Cosmic Cowboys, Thunderbirds, and Punks: *From Austin Countercultures to the 'Live Music Capital of the World'*

Jonathan Watson

The Skunks at Raul's in 1979. Photo by Ken Hoge. Courtesy of Jesse Sublett.

The complex musical traditions of the American Southwest reflect the vastly diverse ethnic cultures long present throughout the region. For hundreds of years, the Southwest has been a cultural crossroads for Native Americans, Hispanics, Anglos, African Americans, Germans, Czechs, and many others, all of whom have left an important imprint on the area's musical history. As historian Gary Hartman notes, "The number, variety, and placement of the state's ethnic communities are unique in all of North America, and they have allowed for a prolific cross-pollination of musical cultures that has given Texas music its special character."[1] Today, music continues to be a vital cultural element in defining what it means to be Texan.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of scholarship that highlights music's prominent role as a cultural force within society at the national level. For example, George Lipsitz's *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* and Diane *Pecknold's Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* look at how music has played an important part in articulating and redefining racial and gender roles in American society. As valuable as such studies are, there is a need for further examination of musical history at the regional and local level, including within specific urban communities.[2]

Central Texas, and Austin in particular, can be seen as a microcosm of these larger trends throughout the Southwest of blending together disparate musical traditions and creating new forms of music that reflect the unique cultural history of the region. This article will look at

the proliferation of several musical genres in Austin and the surrounding area from the 1960s to the 1980s and examine how the dynamic cultural environment of that period helped give rise to the eclectic live music scene that flourishes in Central Texas today.

Ethnomusicologist Manuel Peña suggests that most music can be categorized as either "organic" or "superorganic." By "organic" he means music that has evolved "organically" from within a society and is typically used for non-commercial purposes. Examples of this include music performed by local residents themselves as part of community rituals, such as religious ceremonies, family gatherings, political rallies, or other events that are part of the communal exchange of culture within a society. By contrast, "superorganic" music is usually intended to generate financial profit or be exchanged for money, goods, or services of some type.

Peña's organic versus superorganic paradigm is helpful for better understanding the often complicated role music plays in human societies, but there are also flaws in this theoretical model. The single biggest problem is that most forms of music do not fit neatly into either the organic or superorganic category but, instead, lie somewhere in between. For example, music that arises organically from within a society can be commodified, just as superorganic music that was originally created for commercial purposes can be adopted by local residents and repurposed for organic uses within the community.[3]

The music scene that developed in Austin and the surrounding Central Texas region during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s certainly reflects the dynamic interplay of "organic" and "superorganic" forces at that time. After all, it was this period that gave rise not only to progressive country (which would revolutionize country music on a national level), but also a reinvigoration of the long-standing local blues traditions and the proliferation of a new genre that would come to be known as "punk" and would take on its own uniquely southwestern flavor. All three of these musical styles originated in a mostly organic manner as a grassroots effort by local artists and audiences to find a form of musical expression that would allow them to articulate their own sense of individual and collective identity.

Of course, as is so often the case, these musical genres eventually became more commodified, as record companies, club owners, and musicians themselves began to recognize the potential for financial profit. It is important to remember, however, that the merging of organic and superorganic qualities in music or any other form of cultural expression is not inherently negative. After all, artists and club owners have to be able to make a living in order to continue providing the music that is essential to the organic, communal exchange between musicians and audience. As historian Barry Shank explains, "[A]t the very moment when [the artists] were singing the pleasures of immediate, un-commodified, collective difference, they were also dependent upon the recognition and economic support of a system that produced a commodity from their performances."[4]

Throughout its history, Austin's music scene has involved a complex interweaving of organic and superorganic elements. Even today, there are a number of locations, ranging from nightclubs to backyard "picking parties," in which musicians are allowed (and even encouraged) to create, experiment, and engage in an organic exchange of culture with others. At the same time, there are several venues that strive to attract large crowds and generate a substantial profit for the owners and artists. Such internationally acclaimed festivals as Austin City Limits and South by Southwest bring in thousands of fans and musicians each year. As might be expected, city officials have done their best to capitalize on the perception of music as being an integral part of the community's cultural identity. In 1991, the City of Austin adopted the slogan "Live Music Capital of the World" as part of a marketing strategy aimed at promoting Austin's music scene.[5]

