknowledgments, illustrations, notes, index, music CD.
ISBN 1-933337-06-0, \$14.95 hardcover.)

The list of words that rhyme easily with Abilene is a long one, but that is not the only reason Abilene appears in so many popular songs. Joe Specht has written an entertaining and informative examination of songs featuring Abilene, Texas, in their lyrics or as their theme, as well as the songwriters and musicians who wrote or performed those songs. Although it is a small book the size of a double CD case, it is informative, insightful, well-researched, illustrated, and indexed. Clearly a labor of love, it is also a very entertaining read. The accompanying CD is a nice addition to the book. It includes six songs about Abilene performed by contemporary musicians from the Key City. Five of the songs are covers of classic songs about Abilene, and one is written expressly for the CD.

Specht begins his book with several stories about the most famous song, Bob Gibson and Lester

Brown's "Abilene." First released by Gibson in 1957, a cover version of the song became a national hit in the early 1960s when it was recorded on the RCA label by George Hamilton IV, at the urging of John D. Loudermilk. Insight into the sometimes unfair nature of the music publishing business may be gained here by readers who are not familiar with the realities of dealing with major record labels.

The book continues with chapters about songs from Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins, Ernest Tubb, Johnny Cash, and Bob Dylan. Other well-known artists, including Buddy Jewel, Larry Joe Taylor, Gary I? Nunn, Waylon Jennings, and Dave Alvin are discussed. Specht mentions a substantial number of other artists who have not garnered as great a

degree of fame. He also tells us that the reach of

Abilene extends far beyond Texas, as evidenced by songs from the British bands Humble Pie and Yes. Bands from Canada to Germany also have incorporated Abilene into some of their songs. In July 2006, the Australian Broadcast Corporation produced and broadcast an hour-long radio show entitled "Abilene Jukebox," featuring many recordings of songs about Abilene and an interview with Joe Specht.

"The Future Great City of West Texas" is also Joe Specht's home of thirty years. He has not neglected its native musicians, past and contemporary. In the chapter "Local Talent and Then Some," he writes of the many musical contributions to the Abilene "theme" by artists from the Key City.

This book is an enjoyable and affectionate tribute to the city of Abilene, the images it evokes of the American West, and the music it has inspired. It is also a worthy chapter in the overall story of Texas Music.

Gary Hickinbotham

Texas Zydeco

by Roger Wood, Photography by James Fraher. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.) Pp 336. Acknowledgments, photos, and index. ISBN-13: 978-0-292-71258-4, hardcover; ISBN-10: 0-292-71258-8, soft cover.

Although zydeco is rooted in the Afro-European musical traditions brought to Louisiana by French masters and their black slaves beginning in the early eighteenth century, Texas has played an important role in how those musical influences eventually blossomed into what is now modern zydeco. In fact, several of the most influential pioneers of zydeco have lived in East Texas, where they made some of the earliest known zydeco recordings. It also was in the "Frenchtown" section of Houston during the 1930s and 1940s that French-speaking blacks began to blend their "la la" music with the blues, R&B, and other musical traditions of English-speaking blacks, thereby helping to forge the early zydeco sound.

It may surprise many Texans, as well as Louisianans, to find out just how central the Lone Star State has been to the development of zydeco. This is understandable, since zydeco has long been marketed as a uniquely "Louisiana" form of music. Furthermore, unless you happen to live in East Texas, you might not be fully aware of the strong presence of black creole culture in that part of the state.

