

# ¡Viva Terlingua!:

## Jerry Jeff Walker, Live Recordings, and the Authenticity of Progressive Country Music

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The progressive country music scene that flourished in Austin during the 1970s was rooted in a musical community that shared a deep appreciation of live musical performance. Although such major music industry centers as New York, Los Angeles, and Nashville focused largely on the manufacture and distribution of studio recordings, the Austin-based progressive country movement relied extensively on a vast array of live music venues, including such honky-tonks as the Split Rail Inn and the Broken Spoke, smaller folk clubs such as Castle Creek and the Saxon Pub, and large concert halls, including the Armadillo World Headquarters and the Austin Opry House.<sup>1</sup>

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Beginning around 1972, several prominent Texas musicians, who had enjoyed moderate success in Los Angeles and San Francisco during the 1960s, began to flock to Austin in order to escape the more structured regimen of the mainstream recording industry and to rediscover their creative voices as songwriters and performers. As Dallas-born singer-songwriter B.W. Stevenson explained in a 1974 interview in *The Gar*, the expectations of the music industry to create a saleable product on a consistent basis stifled the creativity of musicians and compelled many to relocate to Austin between 1972 and 1974:

If I'm in L.A...I'm always workin', even when I'm off. Before, it was having time to record. The first three albums were done in two weeks—two-week periods—and that's just not enough time. I like to have time off...There's a lot of times I can't seem to get through to somebody, you know, that I want some time off...I have to have time to write... or I'm just not happy. I gotta have time to myself.<sup>2</sup>

Several of Austin's progressive country musicians continued to travel to Nashville, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York throughout the 1970s to make studio recordings. However, they often returned to Austin where the local club scene offered them a greater sense of creative freedom and a stronger support system made up of friends, collaborators, and audiences who better understood their sense of regional culture.<sup>3</sup> As journalist Pete Axthelm observed in a 1976 *Newsweek* piece, "Austin was a refreshing place to be...[I]t was bracing to wander through honky-tonks like the Soap Creek Saloon and Armadillo World Headquarters, where down-to-earth musicians swilled beer in longneck bottles and shared their songs and dreams."<sup>4</sup>

The spontaneity of live performances and the interaction that took place between musicians and their audiences in Austin venues, therefore, were essential to the musical aesthetics of progressive country music. Moreover, for many artists and fans alike, the shared belief that progressive country music remained independent from the mediating forces of the national music industry helped convince them that this "homegrown" musical

Perhaps the most important element of live performance that is missing from studio recordings is the spontaneity enjoyed by the artists. During a typical recording session, musicians perform songs or parts of songs several times until they have the "best" version possible. This often involves hours of arranging, performing, mixing, and mastering in order to correct the types of tone, pitch, or instrumental control irregularities that are common in live performances. Furthermore, studio albums usually require artists to minimize the kind of musical improvisations that are an important element of many live performances. Finally, and perhaps most problematic in regard to the "improvisational spirit" of the progressive country movement, studio recordings transform the spontaneity of a live performance into a fixed musical object, which can be repeated over and over *ad infinitum*.<sup>7</sup>

Live albums, on the other hand, create a simulation of the concert event that allows consumers to feel as if they are part of an unmediated musical experience.<sup>8</sup> These recordings often preserve the artists' stage banter between songs, reveal musical

collaboration, the importance of direct communication between musicians and their audiences, and, above all, the joy of musical experience—while also commodifying the scene and distributing it for profit to a wider audience. Live albums offered the most passionate fans and the least committed audiences alike an opportunity to partake in the communal exchange that characterized Austin's live club scene, while also allowing the musicians themselves to showcase their own creativity, spontaneity, and prowess as performers.

Despite concerns over losing the "essence" of a live performance through the studio recording process, records did provide artists the potential for additional income and greater regional and national exposure. As a result, many Austin musicians did, in fact, attempt to capture the excitement of their live performances on record for such local and national labels as MCA, Capitol, ABC Probe, and Atlantic. In order to accommodate the limitations of the recording medium and to convey the excitement of the city's music scene, several progressive country musicians recorded "live" albums in Austin venues. Still others who hailed from outside of Texas, such as Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen, Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart, and Phil Woods, came to the city to record concert performances for national distribution.

One of the first Austin-based musicians to achieve substantial critical and commercial success using this model was Jerry Jeff Walker, a singer-songwriter from Oneonta, New York, who gained national popularity in late 1968 with the AM radio single "Mr. Bojangles."<sup>9</sup> Walker had always balked at the process of making records in professional studios, stating in a 1974 *Rolling Stone* interview that studios cause musicians to:

lose all sense of time and space. Because no matter what time you go in there and close the door, it's twelve o'clock midnight. It always was. You don't know if you're making a rally or dying. It drives me fucking nuts. I don't like to play music in a dead space. I'm always saying, "Okay, can I be excused now? Can I go out in the street and be with real people?" You have to play music over and over too much. It loses all spontaneity.<sup>10</sup>



Jerry Jeff Walker, 1973. Courtesy of Craig Hillis.