Of course, music has had a strong presence in Central Texas since long before the 1960s. Prior to the arrival of Europeans

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in the area, local Native-American communities included song and dance in a variety of activities and events. Soon after officials designated the tiny settlement of Waterloo as the Capital of the Republic of Texas and renamed it Austin in 1839, a diverse influx of settlers poured into the region, each group bringing with it rich and vibrant musical traditions. By 1900, the population of Texas had grown to more than three million as an increasing number of immigrants from Europe, Mexico, and elsewhere in the United States arrived.[6]

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the booming population helped forge a unique musical environment that reflected the remarkable ethnic diversity of the region. Tejanos (Texans of Mexican descent) borrowed the accordion-based polkas and schottisches of German and Czech immigrants and blended those together with their own mariachi, corridos, and other forms of Mexican folk music. French-speaking black creoles migrated across musicians combined black jazz and blues with fiddle hoedowns, pop, and ragtime to form a lively new genre that came to be known as western swing. Steel guitar player and Texas Western Swing Hall of Fame member Tommy Morrell described western swing as "jazz, blues, big band, polka music, country music . . . everything."[10] Jean Boyd, Professor of Musicology at Baylor University, states, "Because it is a crossroads for diverse cultures, including Native American, German, French, Cajun, African American, Czech, and Polish, Texas was the birthplace of western swing."[11]

Western swing not only became nationally popular during the 1930s and 1940s, but it also had an important impact on the emergence of rock & roll in the 1950s, as well as on progressive country in the 1970s. During their early years, such rock & roll pioneers as Buddy Holly and Bill Haley borrowed from the western swing tradition of blending diverse ethnic cultures and combined country music with black R&B

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the Louisiana border into Texas and blended their "La La" music with the blues and R&B of African-American Texans to help create zydeco.[7]

German settlers established some of the earliest live music venues around Central Texas. One such venue, built in 1870 and known as the Twin Sisters Dance Hall, remains a vital part of the local community around Blanco, approximately 50 miles southwest of Austin. Scholtz Garten in downtown Austin opened in 1866, followed by Dessau Dance Hall thirteen miles northeast in 1876.[8] Gruene Hall, located about 40 miles southwest of Austin, dates to 1878. These venues served as gathering places for all kinds of events within the German-Texas community, although most are now dance halls featuring country, Tejano, rock & roll, blues, and other types of music. As author Gail Folkins points out, these "halls often served as meeting places where fraternal organizations gathered to conduct business in support of local farmers, merchants, and other residents." This, she says, "provided an important cultural identification for immigrant communities."[9]

By the 1920s and 1930s, jazz was quickly gaining popularity across North America and around the world. In the Lone Star State, Bob Wills, Milton Brown and other white country

to help give birth to rock & roll. In fact, one of Bill Haley's first successful bands was Bill Haley and the Four Aces of Western Swing.[12] Likewise, during the 1970s, Willie Nelson, Asleep at the Wheel, Marcia Ball, and many others drew from western swing to create the eclectic progressive country sound that put Austin on the national music map.

Another example of the type of cultural cross-pollination that took place in Texas during the first half of the twentieth century is "The West Side Sound," which originated in San Antonio during the 1950s but would have a major impact on the Austin music scene by the 1960s. Although Texas, like all southern states, remained racially segregated following World War II, racial segregation in San Antonio was not as deeply entrenched or as vigorously enforced as it was in most other major urban areas in the South at the time. Much of this was due to the city's long history of racial and ethnic diversity. From the 1700s through the early 1900s, San Antonio's population included high numbers of Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans, Germans, Czechs, and others. The Alamo City also was home to several large military bases. When President Truman desegregated the U.S. Armed Forces in 1948, it had a significant impact on San Antonio, where

military personnel and civilians of all races mingled rather freely in many of the city's nightclubs.

The result is what historian Allen Olsen describes as "intercultural congeniality," in which musicians and audiences of all racial backgrounds gathered in local venues to enjoy a diverse range of musical styles, including blues, jazz, country, R&B, and pop.[13] This had an especially important impact on certain young San Antonio musicians, including Doug Sahm, Augie Meyers, Randy Garibay, and others, who eagerly absorbed this wide range of ethnic musical influences and melded them together into what became known as the West Side Sound. Throughout the 1960s, the West Side Sound continued to mature, as it incorporated rock & roll, conjunto, and other styles to form a remarkably eclectic regional sub-genre of Texas music. By the 1970s, Doug Sahm and other San Antonio musicians were bringing the West Side Sound north to Central Texas and making it an integral part of Austin's burgeoning progressive country music scene.

