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OUT OF THIS WORLD: HEARING INDIGENOUS AND IMMIGRANT MUSIC IN THE
AMERICAN SOUTH

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi

by

JAKE X. FUSSELL

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ABSTRACT

At a moment when scholarship regarding traditional music in the U.S. South attempts to transcend outdated confines and limitations, the region itself experiences significant and unforeseen demographic changes. These cultural shifts call into question the foci of documentary efforts and trigger a reassessment of the study of “southern music.” This project looks to the longstanding omission and ignorance of both American Indian and immigrant musical forms from the documentation and study dedicated to the region’s important performative traditions. Specifically, the continued neglect of the fiddle tradition of the Choctaw Indians, an ongoing musical custom which this southeastern cultural group has maintained for at least two centuries, serves as a valuable reminder of the loss that occurs when traditions are overlooked because they fail to meet predetermined criteria or cultural expectations. Likewise, certain obscure ethnic musical performances which were captured in the South during the golden era of prewar commercial location recording illustrate that the business of racial categorizing and marketing, much like documentary prioritizing, has its problematic results and leaves a troubled legacy of absences and gaping omissions. However, within these absences there remain numerous lessons to be learned and musical worlds to be explored. This project seeks to explore why such omissions occur and how they can be avoided within a region currently undergoing major cultural and demographic shifts.

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*“Although, as they will tell you, they do not have the opportunity in this section to indulge themselves, the Chinese, old and young, profess the deepest love for music. While on this subject one of the older ones told of the pleasant custom in China of hitching whistles on the tails of pigeons, with the result that beautiful humming music floats down from the air as the birds fly overhead.”*¹

– Anne McAlpine, Works Progress Administration fieldworker, Bolivar County, Mississippi, 1939

*“Maybe someday, when people become enlightened to the point that they can accept something besides their own narrow view of what the world should be like, they’ll reaccept the traditions they’ve left behind.”*²

– Bobby McMillon, ballad singer, Lenoir, North Carolina, 1999

INTRODUCTION: HEARING AND REHEARING SOUTHERN MUSIC TODAY

Today there is an increasing amount of scholarly attention devoted to the notion of traditional music in America, and particularly in the South, as something more than a quirky and ingenious holdover of our rapidly disappearing agrarian identity. Closer examinations of the development and dissemination of certain musical traditions and their bearers frequently reveal that our current understandings of vernacular music have relied largely on parameters maintained by cultural gatekeeping; that what we know about the subject – and perhaps just as importantly, what we *don’t* know – has as much to do with the documenter as it does the documented. In the past three or so decades, critics and scholars have brought to the table a number of arguments which work to dispel problematic notions of authenticity and isolation, and encourage us to examine industry, interchange, globalism, capitalism, and others forces of modern life as

¹ Anne McAlpine, “Chinese of the Delta – Bolivar County,” *WPA Federal Writers’ Project Files*, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

² Fred C. Fussell, “Bobby McMillon: An Unbroken Tradition,” in *Blue Ridge Music Trails: Finding a Place in the Circle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 143.

immovable realities in the formation and evolution of American musical cultures. Primary concerns now revolve around complex and multifaceted issues of representation, exploitation, and the often precarious relationship between documentarian and subject. Among the first of these studies was David Whisnant's 1988 book *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, which explores the presence of ballad hunters, settlement schools, and folk festivals in Appalachia throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Whisnant examines how the criterion set forth by certain cultural workers in the region have tended to neglect and overshadow some of the modern complexities within the lives and music of their subjects. These prioritized foci of study have not remained the same since the beginning of documentary work in the region but have shifted over time depending on what social purposes and needs their emphases have served within each era. For instance, it is difficult for us to imagine what Appalachian music would be today without the advent of the banjo, but Whisnant points out how early-twentieth-century ballad hunters like Cecil Sharp made it a point to ignore banjo traditions in the region because for them, the twangy instrument only represented regional fascination with newfangled entrapments that didn't represent the "pure" folkloric aspects of the British-American peasantry. Only a short time would pass before other documentarians would begin to acknowledge and study various sub-regional styles of Appalachian banjo playing as worthwhile and important community traditions in their own right. The banjo would not kill British-American balladry in Appalachia, but it would quite literally accompany it.