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genre was more artistically "pure" and more capable of serving as a legitimate means of communicating authentic local culture. Comparing the Austin scene to that of New York City, Jeff Nightbyrd, writing for the national music magazine *Crawdaddy*, argued in March 1973 that Austin musicians and audiences valued music as a form of expression, not as a commodity. "In New York you spend two-fifty to get into a joint where it doesn't take very long to figure out they're using music to sell alcohol. In Austin you pay a buck to get in and get off."<sup>5</sup>

Despite such praise for the "authenticity" of the Capital City's music scene, some critics also pointed out the difficulty inherent in trying to capture on record the dynamic interplay between performers and fans at a live venue. For instance, Ed Ward remarked in an August 1975 *Rolling Stone* review of the Lost Gonzo Band's eponymous MCA Records album that "Most of the bands [in Austin] play drinkin'-and-dancin' music of the sort that doesn't easily transfer its excitement to vinyl."<sup>6</sup> Of course, the difficulty of recording live performances without compromising either sound quality or the experience of having actually been present was nothing new. Even the most successful efforts at capturing on record the "essence" of being at a live show fall short, mainly because they simply cannot duplicate the full sensory experience of being in the audience.

mistakes that might be removed in a studio recording, and situate the sounds of the audience in the mix alongside the featured artists. In addition to these sonic markers of "liveness," the packaging of live albums often encourages vicarious participation in the concert experience by including images from the performance, such as candid onstage photographs of the musicians and the audience, along with copies of concert advertisements, tickets, or other memorabilia.

Although live albums may allow listeners to perceive a direct connection to a spontaneous concert experience, this perception is not entirely accurate. Live records, like all others, are highly-mediated cultural products shaped by the marketing strategies of record companies, the post-production manipulation of producers and engineers, and the musical choices of the artists themselves. Because they represent the complex and dynamic relationship among musicians, their audiences, and the music industry, live albums reflect the artistic, cultural, and economic priorities of everyone associated with that particular recording project. Nevertheless, live records generally provide the most accurate replication possible of the actual concert experience.

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For Walker, the recording studio was a sterile space, and he certainly was not the only musician who felt that way. As Walker noted, the process of recording an album can be an alienating experience. It eliminates the audience, physically separates musicians into individual sound booths, and reduces the spontaneity of the performance in order to make the recording process more efficient and less expensive. In addition to these concerns, recording in a studio can be stressful, because it means that musicians face more pressure to create a polished, professional product. Rather than providing the thrill and immediate gratification of performing before a live audience, studio recording places a tremendous amount of demand on the artist to produce a record whose primary purpose is to ensure commercial viability, not artistic creativity. Walker tried to cope with these challenges the same way in which the Beatles, Brian Wilson, Jimi Hendrix, and others had before. These artists viewed the recording studio not simply as a place to create the most polished and marketable music possible, but also as a space within which they could experiment with new sounds and document their creative process.

In Jerry Jeff Walker's case, he came to Austin in large part to escape the pressures of the "big city" recording studios. He had been in the Capital City during the 1960s while touring throughout Texas, but he would not settle there permanently until the early 1970s. In 1971, Walker rented a cabin in Red River, New Mexico, a resort town in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains that had become home to many young expatriate Texas songwriters. Walker came to Red River intending to write new material for his debut album with MCA Records. Shortly

after arriving, he met bassist Bob Livingston, who had just left Michael (Martin) Murphey's band to join Texas Fever, a Red River-based group featuring Oklahoma-born songwriter Ray Wylie Hubbard. The three musicians quickly became friends, and Walker shared several of his new compositions with them, including "Hill Country Rain," "Charlie Dunn," and "Old Beat-Up Guitar." By 1972, Livingston had rejoined Murphey in Austin. Soon afterward, Walker also moved to Austin and began searching for a band to accompany him on his upcoming MCA sessions. As Livingston recalled, "Jerry Jeff shows up in Austin...so I called him up, and I said, 'Jerry Jeff, you need to come and hang out with us. We're rehearsing with Murphey.' And he goes, 'Really?' So he shows up, and when he sticks his head in the door, it's like an instant band."<sup>11</sup>

Walker recruited Murphey's band, which included pianist Gary P. Nunn, pedal steel guitarist Herb Steiner, fiddler Mary Egan, and guitarist Craig Hillis. Walker then contacted Michael Brovsky, his manager and producer in New York, to arrange a

to a playback [that] we never listened to anything back. We just would go in there, and [Jerry Jeff]'d start making sangria in a big tub around 7 o'clock, and everybody'd have several glasses of sangria, and then we'd start recording at about 8:00 or 8:30. We would go until midnight or 2:00 in the morning and then listen to everything we'd done. It was real ragtag. Really funky.<sup>13</sup>

Mickey Raphael, one of two harmonica players who took part in these sessions, remembered that the musicians all were:

set up pretty close together. I mean, pretty tight. It wasn't like everybody was spread out in different rooms with lots of separation. Everybody was set up where they could see each other, and there was, y'know, recording gear, a tape machine somewhere in the room, and we would just...It would be like

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session at Odyssey Sound, the only recording studio in Austin capable of producing a record for a major label. Although it proved to be adequate, Odyssey Sound did not match the level of quality found in most commercial studios in Nashville, Los Angeles, or New York. As Walker later recounted in the album's liner notes, "We found a tape machine in the old Rapp Cleaner Building (Steve and Jay's Odyssey Sound), and anyone who wanted to contribute came by and picked or just listened."<sup>12</sup> Livingston recalls that the studio was primitive, but the unorthodox setting fostered a more collaborative atmosphere and minimized the pressure on the performers to produce a slick, polished recording:

We go into this funky studio situation. They didn't even have a board...It was on 6th Street in this old converted dry-cleaning house that was not even converted. All it was was burlap all over the wall, big ceilings, and a sixteen-track tape recorder sitting in the middle of the room. No board. A bunch of microphones. Everybody just plugged into this tape recorder...It was so involved to listen

a picking session. That's exactly what transpired... They could've had an audience in there. It would have been great. It was just like sitting up on stage and playing.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike most professional studios, the "funky" setting of the Rapp Cleaner Building ensured that Walker's recording project would be an organic outgrowth of the Austin music scene and a genuine reflection of the local music community's creative output. Whereas formal recording studios are replete with technology designed to mediate between musicians and their audiences, Odyssey Sound did not even have a mixing board. Therefore, by plugging directly into a tape recorder and performing "live," Walker and his collaborators were able to produce a record that could literally and metaphorically minimize the distance between themselves and their audiences.<sup>15</sup>

This album, which would be titled *Jerry Jeff Walker*, would not remain entirely free of the influence of a major studio, however. Walker finished making the record, which included Guy Clark's "L.A. Freeway," with engineer Tom Cacetta at Soundtek Studios in New York. Nevertheless, Walker later would reminisce about

the spontaneous and organic nature of the recording process to describe the sessions. He mentioned that he was inspired to enter the studio after spending a weekend at a farm near Hudson, New York, casually jamming with folk musicians David Bromberg and Larry Packer. Adding to the impromptu nature of the situation, Michael Murphey's band, with whom Walker had recorded at Odyssey Sound, happened to be in New York City playing at the Bitter End in Greenwich Village. The

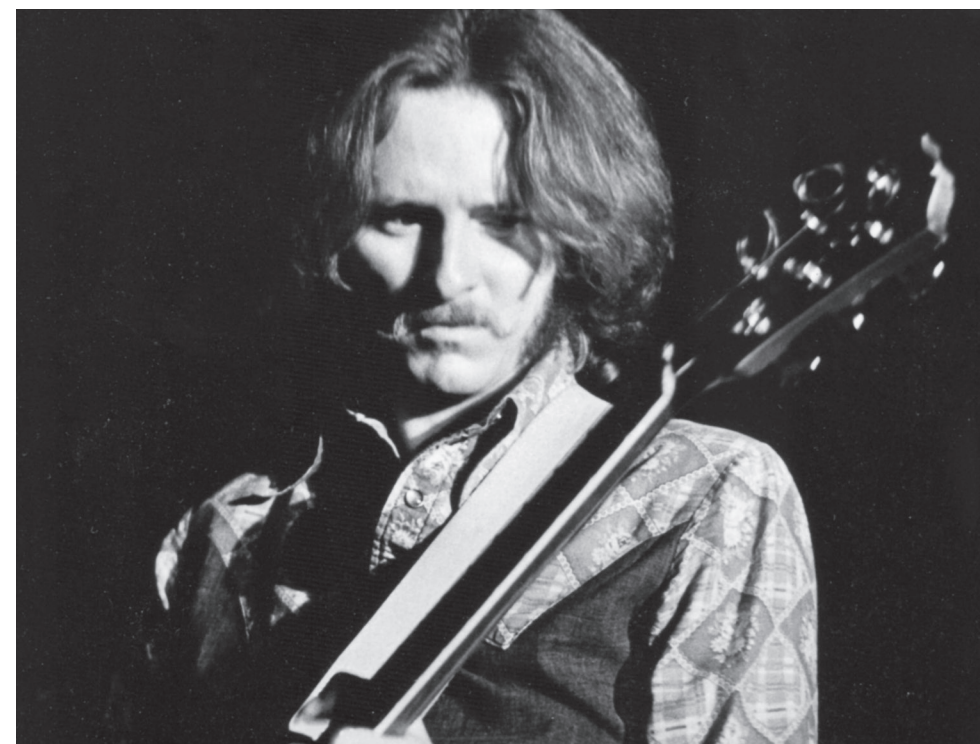
Good Lovin' Grace," Walker asks the band for "one of those intros," to which a musician laughingly replies "one of *those* intros?" The slow, blues-inflected introduction that follows sounds like a false start, as the pianist, guitarist, and bassist struggle to find the downbeats. Likewise, the album's concluding song, "The Continuing Saga of the Classic Bummer, or Is This My Free One-Way Bus Ticket to Cleveland?" begins with a false start that is met with exuberant laughter, and the ensemble

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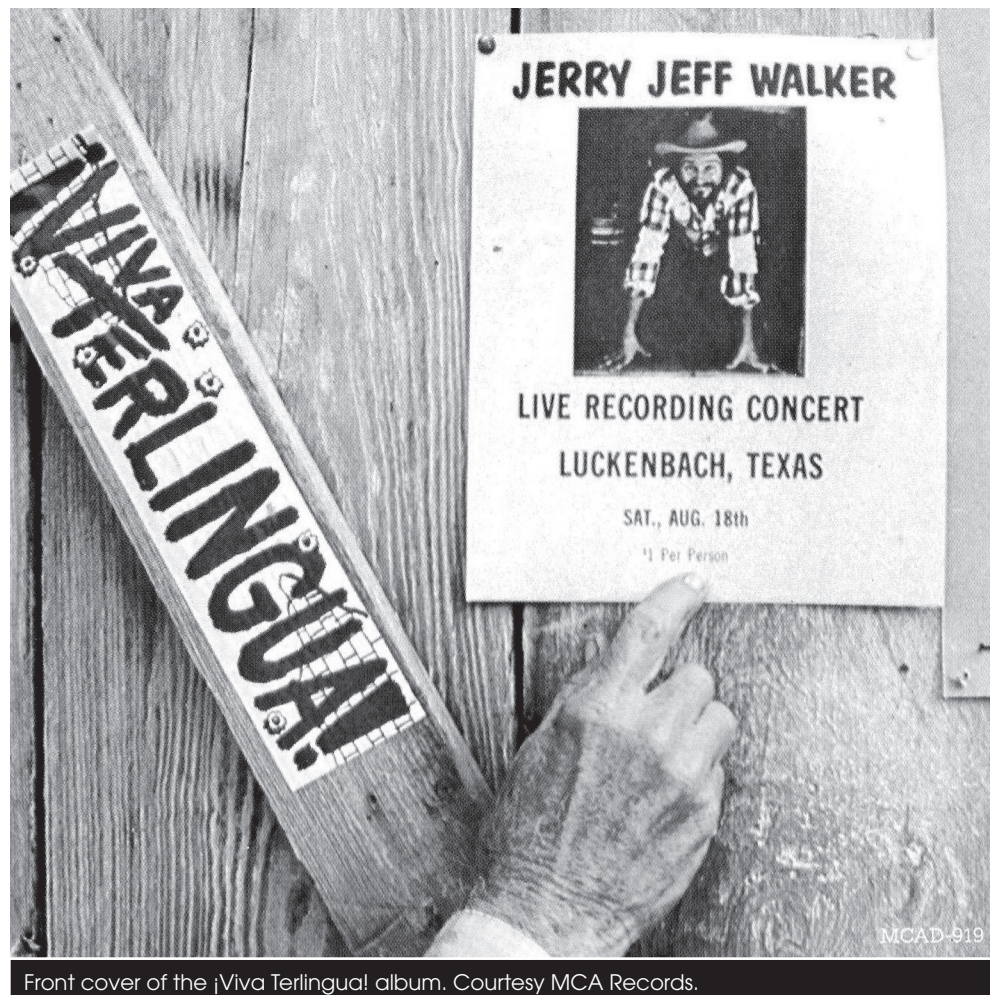
fact that the very same musicians who had been involved in the original "spontaneous" recording sessions in Austin also were able to participate in the New York tapings helped alleviate much of Walker's discomfort over being in the studio, and this helped cause "new songs [to] start...flowing."<sup>16</sup> For Walker, the ability to record with familiar musicians in a less-structured setting made the entire process more artistically rewarding. Because Walker intended for these sessions to document the process of creativity and provide the engineer with enough material for an album, he believed he was able to reclaim the studio as a workspace, thereby displacing ultimate responsibility for the final product from himself to the creative minds employed by the studio.