In some ways, progressive country is also rooted in earlier musical traditions dating back decades in Austin. Perhaps the best example of this is Kenneth Threadgill's bar and gas station on North Lamar Boulevard, which became a gathering place for musicians and music fans not long after it opened in 1933. By the 1960s, "Threadgill's Tavern" was a popular place for locals to gather and jam or just listen to music and drink beer. The most famous Threadgill's patron was then University of Texas student Janis Joplin, who sang folk, country, and blues, sometimes accompanying herself on autoharp. Music historian Travis Stimeling writes, "Kenneth Threadgill personified the ideals of the progressive country scene in Austin. By creating a safe space for the city's emerging counterculture in the early 1960s, Threadgill served as the patriarch of its music scene, a role that was underscored by the common knowledge that the recently deceased Janis Joplin had referred to him as 'daddy'"[14]

Threadgill's developed a reputation as a place where musicians and audiences could experiment with a wide range of musical styles. Threadgill himself often acted as a teacher and mentor for younger musicians, as he encouraged them to infuse new sounds with traditional Texas country and gospel music. Threadgill's emerged as a cultural incubator of sorts, in which intellectuals, poets, artists, and hippies could all gather to share ideas and music. One regular participant in the scene at Threadgill's was current owner Eddie Wilson, who remembers:

> Mr. Threadgill was a fairly ordinary redneck beer joint operator until Janis [Joplin] and Julie [Paul] and some of the gals somehow sneaked the word to him that the "N" word was just not cool. And as soon as he heard that, he adopted it as a philosophy, and the first black ever to come into Threadgill's, that I know of, was Mance Lipscomb . . . East Texas blues player who's got some real good stuff. Mance was one of the best finger-picking guitar players that you have ever heard.[15]

As an entrepreneur and music fan, Eddie Wilson saw great potential in the dynamic and culturally diverse scene at Threadgill's. He also drew inspiration from Austin's primary psychedelic rock venue, the Vulcan Gas Company, which opened in 1967 and began attracting a large and youthful audience. When the venue closed in 1970, Wilson put his vision into action by securing local investors—including Mad Dog Inc., a group of famous Texas novelists and playwrights—to purchase a former National Guard armory and transform it into a "Cultural Arts Laboratory." [16]

With the help of local artist Jim Franklin, Eddie Wilson dubbed the new venue the "Armadillo World Headquarters." According to Franklin, the small, indigenous mammal known as the armadillo symbolized the very spirit of Austin's emerging counterculture, since it was native to the region, odd in appearance, and mostly nocturnal. Historian Jason Mellard writes, "[W]hile progressive country percolated up out of Austin's larger live music scene (including Soap Creek Saloon), the Armadillo provided the most high-profile arena in which the diverse elements of progressive country came together to reach the largest audiences in Austin and beyond."[17]

From the very beginning, Eddie Wilson booked a diverse musical lineup that included national acts, such as Ravi Shankar, Bruce Springsteen, and the Pointer Sisters; local artists, such as Freddie King, Freda and the Firedogs, Greezy Wheels, and Asleep at the Wheel; and an assortment of performances

Armadillo World Headquarters in 1975.
Photo by Jim Richardson. Courtesy of South Austin Popular Culture Center.

by the Austin Ballet Theater and several jazz groups. Wilson recalls that the Armadillo was "this remarkable, awkward size that caused us to have to marry, in that location, every single kind of audience that we could, and so everybody gives it a lot of credit for being [the birthplace of] progressive country music, but we did a lot of stuff that was a lot more progressive than that."[18]

Although the Armadillo World Headquarters regularly featured a wide variety of music, it is perhaps most often associated with the rise of progressive country during the 1970s. Progressive country was a unique, regionally based amalgamation of honky tonk, folk, rock & roll, western swing, boogie woogie, and other styles heard at the Armadillo, Soap Creek Saloon, and a variety of venues throughout the Capital City. However, the progressive country phenomenon that so captivated Austin audiences and went on to redefine country music at the national level was about more than just the music. This new "cosmic cowboy" culture also was reflected in more liberal social and political ideals, the open use of drugs (especially marijuana), a "laid-back" lifestyle, and an outward appearance that blended Texas tradition with hippie counterculture, including cowboy boots and western shirts worn with beards and shoulder-length hair.