In a related vein of scholarship, Elijah Wald and Patrick Huber are two authors whose recent writings, respectively, work to dispel romantic notions of vague agrarian origin in traditional music. In his 2002 book *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*, Wald demystifies much of the romanticism surrounding the life and music of Mississippi

blues “legend” Robert Johnson by placing the artist into a modern context of pre-World War II African American popular music and social activity. Wald admits that although spellbinding, powerful, and ingeniously crafted, Johnson’s iconic 1930s recordings echo as much of the theatre, the phonograph, and Tin Pan Alley as they do the dusty crossroads or the sweat-drenched cotton field. And even the crossroads and cotton field are, each in their own way, sites of enterprise, modernity, and creative exchange. Patrick Huber, in his 2008 book *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South*, decries the common assumption that the earliest recorded country music was pure, untouched resounding from the Anglo-American cabins of “high lonesome” mountain hollers. Huber explains that although the commercial recording companies of the 1920s and 30s certainly advertised their fiddling and banjo picking recording artists as “hillbilly” folksingers, many of them – Charlie Poole, Fiddlin’ John Carson, Dave McCarn, Jimmie Tarlton, Dorsey Dixon, to name just a few – were actually lowland southerners who lived and worked in sizable, bustling cotton mill towns and cities of the Piedmont South, particularly in Georgia and the Carolinas. Many of these cities, like Gastonia, North Carolina, and my hometown of Columbus, Georgia, bolstered significant populations of African Americans who frequently shared and exchanged songs and musical ideas with their white working-class neighbors.

Scholars Tony Russell and Karl Hagstrom Miller each point out that this notion of southern blacks and whites having mutually separate musics had less to do with reality than it did an agenda initiated by businessmen within the American recording industry to cater to race-based niche markets; that almost all of southern traditional music is in fact the result, at least in part, of some form of transcultural borrowing. In his groundbreaking book *Blacks, Whites & Blues*, Russell explores how much of the emblematic southern folk music recorded in the 1920s

and 30s represents a shared repertoire of “common stock” songs between black and white southerners rather than the mutually exclusive racially based categorizations the commercial recording companies enforced through the marketing of their “race” and “hillbilly” discographies. Karl Hagstrom Miller covers some nearby ground in his 2009 book *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, as he discusses how the genres developed by various facets of the American music industry have maintained a continuous impact on the way we hear and think about music in the South. Miller takes his argument a step further and asserts that the work of folklorists such as John Lomax echoed much of the problematic thinking of the commercial vernacular music recording era in its insistence on defining traditional music in isolationist terms and its refusal to take dynamics of modern cross-cultural exchange into account. Miller targets the “folkloric paradigm” as a problematic rubric which he believes is in a continuous attempt to confine, encapsulate, and antiquify the creativity of southern musicians and the songs they play.³

In his keynote address at the 2011 Living Blues Symposium held annually here at the University of Mississippi, blues researcher Jim O’Neal pointed out how the study of blues, and folk music in general, has been far too dependent on the discography: the memorization of who recorded what and when. According to O’Neal, this information isn’t nearly sufficient to tell us enough about the greater cultural and social dynamics which created, nourished, and sustained these musical cultures, nor does this isolationist approach do much justice to an attempt at understanding the complexities of the music or the lives of the musicians themselves. Revolutionary advances in research technology are now allowing us to more conveniently and quickly access resource materials which once would have taken long-term dedication to

³ Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Refiguring American Music Series, Duke University Press, 2010).

painstaking detective work at the risk of little or no result. We now know, for instance, that the 1920s blues recording star Ma Rainey was born in Alabama and not Georgia, as was previously believed, and that some recently uncovered chapters which a publisher omitted from the original draft of W.C. Handy's milestone 1941 autobiography *Father of the Blues* discuss several professional southern African American blues performers in the first decade of the twentieth century, thereby providing some rare insight to an otherwise relatively unremarked era in blues history.⁴ But beyond editorial omissions and statistical affirmations and repudiations, O'Neal's charge illustrates the important role that archival research plays within a broader paradigm shift led by revisionist thinking which is currently seeking out new ways of rehearing "old" music.

If we as scholars and enthusiasts of southern music now acknowledge that our comprehension of the southern soundscape has been at various times flawed due to our insistence on continuous genrefication and exclusive canonizing, the confession begs a pertinent question: What all have we neglected and left behind? What have we allowed to slip through the cracks? