

## **Western Swing**

Narrator: Western Swing is a distinct musical genre that combines different influences found in Texas and the American Southwest.

N: Popularized by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, Western Swing enjoyed a heyday three decades long, from the 1930s to the 1950s.

N: It delighted the audiences on the radio and at dance halls, on records and in the movies.

N: One of the most successful of American popular music styles, its energy, complexity, and beauty continue to resonate with musicians and fans alike.

N: At its root, Western Swing is dance music that combines elements of many different genres including country, jazz, polka, mariachi, pop, blues, and more.

N: It began to evolve into a distinctive style in the late 1920s when hot-string bands on the dance hall circuit started to experiment and expand their sense with different songs and styles.

(Music playing)

N: Other bands, such as the High Flyers and Clayton McMichen's Georgia Wild Cats, were playing proto-Western Swing in the mid to late 1920s; however, Texans Bob Wills and Milton Brown in particular are widely credited with creating the genre.

N: Both were born in the early years of the twentieth century in rural areas and, like so many other families after the great crash of 1929, found themselves transplanted to an urban area, in this case, Fort Worth, Texas.

(Music Playing)

N: Milton Brown's smooth jazz vocals and Bob Wills' traditional breakdown fiddling blended in a unique new way.

N: The combos they led became extremely popular around Fort Worth and throughout the Southwest.

N: Broadcasting on radio stations first as the Aladdin Laddies and later as the Light Crust Doughboys, Brown pushed for more jazz experimentation while Wills clung to the fiddle tradition.

N: The resulting compromise coalesced into the genre that would come to be known as Western Swing.

(Music playing)

N: After three years together, the partnership between Milton Brown and Bob Wills ended when brown left the Dough Boys in 1932 to form his own band, Milton Brown and his Musical Brownies.

N: Wills left the following year forming Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.

N: Both bands continued to experiment with instrumentation; Brown added piano and Wills added drums.

N: Both continued to broaden their repertoire, drawing influence from Mexican folk songs as well as western and cowboy tunes.

N: The popularity of both bands soared throughout the Southwest and beyond, and both began recording under the savvy production efforts of the talented and influential Uncle Art Satherley.

(Music playing)

N: Tragically, Milton Brown died in 1936 from injuries sustained in a car accident.

N: The recordings he left behind are some of the most exciting and important in American music, a blueprint of what Western Swing would become as it blossomed over the next ten years.

(Music playing)

N: Throughout the rest of the 1930s, Western Swing music exploded across the nation.

N: In Texas, the birthplace of the genre, bands sprung up across the state.

N: Cliff Bruner, who had been a member of The Musical Brownies, formed his own highly successful group, The Texas Wanderers in Houston.

N: The Port Arthur Jubileers brought even more of the Gulf Coast influence into the genre and Adolph Hofner added his Czech musical heritage to the mix.

N: Western Swing or Texas Swing as it was known in those early years, spread far beyond the borders of the Lone Star State.

N: Pee-wee King from Milwaukee, Wisconsin formed his Golden West Cowboys and Hank Penny from Birmingham, Alabama started his Radio Cowboys.

N: These bands enjoyed success on the radio, through their records, and on the concert and dance circuit.

(Music playing)

N: In the late 1930s and early 1940 a new medium, film, began to feature regional musical acts, thereby introducing bands to national and international audiences.

N: The Hollywood western movie, or horse opera, gave many bands not only lasting celluloid success but a permanent association with the western image.

N: Bob Wills took his Texas Playboys to Hollywood, appearing in numerous horse operas and permanently adopting the popular rodeo clothing style.

(Clip from movie)

N: Wills wasn't the only one leaving the mid South for California during the 1930s.

N: Throughout the Great Depression, about three and a half million rural farming people fled the Dust Bowl, a severe regional drought centered in Oklahoma and North Texas.

N: They headed west to California.

(Music playing)

N: Sometimes referred to as Okies, these Dust Bowl refugees came not only from Oklahoma but also from Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, and other states.

N: In December 1941, the entry of the United States into World War II brought a new prosperity to California, where a boom in war industry jobs spawned another population explosion, particularly in Hollywood and in surrounding communities.

(Music playing)

N: Just as the urban transplants had, most who uprooted themselves sought cultural comfort in the music and Southern California became a thriving center for bands such as the Texas Playboys, who would draw up to 15,000 people at a concert.

N: It was in California during the wartime boom that what had been called Hillbilly Jazz, Texas Swing, and just plain dance music, took the name it would wear permanently, Western Swing.

(Music playing)

N: A new generation of California-based Western Swing acts was emerging, including the self-proclaimed king of Western Swing Spade Cooley.

N: His sophisticated arrangements and top notch big band were Bob Wills's main competition.

N: Many others, including Tex Williams, Hank Thompson, and Deuce Spriggins, also found success in the golden age of Western Swing.

N: With the advent of Rock and Roll, Western Swing went into a decline following World War II.

N: A lull period throughout the 1950s and 1960s might have led some to believe that the genre had run its course, but two distinct revivals have kept the music alive.

(Music playing)

N: In Northern California in the early 1970s, two bands gained wide success playing Western Swing music.

N: Commander Cody and his Lost Planet Airmen incorporated elements of Western Swing into their country rock sound.

N: The Grammy Award-winning band Asleep at the Wheel launched its career in California but later moved to Austin, Texas, where it continues to perform Western Swing music.

N: The Wheel pays tribute to the legendary founder of Western Swing, Bob Wills, in its musical theater production, "A Ride with Bob."

N: Others, including Alvin Crow and Cornell Hurd, also continue the tradition of Western Swing in dance halls all across Texas.

(Music playing)

N: The early 1990s brought another revival for Western Swing with such bands as The Lucky Stars from Los Angeles and Austin's Hot Club of Cowtown.

N: Country music superstars Merle Haggard, the Dixie Chicks, and George Strait have proclaimed their appreciation for Western Swing, recording songs made famous by Bob Wills and other greats.

N: Western Swing music festivals are held throughout the United States and around the world, highlighting the talents of these newer acts and shining a spotlight on some of the original players, including members of the Texas Playboys.

(Music playing)

N: Western Swing music remains one of the most successful and best loved genres of American popular music.

(Music playing)