The progressive country scene received an unexpected boost on August 12, 1972—almost seventeen years to the day after Elvis Presley played in the same building—when a Texas born singer and songwriter named Willie Nelson walked out onto the Armadillo stage.[19] As Eddie Wilson later remarked, that night "changed everything."[20] Author Joe Nick Patoski concurs that "[Willie Nelson's] performance in front of a mixed crowd of hippies and rednecks is recognized as the starting point of the modern Austin music scene."[21]

Nelson, from Abbott, Texas, had established a successful songwriting career in Nashville but was frustrated with creative constraints placed on him and other country music artists by record label executives. When his Nashville home burned down in 1970, Nelson moved his family to Bandera, Texas, intending to return to "Music City" once the house was rebuilt. However, he soon re-discovered the thriving dance hall scene he had left behind in Texas and began performing throughout the area. After playing at the Armadillo and other Austin-area venues, Nelson decided not to return to Nashville but, instead, to remain in his home state and pursue a new, more independent career path that would allow him the creative freedom he craved. Although he was not the first artist to don the progressive country mantle, Nelson was the most nationally prominent. He soon came to embody the non-conformist, free-spirited, and eclectic essence of progressive country.[22]

As important as the Armadillo and Willie Nelson were to the proliferation of progressive country, the PBS television series *Austin City Limits* introduced the city's burgeoning music scene to millions throughout North America and around the world. The first episode of *Austin City Limits* aired in October 1974 (featuring Willie Nelson), and eventually became the longest-running nationally broadcast music show.[23]

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While progressive country may have been the most nationally prominent genre in the Austin music scene during the 1970s, the blues also reached an unprecedented level of popularity in the city around the same time. This was due mainly to the efforts of a former University of Texas student and blues aficionado named Clifford Antone, whose nightclub, Antone's, bolstered the careers of both veteran and novice blues artists and played a major role in further enhancing Austin's reputation as a hotbed for live music.

Of course, the blues had been popular throughout the Lone Star State since well before the 1970s. Such Texas-based musicians as Blind Lemon Jefferson, Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter (born just across the state line in Mooringsport, Louisiana), T-Bone Walker, and Mance Lipscomb honed their musical skills in the Dallas neighborhood of Deep Ellum and elsewhere around the state during the 1920s-1940s.[24]

Other Texas blues musicians, including Lavelle White, Robert Shaw, Albert Collins, Freddie King, W.C. Clark, and Roosevelt Thomas, often played the so-called "Chitlin'

Circuit" during the 1940s-1960s. This was an informal network of nightclubs throughout the South that welcomed black musicians and audiences during a time of widespread racial discrimination and segregation. As Roger Gatchet explains, "Decades before Austin christened itself the 'Live Music Capital of the World,' the city held a small yet prominent place on the national blues scene by virtue of its location on the 'Chitlin' Circuit.'"[25] East Austin was home to such popular Chitlin' Circuit venues as the Victory Grill and Charlie's Playhouse. By the 1960s, these clubs began attracting large numbers of white university students who helped create a broader demand for blues music throughout the town.

Dallas also had a thriving blues scene, which attracted young white listeners. For many of these fans, blues music seemed exotic and somewhat rebellious, similar to rock & roll. Dallas native and current Austin-based blues musician Denny Freeman recalls:

> [In] Dallas at the time, there was a blues awareness, and there was one radio station that had—in the daytime, it had adult programming, kind of like Big Band stuff—but at night, there was a radio program called *Cats Caravan* that came on. The DJ played a lot of blues that you just didn't hear any place else on the radio, and so that kind of furthered my education by hearing a lot of blues artists, like Muddy Waters and people on Excello Records. They played Lightnin' Slim and Lazy Lester, people like that—Lonnie Johnson—just all kinds of lowdown blues.[26]

By the late 1960s, many young Texans from Dallas and elsewhere where drawn to the vibrant and eclectic music scene emerging in Austin. Again, Denny Freeman remembers:

