

Licks and Lyrics in Sounds and Stories

Texas Soundtrack: Texas Stories Inspired by Texas Music

edited by Terry Dalrymple

Temple, TX: Inkbrush Press, 2011.
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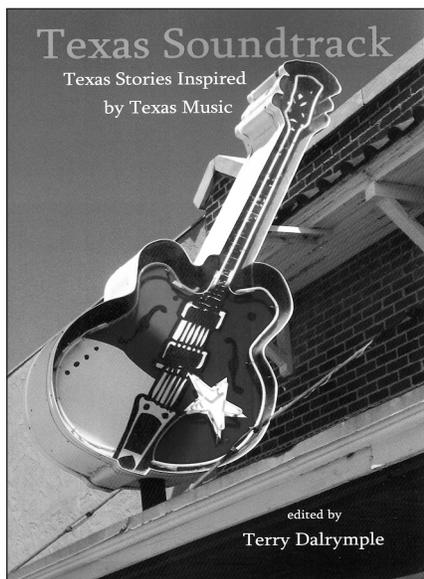
Reviewed by
Tiffany Anderson

T*exas Soundtrack* delivers exactly what the title advertises. All of the short stories inspired by songs have one thing in common: Texas. Texas consists of a variety of climates and creative spaces for inspiration and stretches beyond its geographical borders. The Lone Star State dwells in the imagination of its natives whether they're living as far west as New Mexico, south as Mexico, north as Oklahoma, east as Florida, or overseas in Vietnam, like the characters created by Wayne Nichols, Dave Kuhne, Amanda Gann Churchill, Clay Reynolds, Laura Payne Butler, Mark Busby, and Chris Ellery.

This book shows that we learn the art of storytelling through listening. In "Bring Lyndon Home," a story included in this anthology and inspired by Shiva's Headband's "Song of Peace," Busby writes about how he grew up "tempted by the belief that each generation had a war in which the boys became men." Texas music motivates these writers to condense a story into satisfying segments like the songs that influenced them. Introduced by songwriter Daniel Makins and chosen by editor Terry Dalrymple, authors Nichols, Kuhne, Churchill, Reynolds, Butler, Busby, Ellery, Laurence Musgrove, Chuck Taylor, A. C. Jerroll (a pen name), Laurie Champion, Jim Sanderson, and Andrew Geyer shine as "masters of minimalism."

A treasure map hidden in a father's journal, tucked away in the sculpted pages of an oversized *Texas Almanac*, make for an enticing read in "Bigger Wheel" by Wayne Nichols, a story roused by Stephen Bruton's songs

"Bigger Wheel" and "One More Trip Around the Sun." We sense the narrator's resentment when he has "not yet seen [his] life flash before [his] eyes. [He] was looking forward to that bit of entertainment to be the very least that [he] could expect from an unanticipated gun shot to the chest." Although all the adventure takes place in New Mexico, the narrator is coaxed into returning to Texas once again by a woman "wearing a short yellow sundress with boots,



her hair tied up in a bun, with a little ponytail."

The narrator in "Ridin' My Thumb to Mexico" by Dave Kuhne finds that by leaving the "suburban metromess" of DFW, he escapes his father's wrath, provoked in particular by the narrator's "screwing his friends' daughters." To spare his mother's feelings, he lies and tells her that he will be "Greyhound-ing, not thumbing" his way to Mexico. As the narrator hitches a ride, a song with the same name as the story's title plays on the radio: "Ridin' My Thumb to Mexico" by Johnny Rodriguez. Like many of the writers in this collection, this story addresses the United States and war. Specifically, this character feels "guilty about being safe in college while they risked everything," recognizing that being chosen by the draft

meant you were "forced to join or be jailed." He overcomes his guilt with a little help from his tribe's sacrament, which they passed around. He describes the path to Mexico accurately, "nothing but open highway and scrub desert" that eventually "surrender[s] to the Rio Grande delta." His journey with a pretty, green-eyed girl leads to his revelation that he may be wasting time "chasing dope and skirts," that maybe his dad was right. That revelation will be put on hold as the couple's journey takes them further from their "separate futures, at least for a while."