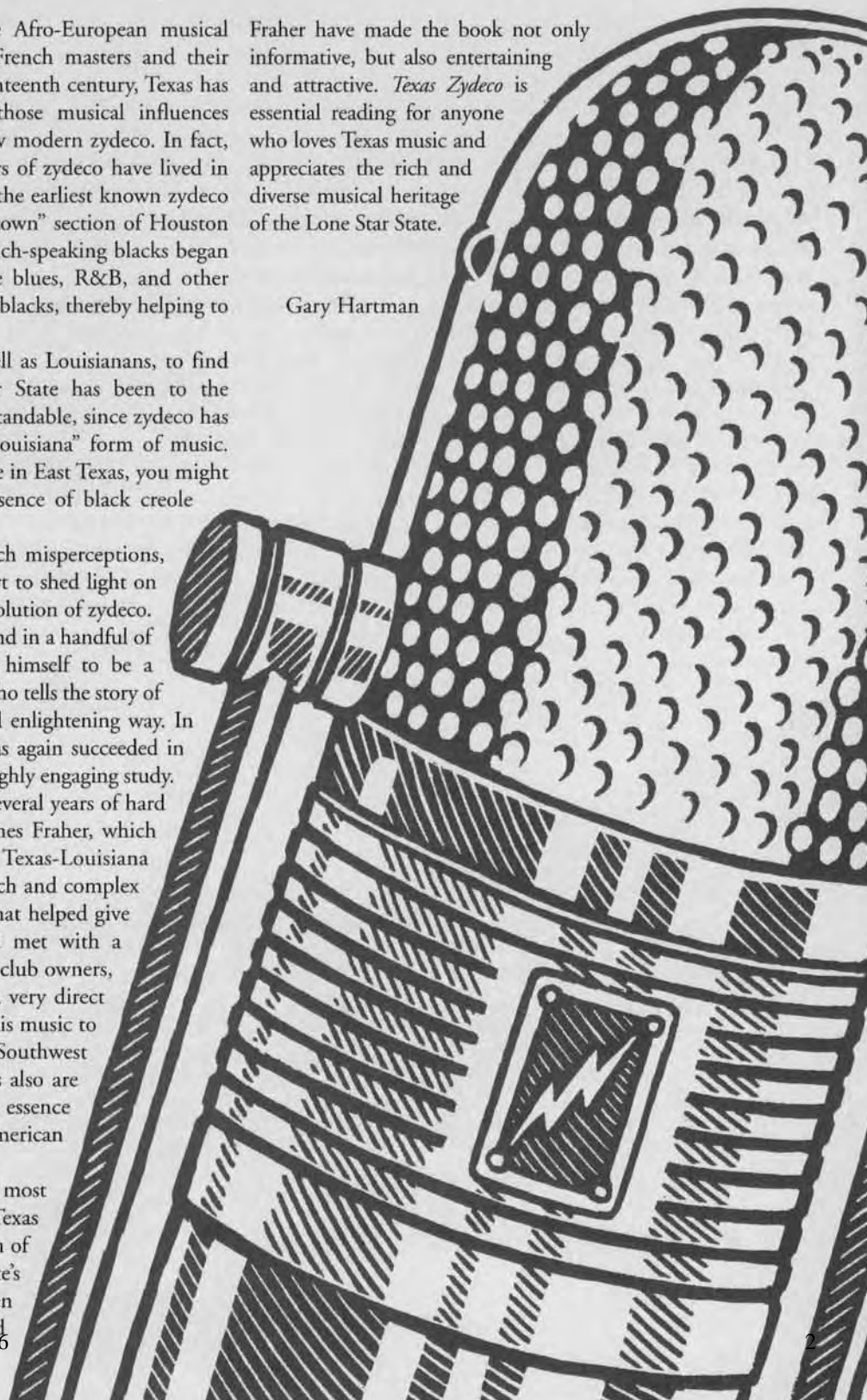
As part of an attempt to correct such misperceptions, Roger Wood has been leading the effort to shed light on the vital role Texas has played in the evolution of zydeco. In his earlier book, *Down in Houston*, and in a handful of published articles, Wood has proven himself to be a shrewd observer and a talented writer who tells the story of zydeco in Texas in an entertaining and enlightening way. In this most recent publication, Wood has again succeeded in producing a well-researched and thoroughly engaging study.

Texas Zydeco is the culmination of several years of hard work by Wood and photographer James Fraher, which involved traveling throughout the Texas-Louisiana border region and documenting the rich and complex cross-pollination of musical cultures that helped give rise to zydeco. In his travels, Wood met with a remarkably diverse array of musicians, club owners, and fans, all of whom help relate in a very direct and personal way the importance of this music to the regional culture of East Texas and Southwest Louisiana. James Fraher's photographs also are superb and certainly help capture the essence of this hybridized Franco-African-American musical genre.

Texas Zydeco may be one of the most important books published about Texas music to date, since it provides a wealth of information about a part of the state's musical heritage that is so often misunderstood. Fortunately, Wood and

Fraher have made the book not only informative, but also entertaining and attractive. *Texas Zydeco* is essential reading for anyone who loves Texas music and appreciates the rich and diverse musical heritage of the Lone Star State.

Gary Hartman



Our Contributors

Joe Bailey

is a second-year student at the University of Texas School of Law, who edits for the *Texas Review of Entertainment and Sports Law*. As an undergraduate studying with music historians Karl Miller and Richard Holland, as well as with musicologist Elizabeth Crist, Bailey produced a thesis entitled "Conversations in Jazz," which included interviews with such jazz greats as Roy Haynes and Wynton Marsalis. Bailey is currently involved in a project examining the life and career of Texas musician Doug Sahm.

Gail Folkins

holds a Ph.D. in creative writing and is an adjunct faculty member at St. Edward's University in Austin. Her recent publications have appeared in *SLAB*, *R-KV-RY*, and *Lifewriting Annual*. This essay is adapted from her upcoming book *Texas Dance Halls: A Two-Step Circuit*, to be published by Texas Tech University Press.

Gary Hartman

Director of the Center for Texas Music History at Texas State University-San Marcos, has published several articles and book chapters on Texas music and will soon publish a comprehensive book on the history of Texas music.

Gary Hickenbotham

is a recording engineer and producer at the Fire Station Studios at Texas State University, where he has recorded a number of great Texas musicians. He is a voting member of NARAS, a member of the AES, and is on the faculty of the Sound Recording Technology Program in the School of Music at Texas State. He has been published in *The Journal of Texas Music History* and is a contributor to *The Handbook of Texas Music*.

Sterlin Holmesly

is a former newspaper editor and author of "HemisFair '68 and the Transformation of San Antonio." He has contributed more than sixty-five oral histories to "The Holmesly Collection" at the Institute of Texan Cultures, the University of Texas at San Antonio.

J. Marcus Weekley

is a freelance photographer who is also a poet and short story writer. His work has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Quick Fiction*, *Thieves Jargon*, and elsewhere. More of his photographs may be viewed at: www.flickr.com/photos/whynottryitagain2