> Some people said, 'Hey, let's go to Austin for the weekend.' So, I came down there in [19]69 with some friends. And the first day that I was here, I just fell in love with the city. . . . There was music here, and there was an important kind of hippie psychedelic venue right down on Congress Avenue—the Vulcan Gas Company. It was just a hippie joint. I mean, Muddy Waters played there. Freddie King played there, some other blues guys. It wasn't a blues joint, it was just that back in those days, it was just a hippie joint, but some hippies were aware of blues guys. I mean, whoever played there. It was just a cool place. . . . [Austin] was a small town. It was so much smaller than now, and there was a community of longhaired people. At that time, UT [The University of Texas], that was the nucleus of it; that's where it kind of started. In a lot of towns, all of the hippie communities, all the hippie crap, emanated from the universities in the [19]60s. When I got here I moved to Central Austin. Not everybody went to UT, but that's where a lot of the stuff emanated from and it hovered around that part of town. There was just a lot of longhaired people and people that were living like hippies. Whatever that was—I don't know what that was—it was just people that had kind of dropped out of the normal thing.[27]

By the 1970s, an increasing number of young blues musicians migrated to Austin, including Jimmie Vaughan (and his younger brother Stevie), Lou Ann Barton, Kim Wilson, Doyle Bramhall, and Paul Ray. As the local blues community grew, the need for a blues venue emerged that would link the traditional artists of the Chitlin' Circuit to the new generation of musicians flooding into Austin.

Clifford Antone, from Port Arthur, Texas, opened just such a venue, Antone's, on a then nearly vacant Sixth Street in downtown Austin on July 15, 1975. He had noticed a growing number of young white blues fans flocking to nightclubs on the East Side and believed that he could create a venue that would cater to that audience while also providing a place in which veteran blues players could mingle with up-and-coming musicians as a way of keeping the blues traditions alive and relevant to the city's younger white population. Blues singer and radio personality Paul Ray says, "Antone's has been more than a club; it's been a home to the blues, where white and black performers could jam and learn from each other."[28]

Perhaps ironically, Antone's drew away much of the young, white crowd that previously frequented more traditional East Side venues, causing them to lose money. As musician Jesse Sublett explains, "The East Side scene was kind of like So Co [South Congress], and like Sixth Street when it was happening and not 'dirty' in the early 1980s. . . . Things started to decline after Austin became more integrated. An ironic, weird, sad fact."[29]

Antone's would launch the careers of several younger musicians, just as it helped reinvigorate the careers of many older artists. Dallas guitarist Jimmie Vaughan and vocalist Kim Wilson, from California, founded the blues and R&B group the Fabulous Thunderbirds in 1974. They became the house band at Antone's, which gave them the opportunity to perform with a number of blues legends who came through on tour. Jimmie Vaughan's younger brother, Stevie Ray Vaughan,

soon began playing at Antone's, along with Paul Ray, Angela Strehli, and a number of other young white musicians. Although Clifford Antone died in 2006, his namesake club continues to serve as an incubator for the evolution of the blues, as well as a cornerstone of Austin's live music scene. In recent years, Gary Clark Jr., Eve Monsees, Jackie Venson, and others represent the newest generation of successful blues musicians to emerge from Antone's.

Unlike progressive country and the blues, punk is less well documented in the historical narrative of Austin music. The exact beginning of the punk scene in Central Texas is difficult to pinpoint, although its roots extend, at least in part, to the psychedelic sounds produced in the 1960s by Austinite Roky Erickson and his band, the 13th Floor Elevators.

Such songs as "You're Gonna Miss Me" and "Tried to Hide," from the landmark album *The Psychedelic Sounds of The 13th Floor Elevators*, showcase a new, harder-edged style of music and lyrics that reflected a growing use of "mind-altering" drugs. To celebrate and publicize psychedelic rock in Austin, the Vulcan Gas Company's art directors, Jim Franklin and Gilbert Shelton, as well as other artists, created posters that captured the more abstract psychedelic culture of the period. Joe Nick Patoski writes, "[Music posters] were aimed at hippies, a new cultural phenomenon growing in numbers around the country. These posters advertised music concerts that appealed to a long-haired, counterculture audience that championed peace, love, and understanding as moral virtues and embraced marijuana and psychedelic drug consumption as pleasurable accompaniments to their concert-going experience."[30]

By the mid-1970s, a new style that would come to be known as punk was rapidly gaining popularity in New York City and across Great Britain. Such British bands as the Sex Pistols and the Clash, along with New York-based artists the Ramones and Patti Smith, ushered in a new sound combining loud, frenetic rhythms with a decidedly non-conformist attitude and physical appearance.