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struggles to find a consistent tempo throughout the record.<sup>17</sup> In a typical studio session, such "mistakes" as those present on the *Jerry Jeff Walker* album would be corrected by having the musicians play as many additional takes as necessary to render a polished final product. However, Walker indicates his distaste for such multiple takes in the song's tag by saying "Thank God you don't have to hear the take after this." The rather sloppy performance, the exuberant and sometimes overmodulated vocals, and even the muddy mix all contribute to Walker's vision



Craig Hillis, 1974. Courtesy of Craig Hillis.



Front cover of the *Viva Terlingual!* album. Courtesy MCA Records.

space and redefines it as a social space. In the case of the Luckenbach sessions, this social space involved not only the musicians, but also two of the town's most unique and colorful residents—John “Hondo” Crouch and his daughter, Cathy Morgan. Crouch and Morgan purchased the town in 1970 with hopes of transforming Luckenbach from a ghost town into a hangout where people could come to relax and drink beer. Adopting the motto “Everybody’s Somebody in Luckenbach,” Crouch and Morgan created in Luckenbach an environment in which people from all backgrounds could meet, exchange ideas, and make new friends.<sup>20</sup>

Walker began traveling to Luckenbach shortly after his arrival in Austin and found in Hondo Crouch a close friend who encouraged his creativity by providing a nurturing atmosphere in which to work.

As Bob Livingston observed, Crouch “was like a surrogate father for [Jerry Jeff], and he was kind of a rambler and yarn spinner and even played pretty good Spanish guitar... Hondo was the ‘grand imagineer’ of Luckenbach. And Jerry Jeff really took to him.”<sup>21</sup> Crouch’s almost constant presence and his empathy for Walker’s own ceaseless search for freedom was, it seems, a comfort to Walker and created a supportive environment in which he could compose and perform music freely. Moreover, as physical manifestations of a bygone era, both Crouch and Luckenbach represented a very tangible connection to the unique history and culture of Texas, which was essential to the progressive country movement’s efforts at bucking national trends.

While Walker’s experimentation with unorthodox recording venues had proven to be relatively successful, Michael Maitland, the president of MCA, was understandably worried about the proposed Luckenbach sessions. The financial risks that the company might incur were substantial, since it would need to supply the type of mobile recording unit that cost considerably more than a conventional studio. Another logistical and

financial concern was that, rather than following the standard studio protocol in which musicians arrive with pre-arranged and rehearsed compositions in order to minimize costly delays, the material for the Luckenbach sessions was to be created, arranged, and performed for the first time right there on location. What this meant was that Walker and Brovsky were asking MCA not only to underwrite the costs of recording Walker’s material, but also to pay for the time it took to compose, arrange, and perform the songs. This was almost unheard of for an artist with as limited a track record as Walker. Further complicating matters was the fact that Luckenbach offered little in the way of amenities, including its undependable supply of electricity, which created significant technical problems for the recording engineers.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the extensive financial and technical risks inherent in the project, Brovsky managed to convince Maitland to finance the Luckenbach sessions. For nearly two weeks, Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band—Michael Murphey’s former group—joined with several of Austin’s leading session players to create *Viva Terlingual!* Much like his 1972 recording sessions at Odyssey Sound, Walker worked to create a casual environment in which individual musicians could rekindle old friendships, write songs, and contribute their musical talents to the larger project. Mickey Raphael, who had been touring with Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, remembered, “It was a good time for everybody to hang out, because, if we all had different jobs with different people, we’d be out on the road separately. So, this kind of brought other musicians that were friends that didn’t get to play together a lot.”<sup>23</sup>

The casual mood of the sessions is reflected in the *Viva Terlingual!* album cover, which includes a sepia-toned photograph showing the musicians relaxing around the woodstove in the Luckenbach post office. Other photographs taken during the sessions and included on the album cover document the personal relationships developed among participants. They show the smiling faces of Crouch, Walker, and background singer Joanne Vent, along with the conversations, meals, and drinks shared by the musicians. The overall visual effect of the album cover underscores the key themes of Walker’s approach to the songwriting and performing process. More specifically, the visual message transmitted by these photographs is that this was a communal effort on the part of these musicians, whose priority was exercising creative freedom in an informal setting rather than producing a marketable commodity in a sterile studio.<sup>24</sup>

With the exception of Guy Clark’s “Desperados Waiting for a Train” and Michael Murphey’s “Backslider’s Wine,” the songs recorded for *Viva Terlingual!* were fully or at least partially composed at Luckenbach. As such, they serve as musical analogues to the album cover’s images, further documenting the casual atmosphere of the sessions. The opening cut, “Gettin’ By,” draws Maitland into the narrative by poking fun at the

president of MCA Records’ initial resistance to the Luckenbach sessions. In the second verse, Walker comments:

Last week I was thinking, it’s record time again, And  
I could see Mike Maitland pacing his floor.  
Ah Mike, don’t you worry, something’s bound to  
come out.  
Besides, I’ve been down this road once or twice before.