Chris Ellery highlights his reptilian instincts in "The Song of Four Snakes," a story spawned from the lyrics of Robert Earl Keen's "Feelin' Good Again." Ellery's mythology uses the settings of Keen's lyrics and unfolds with all the drama of a veteran. Ellery showcases his talent for listening when Joey Perkins, the main character, gets barked at by his lieutenant for "jawing with [a] snake," that promises to reward him for sparing the reptile's life. Ellery describes the mystical connection Perkins ignited with this snake by sparing its life during the "War of His Time," as Ellery calls the war in Vietnam. Convinced that the snake holds the power to keep its promise, Perkins lives in accord with life, especially when things don't come his way. Dances in his local tavern serve as a vehicle for ladies to tell their stories, and one day a special dance partner confirms his faith in the snake's promise.

In Laura Payne Butler's "Shimmer-dance," a Western fantasy takes place as Butler describes the desire of a Florida lady to become a Texas woman after hearing the Flatlanders sing "Dallas." Her free-spirited side yearns toward the West, away from her "house surrounded by its veranda," "its choking wisteria, its Spanish moss shadows" before the moment "expires like lightning bugs drowning in dew." While Butler shares the observation that "Texas flatlanders possess the

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steadiness of spirit to withstand hard, hot Plains winds,” her main character doubts if she has those qualities. Do you? ★

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an opportunity to discuss the ways blacks and Tejanos resisted violence. Smallwood, Moneyhon, Kosary, and Tijerna mention resistance, but their discussion is not extensive. Was black and Tejano armed resistance, flight, or protest to the federal government common? Were certain regions more prone to resistance than others? A section on resistance to terrorist violence would have provided the book some balance.

When taken as a whole, the compilation provides a nuanced understanding of various parties involved in the Reconstruction drama. Although spared from large campaigns during the Civil War, Texans waged bloody battles against the federal government during the War of Reconstruction and were ultimately successful. Texans’ fight continued until 1874, when conservatives reclaimed the state legislature and continued the oppression of blacks well into the 20th century. Despite Texas’ unique characteristics, Howell’s compilation provides a framework applicable to future studies of Reconstruction in other Southern states.★

Brandon Jett is a graduate student in the history Ph.D. program at the University of Florida.

are only real people who battle real problems and injuries, both spiritual and physical. For any fan of books with the smell of blood on them, *Men in the Making* will make a welcome addition. ★

William Jensen is a writer and teacher. He lives in central Texas.

the Hill”:

Above the south shores of Lake
Travis
she moves in the dawn that is
breaking
over the railings of the house
that clings
to the ancient limestone cliffs—
she is the deep
and complex aroma of a dark, rich
coffee held
in both hands against the gusts of
wind that have carried
a chill across the water, a body so
deep and blue
that it captures all the light
intense morning sun...

Clearly poetry is one of the driving forces in Parsons’ life. He is one of those rare poets with the ability to apply his art to anything he desires. Fortunately, for all of us, his artistic gaze is pointed at Texas. ★

Colin Pope is the Clark Writer-in-Residence at Texas State University-San Marcos, where he teaches in the English Department and works as a poetry editor for *Southwestern American Literature*.

ordinary accomplishments and disappointments, the death of children, neighbors, relatives coexisting with the promise that nothing would change.”

Furman has said in interviews that she found similar diaries in the attic of her own house. Like Furman, Dinah wonders about this woman whose “ephemeral activities occupied every minute of her life.” Dinah, who never finds out why her mother left, longs for a connection to “the mother who stayed.” Regretting not having had children, Dinah tries to nurture Amber, an artist, but her good intentions become interference, and the results are disastrous.

Mother-daughter relationships remain Furman’s most obvious theme, but time is her real subject. Besides the diary entries, historical reports and research discoveries, *The Mother Who Stayed* ends with Dinah uncovering the remains of Mary Ann’s house. Like an archaeologist, Dinah finds broken steps, a stone wall, an old brick marked *Troy*, and “a blue canning jar broken and half-buried in the earth floor.” Gradually, the distance between the narrator and reader expands, and time collapses until we see a picture of both women simultaneously: the one for whom nothing is left “but the diaries and the witness they bear” and the one left “standing alone at the edge of a ruin.” ★

Nan Cuba is the co-editor of *Art at our Doorstep: San Antonio Writers and Artists* (Trinity University Press, 2008) and has published work in *Quarterly West*, *Columbia*, and *Harvard Review*. Her novel, *Body and Bread*, is forthcoming from Engine Books. She is the founder and executive director emeritus of the nonprofit literary center, Gemini Ink (www.geminiink.org), and an associate professor of English at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio.