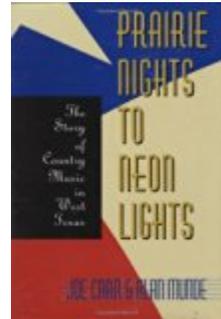


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joe Carr, Alan Munde. *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights: The Story of Country Music in West Texas*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1995. x + 243 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89672-349-8.

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The names Bob Wills, Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, Waylon Jennings and Joe Ely are familiar to many music lovers. But how many would recognize Eck Robertson, Hoyle Nix, Tommy Hancock, Tex Logan, The Sons of the West, “Pappy” Dave Stone, Drugstore Cowboys, Terry Allen, Andy Wilkenson, Edna Lee Dubre, Tommy Anderson, or the Maines Brothers? Alan Munde and Joe Carr document the story of these artists in, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights*, the history and lore of Country Music in West Texas. While the authors don’t leave out the influence and history of the better known West Texas musicians, their emphasis is on paying homage to those musicians who may not be well known, but whose influence is nevertheless very important. Carr and Munde, both musicians and professors of music at South Plains College, prove they are competent historians as well. Relying on personal interviews, photographs, music publications, oral histories, newspapers, record albums, local histories and sources dealing with the general history of Country Music, the authors tell the tale of West Texas Country Music and its musicians. They answer the question, “Why has such a proliferation of musical talent been spawned by the flatlands known as West Texas?” The authors assert that “Part of the answer may lie in the mystique that surrounds West Texas and its music.” Another reason they give is that the “great emptiness of the prairies ... prompts [people] to lift their voices.”

Prairie Nights begins by tracing the influence of the early cowboy settlers on the West Texas plains, in the late 1800s, and continues through the early 1990s. The authors look at all the styles associated with Country Music including Fiddle Music, Country Dance, Honky Tonk, Western Swing, Rockabilly, Bluegrass, Community Musicals, Hillbilly, and Country Rock. While a great deal

of the text discusses the many fine musicians who have come out of Lubbock, the influence of musicians from Meadow, Wink, Brownfield, Abilene, and many other West Texas towns also is described in detail.

Few people are aware that fiddler, Eck Robertson, was one of the founders of Country Music’s commercial recording history with his first recordings (1922), or that early country dances on the plains were often all male events. During the late 1930s, it was not uncommon for Texas politicians to use a Country Dance or Fiddle Music as a campaign technique. For example, Hop Halsey, a State representative, used Lubbock’s Drugstore Cowboys to entertain people in hopes that they might vote for him. As a result of their association with Halsey, the Drugstore Cowboys played at inaugural and birthday balls for several Texas governors. The authors pay homage to fiddler and band leader, Tommy Hancock. Hancock’s band, the Roadside Playboys, played throughout West Texas during the forties and fifties, and his Supernatural Family Band and its offshoot, the Texana Dames, continue to perform today. Although not well known outside of the West Texas area, his influence on West Texas and its musicians is notable. Carr and Munde also document the story of the first West Texas “supergroup,” The Flatlanders, which featured Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Joe Ely, and Butch Hancock.

This is a delightful book, filled with interesting anecdotes and many previously unpublished photographs. While there have been many histories of Country Music, none have documented its story in West Texas. What makes *Prairie Nights* such an important book for Country Music scholarship is that it is the only book of its kind. Country music enthusiasts and scholars will want to add

this volume to their collections. Music, public, and academic libraries also should consider this book for their collections. *Prairie Nights* is truly a milestone in Country Music scholarship; it deserves to be read.

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