During the instrumental interlude, Walker reassures Maitland that the song will work, even though “it’s not really a monster track,” creating ironic distance between himself and the visibly mediated album upon which this comment is documented. In addition to “Gettin’ By,” many of the songs that made the album began simply as improvised lyrics or melody lines and were cobbled together on the spot. This rather haphazard approach to composing helped create instrumental and vocal arrangements that reflected the spontaneous nature of the informal picking sessions and the communal process of making the record. “Sangria Wine,” for instance, began simply as a recipe for making drinks, along with the refrain “Oh, oh, I love sangria wine.” While Walker worked on the lyrics, the band experimented with the accompaniment, trying to match the theme of the song with the ideal groove. As Livingston recalled:

We would try everything “reggae” at least once. We might take a song like “London Homesick Blues” and try it bluegrass and rock and reggae and every kind of way, just for fun. And so Jerry said, “We ought to do [‘Sangria Wine’] reggae.” But we didn’t know anything about reggae. Michael McGeary, our drummer, said, “Man, it’s just kind of this thing. You have to have some guitar parts. Like Craig [Hillis], you should go ‘do-do-do-do-dut’, and then Bob, you answer it with the bass ‘boom-boom-boom’ something.”<sup>25</sup>

Another example of the informal approach to arranging and recording the album is evident on how the Lost Gonzo Band performed background vocals on several of the songs. Their imprecise vocal performance, which includes tuning, control, and timing problems, adds an element of realism and suggests that the band is drinking alcohol while making the record. By highlighting this improvisational technique of composing, arranging, and performing, *Viva Terlingual!* rejects the more structured, commercially-oriented approach to recording contemporary country music and, instead, celebrates an attitude of mutual artistic respect and communal enjoyment symbolized by the entire progressive country music movement.

The Luckenbach sessions concluded with a “live recording

concert” held in the town’s dancehall on August 18, 1973. Nearly three hundred people paid one dollar each to be part of what turned out to be the only true “live” segment of *¡Viva Terlingua!* According to some of the musicians, the concert was somewhat of an afterthought. Despite last-minute planning and minimal advertisement, the hall was filled with friends of the band and a few others who found out about the concert at the last minute. Bob Livingston remembered that “people just showed up and said, ‘What’s going on here?’ and the town of Luckenbach was jumping.” Mickey Raphael observed that “most of [the audience members] were kids from Austin that were into that ‘cosmic cowboy,’ ‘progressive country’ scene at the time...It was the same crowd that was going to the Armadillo and Castle Creek.”<sup>26</sup>

In many ways, the concert also was a realization of the idealized, collaborative, and free-wheeling recording session

Mother,” Walker and Brovsky help convey the exuberance of live performances. This helped reinforce the notion that fans are an essential ingredient of the progressive country music phenomenon, and it gave listeners the sense that they were part of an authentic and unmediated concert experience, whether or not they actually were there in person.<sup>28</sup>

While the loose vocal arrangements of *¡Viva Terlingua!* and the direct involvement of an audience reinforce the “live” feel of the record, most of the album is not truly live. The liner notes mention that the songs are part of a “live recording concert,” but, in fact, only “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother” and Gary P. Nunn’s “London Homesick Blues” are from the live show. Everything else on *¡Viva Terlingua!* was recorded prior to the August 18 concert. Furthermore, three songs—“Desperados Waiting for a Train,” “Sangria Wine,” and “Get It Out”—conclude with a “fadeout,” which underscores the fact that the

wherein writers and singers do things their way... work? Heretofore, singers have been treated as wayward, slightly batty infants whose whims must be ignored. If they start a liberation movement, can it be accommodated? No reason why not, argues Jerry Jeff Walker. He is the only prominent singer who refuses to set foot in a recording studio.<sup>30</sup>

Flippo believed that the success of *¡Viva Terlingua!* played a direct role in shaping Austin’s progressive country movement by guaranteeing that it could function as a sanctuary for independent-minded artists, while also exerting a significant influence on the mainstream music industry. Others also hailed *¡Viva Terlingua!* as an accurate representation of the styles, rhetoric, and image of the Capital City’s live music scene. As Joe Gracey, disc jockey at Austin’s KOKE-FM, said in a November 1973 *Austin American-Statesman* article, “They...sat down and made the best record

The town depicted in the chorus of “Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)” bears little resemblance to the Luckenbach of Walker’s *¡Viva Terlingua!* The song offers few details about the community’s unique characteristics, and the artists named in the song have no direct relationship with Walker’s recording session there. The link to Walker himself in “Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)” is not established until the final chorus, when Willie Nelson joins in and replaces the reference to Mickey Newbury with a line about “Jerry Jeff’s train songs,” an allusion to Walker’s version of Guy Clark’s “Desperados Waiting for a Train.” Jennings, who had recorded his 1976 album *Waylon: Live* at Austin’s Armadillo World Headquarters in 1974, and whose 1976 RCA compilation *Wanted!: The Outlaws* became the first country music album to be certified platinum (reaching sales of one million)<sup>35</sup> remarked that the lack of specific details about Luckenbach was necessary because neither he nor co-writers Moman and Emmons had been there prior to recording

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that Walker had described on the jacket of his self-titled 1972 album. Instead of isolating band members from one another in recording booths, the concert setting facilitated musical collaboration and exchange by allowing the musicians to play together exactly as they would have in one of Austin’s live music venues.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the presence of a live audience was an essential element of Walker’s informal attitude, which he wanted to communicate to potential record buyers. As such, the live concert allowed the artists to remain within their normal social context of performing onstage, while also presenting an opportunity for producer Michael Brovsky to capture the energy of the local live music scene in order to market it to a larger national audience.