Bluesman Eddie Taylor with The Fabulous Thunderbirds at Antone's. Courtesy of South Austin Popular Culture Center.

Austin's punk scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s emerged in large part as a backlash against the "peace and love" message often expressed in progressive country and psychedelic rock. Barry Shank, who produced one of the few academic studies on the early Austin punk scene, writes, "[The 13th Floor Elevators'] music helped define the genre of psychedelic punk. . . . An unrelentingly simple yet purposive beat drove the song through this unexpected harmonic transition, emphasizing the feeling in the song."[31] These elements from psychedelic rock, combined with starker lyrics expressing the frustration with one's own place in society, helped give rise to an organic punk movement in Austin during the mid-1970s.

One of the first punk bands to gain a substantial following in Austin was the Skunks. Comprised of Jesse Sublett on bass and vocals, Eddie Muñoz on guitar, and Billy Blackmon on drums, the Skunks formed in the summer of 1978. Sublett, a native of Johnson City, Texas, often visited Austin during the late 1960s, reveling in the vibrant and eclectic musical culture found throughout the city. Sublett remembers, "I went to several shows at the Vulcan Gas Company right before it

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The Violators' first performance at Raul's in February 1978. Photo by Ken Hoge. Courtesy of Jesse Sublett.

closed. And that was really cool. It was really over my head. I was just a young teeny bopper. . . . It was just really neat, because it was a cultural experience. You know, it was hippies."[32]

In 1976, Sublett formed a garage blues/rock band called Jellyroll, featuring lead guitarist Eddie Muñoz. However, since progressive country and blues were so popular in Austin at the time, Jellyroll faced stiff competition in finding gigs. Sublett decided to form two different groups and commit himself fully to playing punk music. In December 1977, he formed the Violators, featuring singer Carla Olson, guitarist Kathy Valentine, drummer Marilyn Dean, and Sublett on bass.[33] Around the same time, Sublett and guitarist Muñoz decided to create the Skunks. Sublett remembers:

> So, the Violators' first gig was New Year's Eve, 1977, at Soap Creek [Saloon] opening for the Uranium Savages. . . . Eddie and I agreed to back up this guy by the name of Charles Ray who had a little project called the Tools. . . . He came up with this opening slot, and we said, 'Yes, we will do it,' but [we] wanted to showcase our bands, too. By that time Eddie and I decided to start our new band called the Skunks.

All this happened really rapidly. So, at that gig on New Year's Eve, the Tools played, then in the middle of the set, we did a mini set by the Skunks and a mini set by the Violators. So, that was actually the first Austin debut of two punk bands from Austin. And the people there hated us . . . but the hatred we felt told us we were doing something right and we had something.[34]

Although Sublett believed that any audience response to his music, whether positive or negative, was a good thing, club owners were reluctant to offer the Skunks regular bookings. As the band continued to look for venues, Sublett remembered a club located near the University of Texas named Raul's. As he recalls, "We had played there as Jellyroll. It was not a strict formatted club. They had country, they had country rock, and hard rock—whoever. When we started our punk bands, we thought, well, that place we could play."[35]

The owners of Raul's, Joseph Gonzales and Roy "Raul" Gomez, initially intended for the bar to be a home base for the up-and-coming Tejano music scene. However, when this proved slow to develop, Gonzales and Gomez began looking for other styles of music to showcase. After some initial hesitation, they agreed to give the Skunks a try. The Skunks and the Violators quickly proved their ability to attract college crowds when they first performed at Raul's in early 1978. Sublett remembers those first shows:

> I know he [Joseph Gonzales] didn't expect anything. I think he thought it was a joke or something really weird. So, at the first gig it was a big success. It was less than 100 people there, maybe 50 or 70 at the most, but there was a lot of excitement. It was wild and everyone could see there was something.[36]

The success of the Skunks' first few gigs at Raul's helped create a burgeoning punk scene in Austin. Similar to Antone's and the Armadillo, Raul's became a cultural hotbed that helped "solidify the foundation of a unified, alternative network of fans and musicians."[37] With the success of the Ramones playing at the Armadillo in February 1978, Raul's booked the Violators and the Skunks as regulars on Monday nights.[38] Soon Raul's became very popular with the college-aged crowd.
In the summer of 1978, the Violators dissolved, leaving Sublett, with new guitarist Jon Dee Graham, to concentrate fully on the Skunks, spreading their anti-establishment message through punk music to Austin and beyond.

Raul's soon gained national fame during a show in the autumn of 1978. One of the many new bands on the scene, the Huns, made up of University of Texas students, performed to a large crowd. When the lead singer exchanged words with a local Austin police officer, a small riot broke out, ending with a total of six people arrested and charged with inciting violent behavior.[39] After *Rolling Stone* magazine published a story on the incident, Raul's enjoyed international exposure, and "attendance and participation increased significantly after that."[40]

Raul's only existed for three more years, closing in 1981. More than any other local punk venue, including Duke's Royal Coach Inn, Club Foot/Night Life, and Liberty Lunch, Raul's helped define the Austin punk scene. Through the early

Music poster advertising The Ramones performing at Armadillo World Headquarters in 1977. Artwork by Micael Priest.
Courtesy of South Austin Popular Culture Center.

success of the Violators and the Skunks, Joseph Gonzales formed a reputation for showcasing newly formed punk bands. This drove the creation of numerous new punk bands in the Austin area during the early 1980s. Brett Bradford, guitarist for the Austin-based post-modern rock band Scratch Acid, recalls, "Austin was a city with a small town atmosphere. For some reason, the underground music scene just took hold and exploded. That whole 'go start your own band thing' was real."[41]

With the growing numbers of musicians and music fans moving to Austin by the 1980s, venues featuring live music became more abundant. Austin eventually had "more live music venues per capita than anywhere else in the nation," further bolstering its claim as the "Live Music Capital of the World."[42]

The notion of Austin as a "Live Music Capital" is relatively new, but it is built upon decades of a dynamic, eclectic, and ever-evolving music scene. The music found in and around Austin reflects a complex mix of cultures and of organic and superorganic elements, all of which have blended together in unique and sometimes unexpected ways to help earn Austin an international reputation as a mecca for live music. ★

Notes

1 Gary Hartman, *The History of Texas Music* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 7.

2 George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Diane Pecknold, *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013).

3 Manuel Peña, *Música Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 2.

4 Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 49.

5 http://www.austintexas.gov/resident/music (accessed on July 12, 2016).

6 United States Census Bureau, 1900.

7 The best source for more on the vital role Texas played in the creation of zydeco is Roger Wood's *Texas Zydeco* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

8 Gail Folkins, "Texas Dance Halls: History, Culture, and Community," *Journal of Texas Music History* 6 (2006): 56-57.

9 Ibid., 54.

10 Jean Boyd, *Jazz of the Southwest: An Oral History of Western Swing,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 1.

11 Ibid.

12 For a sample of Haley's early melding of western swing and proto-rockabilly, see his 1949 version of "My Sweet Little Girl from Nevada," backed by Reno Browne and Her Buckaroos: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwcaDi1pd6c.

13 Allen Olson, "The Post-World War II 'Chitlin' Circuit,'" *Journal of Texas Music History* 7 (2007): 3.

14 Travis D. Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive country Music Scene* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 24.

15 Eddie Wilson, interview by author, November 8, 2014.

16 Ibid; Mad Dog, Inc., included Billy Lee Brammer, Bud Shrake, Gary Cartwright, Dan Jenkins, Peter Gent, and Larry L. King.

17 Jason Dean Mellard, "Home with the Armadillo: Public Memory and Performance in the 1970s Austin Music Scene,'" *Journal of Texas Music History* 10 (2010): 20.

18 Eddie Wilson, interview by the author, November 8, 2014.

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26 Denny Freeman, interview by Gaetan Carpentier and Heather Haley, November 14, 2014; Founded in 1953 in Nashville, Tennessee, Excello Records recorded primarily veteran blues musicians.

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31 Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 48-49.

32 Jesse Sublett, interview by the author, November 8, 2014; For more on the life and career of Jesse Sublett, see Jesse Sublett, *Never the Same Again: A Rock 'n' Roll Gothic* (Berkeley, California: Boaz Publishing Company, 2004).

33 Kathy Valentine later went on to have national success with the Textones and the Go-Gos. She currently lives in Austin and plays with the punk/blues band the Bluebonnets.

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