Perhaps the best example of the importance of this type of artist-audience interaction at Walker’s Luckenbach concert is Ray Wylie Hubbard’s “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother.” During this song, enthusiastic audience members sing along on the chorus. One particularly exuberant fan yells out indicating his approval at the end of the first and third lines of the beginning verse. (“He was born in Oklahoma,” and “He’s not responsible for what he’s doin’.”) Throughout the song, audience members are prominently featured clapping their hands and singing loudly in the background, especially in unison with the signature chorus (“And it’s up against the wall, redneck mother”). By making the audience such an integral part of “Up Against the Wall, Redneck

listener is not actually experiencing an unmediated musical event but rather one in which studio engineers have had a hand in shaping the final product. These fadeouts imply that the improvisations will continue in perpetuity, but out of earshot of the listener. The effect of the fadeouts is quite ironic. On one hand, fadeouts highlight the fact that much of *¡Viva Terlingua!* is not actually live, since they are a result of technological manipulation and mediation of the recordings. At the same time, however, the fadeouts reinforce the perception that the progressive country music scene is based on a live performance environment in which a wide variety of musicians can join together in unceasing collaboration and experimentation.

Critics praised *¡Viva Terlingua!* as a milestone in the progressive country music movement and commented on how well it captured the organic, spontaneous nature of this new musical genre. Prominent music journalist Chet Flippo, who had remarked earlier in 1973 that “the present crop of Texas musicians are followers, rather than innovators,”<sup>29</sup> observed just one year later in 1974 that *¡Viva Terlingua!* was important because it demonstrated that Austin’s relaxed and liberal environment could yield an album of great artistic and commercial merit. According to Flippo:

The rest of the recording industry has a wary eye trained on Austin...will this noble experiment,

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that anybody in Texas will ever make. Every cut is tremendous... Some of the cuts are taken from the Saturday night concert, and all of ‘em are live, whether there’s an audience or not.”<sup>31</sup>

The historical importance of Jerry Jeff Walker’s Luckenbach sessions became fully apparent in 1977, with Waylon Jennings’s recording of the Chips Moman and Bobby Emmons tune “Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love).”<sup>32</sup> The lyrics bemoan the stress and malaise of an urban existence and express longing for a more peaceful, rural setting and a simpler way of life.<sup>33</sup> The singer asks his partner to trade her expensive jewelry for “boots and faded jeans” and to trade her “high society” and “four-car garage” for a place where they can “get back to the basics of love.” In the chorus, that place is revealed to be Luckenbach:

Let’s go to Luckenbach, Texas, with Willie and Waylon and the boys.

This successful life we’re livin’s got us feuding like the Hatfields and McCoys.

Between Hank Williams’ pain songs, Newbury’s train songs, and “Blue Eyes Cryin’ in the Rain,”

Out in Luckenbach, Texas, ain’t nobody feelin’ no pain.<sup>34</sup>

the song. In fact, Jennings said in his 1996 autobiography that much of the song’s success, which included reaching Number 1 on the *Billboard* country chart and Number 25 on the *Billboard* pop chart,<sup>36</sup> was due to the universality of the song’s pastoral retreat narrative. “Every state has a Luckenbach; a place to get away from things. That’s why it succeeded.”<sup>37</sup>

Jerry Jeff Walker’s Luckenbach recording session became an important milestone in the evolution of the progressive country music movement and was a powerful expression of the “anti-industry” attitude exhibited by many of the genre’s most prominent musicians. At the same time, *¡Viva Terlingua!* reflected contradictions inherent in the notion of an “independent, non-conformist” approach to artistic creativity, since it still relied extensively on the financial backing and marketing expertise of a national label in order to make this “live” album successful. Furthermore, while *¡Viva Terlingua!* offers a broad cross-section of the sounds and lyrical themes prominent throughout the progressive country genre (from the visions of a dying American West in “Desperados Waiting for a Train” to the rollicking honky tonk sounds of “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother”), this perspective was shaped, in large part, by the musical predilections and social connections of the musicians involved. As a result, the album represents a

mediated vision of the progressive music scene despite its aura of unmediated “live-ness.”

Another notable irony is that, the success of Walker’s *Viva Terlingua!* allowed him to reinvest in Austin’s music technology infrastructure, since he and Brossky used some of the profits from the record to upgrade Odyssey Sound, the site of Walker’s first Austin recording. This meant that the rudimentary studio which had contributed to the rough, “live” feel of those early recordings could be transformed into a professional studio capable of producing high-quality material for regional and national distribution. This made it possible for emerging Austin bands to make first-rate demo records to send to major record labels.<sup>38</sup>

Consequently, *Viva Terlingua!* stands as a carefully constructed musical manifesto of Austin’s emergent progressive country movement, conveying a sense of spontaneity and freedom to potential audiences and musicians with similar ideologies. Yet, the album also was very much a part of the larger commercial music industry infrastructure, since it relied on the technology, financing, and marketing provided by MCA. In the end, *Viva Terlingua!* represented progressive country’s break with mainstream creative limitations, but it also revealed that most artists, no matter how “independent” they envisioned themselves to be, still had to rely on certain industry conventions in order to have successful recording careers.

Walker’s MCA sessions in Austin and Luckenbach also represent a compromise between the isolation of the professional recording studio and the dynamic interplay of live musical performances. By downplaying the mediating influence of the music industry, highlighting the humanity of the people who helped create the recordings, and situating the albums within specific geographical, social, and temporal contexts, Walker sought to achieve a balance between creative freedom and commercial vitality. However, Walker’s approach was only one of many competing models in the progressive country music community. Others in the Austin scene of the 1970s strove instead to create a local entertainment industry that, while informed by the city’s live music scene, could compete with the major recording and publishing centers in Nashville, New York, and Los Angeles.<sup>39</sup> For example, Eddie Wilson, proprietor of the Armadillo World Headquarters, struggled to transform the old National Guard armory into a concert hall that could host both local bands and national touring acts and be part of a multimedia infrastructure that would rival the nation’s top sound and film studios.<sup>40</sup>

Local radio station KOKE-FM also helped define the emerging music scene by coining the term “progressive country” in 1972 to describe a new radio format that blended together the music of Austin artists with that of such nationally-prominent acts as the Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers, Bob Dylan, and the Band.<sup>41</sup> Other high-profile Central Texas musical events,

including the 1972 Dripping Springs Reunion, Rod Kennedy’s Kerrville Folk Festival, and Willie Nelson’s Fourth of July Picnics, sought to capitalize on the local scene, showcase the wealth of Texas talent, and elicit outside investment in Austin’s fledgling music industry.<sup>42</sup> In 1976, the PBS television series *Austin City Limits* began syndication on the Public Broadcasting System, helping to carry Austin’s diverse and dynamic live music scene to audiences across North America.<sup>43</sup>

As a result of these projects and others, Austin gained a national reputation by the 1980s as a thriving center for musical innovation, collaboration, and live performance. City officials soon realized the potential for capitalizing on the community’s vibrant entertainment scene in order to attract tourists and commercial development. On August 29, 1991, the City of Austin passed a resolution proclaiming the town to be “the live music capital of the world” and officially acknowledging that

“music is a driver of the ‘creative economy’ that translates into millions of dollars annually for Austin.”<sup>44</sup> The Austin Music Marketing Office, part of the city’s Convention and Visitors’ Bureau, “promotes...the diversity of Austin music, whether it’s blues, rock and Latino, or jazz,”<sup>45</sup> and the non-profit Austin Music Foundation “strengthens and connects the local music community with innovative programs that empower musicians and fuel Austin’s creative economy.”<sup>46</sup> While many of the venues



Michael McGeary (left) and Bob Livingston (right), clowning around on tour, 1973. Courtesy of Craig Hillis.

that were popular during the heyday of the progressive country movement have long since closed, new venues, many of which are owned and operated by entrepreneurs who learned about the music industry during the 1970s, have filled the void and now offer musical styles that appeal to new generations of fans.

In January 2006, several of the musicians who took part in Jerry Jeff Walker's 1973 Luckenbach sessions gathered in the Luckenbach dancehall to record *Viva Terlingua! ¡Nuevo!: Songs of Luckenbach, Texas*. The event included a live audience of three hundred people, all of whom paid one dollar for admission.<sup>47</sup>

## Notes

1. For a more complete discussion of the progressive country music phenomenon, see Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2004); Cory Lock, "Counterculture Cowboys: Progressive Texas Country of the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 3, Number 1, (Spring 2003), 14-23; Gary Hartman, *The History of Texas Music* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).
2. Kim Martin, "Time is a Pivotal Issue: Texas Artists Just Can't Run on L.A. Time, That's All," *The Gar* 3, Number 5 (June-July 1974), 10.
3. James Neff, "A Big Commotion in Austin," *Country Style* Number 26 (December 1977), 5, 66-67.
4. Pete Axthelm, "Songs of Outlaw Country," *Newsweek* (April 12, 1976), 79.
5. Jeff Nightbyrd, "Highway 71 Revisited," *Crawdaddy* 22 (March 1973), 25.
6. Ed Ward, "Review of *The Lost Gonzo Band* (MCA 487) and *Juz Loves Dem Ol' Greezy Wheels* (London PS 657)," *Rolling Stone* 193 (August 14, 1975), 49.
7. Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1-47.
8. Sociologist Andy Bennett, in his work on the film *Woodstock* (1970), explains the effects of such mediated representations of a musical community on subsequent understandings and interpretations of that community, even among people who were active participants. Andy Bennett, "Everybody's Happy, Everybody's Free: Representation and Nostalgia in the *Woodstock* Film," in *Remembering Woodstock*, Andy Bennett, ed., (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 43-54.
9. "Mr. Bojangles" b/w "Round and Round," Atco 45-6594 (October 1968).
10. Douglas Kent Hall, "Mr. Bojangles' Dance: The Odyssey and Oddities of Jerry Jeff Walker," *Rolling Stone* 176 (December 19, 1974), 9.
11. Bob Livingston, interview with author, June 25, 2007. There is some controversy over precisely how Walker

literally and symbolically, this reunion concert seems to have been a fitting tribute to Walker's earlier ventures in Central Texas. The original sessions, which were a mixture of live and "semi-live" recordings, reflected the larger compromise Walker and others were hoping to achieve between true artistic freedom, including an organic musical exchange between musicians and their fans, and the more pragmatic considerations of creating a commercially-viable product that could be shared with a larger audience well beyond Central Texas. ★

brought Murphey's band into the studio and eventually made them his road band. In *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, page 98, Jan Reid remarks that "the best band in town was known to work for the perfectionist Michael Murphey. Walker didn't steal the band; he just happened to be in the right place at the right time. At a rehearsal Murphey blew up over their general lack of discipline and with harsh words stormed out—just as Walker was coming in. In the course of an evening he gained the Lost Gonzo Band." Murphey, on the other hand, recalled to Jack Bernhardt in 1993 that the band left him following a surgical procedure to remove nodes from his vocal cords in 1972, a procedure that rendered his voice useless for over six months and that led to an extended period of depression (Michael Murphey, interview with Jack Bernhardt, June 5, 1993, Jack Bernhardt Papers, FS-1713, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). However, credits in the liner notes to Walker's first Austin album (*Jerry Jeff Walker*, Decca DL 7-5385/MCA 510 [1972]) suggest a much more congenial split, noting Murphey's contributions on acoustic guitar.

12. Liner notes for Jerry Jeff Walker's *Jerry Jeff Walker*.
13. Bob Livingston, interview with author, June 25, 2007.
14. Mickey Raphael, interview with author, June 6, 2007.
15. Leslie C. Gay, Jr., "Acting Up, Talking Tech: New York Rock Musicians and Their Metaphors of Technology," *Ethnomusicology* 42, Number 1 (1998), 81-98.
16. Liner notes for Jerry Jeff Walker's *Jerry Jeff Walker*; Livingston, interview with author, June 25, 2007.
17. Jerry Jeff Walker, *Jerry Jeff Walker*.
18. Jerry Jeff Walker, *Viva Terlingua!* MCA 382 (1973).
19. Liner notes for Jerry Jeff Walker, *Jerry Jeff Walker*.
20. Reid, *Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 92.
21. Livingston, interview with author, June 25, 2007. Apparently, Crouch himself used the word "imagineer," a term associated with Walt Disney's escapist theme parks, to describe himself. An account of this appears

- in an anonymous 1976 *Newsweek* article covering his "Non-Buycentennial Day" celebration ("Texas: Hondo's Jamboree," *Newsweek* [8 March 1976], 35).
22. Livingston, interview with author, June 25, 2007.
23. Raphael, interview with author, June 6, 2007.
24. Liner notes for Jerry Jeff Walker's *Viva Terlingua!*
25. Livingston, interview with author, June 25, 2007.
26. *Ibid.*; Raphael, interview with author, June 6, 2007.
27. Livingston recalled, "We were not on the stage. The drummer was up there, but we were all set on the ground. They put a bunch of bales of hay for baffles." (Livingston, interview with author, June 25, 2007).
28. S. Alexander Reed has argued that crowd noise is perhaps the most essential component of a live album. "It is of course naïve to suppose that the capacity for crowd noise to advertise a performance's value lies simply in the bandwagon approach that a hundred thousand fans can't be wrong. Its deliberate use as an identifiable but integrated sign to which attention is drawn both in the recording process...but also on final recordings by virtue of its selective placement and volume, helps to argue that crowd noise need not be auxiliary human buzzing, but that it assumes a foreground role woven through many records." (S. Alexander Reed, "Crowd Noise and the Hyperreal," in *The Proceedings of the First Art of Record Production Conference, 17th-18th September 2006, University of Westminster, London*, www.artofrecordproduction.com, accessed April 25, 2006).
29. Chet Flippo, "Splash," *The Texas Observer* 65 (January 19, 1973), 22.
30. *Idem*, "Hill Country Sound," *Texas Parade* 34, Number 11 (April 1974), 22.
31. Joe Gracey, "City Audiences Honest, Picky," *Austin American-Statesman*, (November 17, 1973), 20.
32. Waylon Jennings, "Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)" b/w "Belle of the Ball," RCA 10924 (1977).
33. Michael Murphey, *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*, A&M SP 4388 (1973).
34. "Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)," written by Chips Moman and Bobby Emmons.
35. Hartman, *The History of Texas Music*, 175.
36. Joel Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn's Top Country Singles, 1944-2001* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, Inc. and

- Billboard, 2002), 170; *idem*, *Joel Whitburn's Top Pop Singles, 1955-2002* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, Inc. and Billboard, 2003), 356.
37. Waylon Jennings with Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 271.
38. Bob Livingston, interview with author, June 25, 2007; Hall, "Mr. Bojangles' Dance," 20; Walker's *Collectables* (MCA 450 [1974]) was also recorded at Odyssey.
39. Historian Barry Shank has described this process as "the honky-tonk commodification of an antimodernist critique," in Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 49.
40. Eddie Wilson, interview with Robert Heard, June 26, 1974, tape recording, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas; David Menconi, "Music, Media, and the Metropolis: The Case of Austin's Armadillo World Headquarters," M.J. Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1985.
41. Joe Gracey, email communication with author, April 5, 2007; Nelson Allen, "KOKE-FM," *Picking Up the Tempo: A Country Western Journal* (April 1975), 7-8; Rick Gilzow, "Austin Country Radio," *Nashville West* 1, Number 11 (July 1976), 20-21, 42-50.
42. Travis D. Stimeling, "Place, Space, and Protest: Austin's Progressive Country Music and the Negotiation of Texan Identities, 1968-1978," Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007, 274-300.
43. Clifford Endres, *Austin City Limits* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Marty McKenzie, "Mediatin' Music," *Austin Sun* 2, Number 6 (March 25 - April 7, 1976), 1, 20.
44. "City of Austin—Music," www.ci.austin.tx.us/music, accessed January 30, 2007.
45. "Austin Music Office," www.austintexas.org/music/contact, accessed March 18, 2008.
46. "Austin Music Foundation," www.austinmusicfoundation.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=15, accessed March 18, 2008.
47. *Viva! Terlingua! Nuevo!*, Palo Duro Records 4201 (2006); Michael Corcoran, "Revisiting 'Terlingua,'" *Austin American-Statesman* (January 26, 2006), www.austin360.com/music/content/music/stories/xl/2006/01/26inmusic.html, accessed March 18, 2008.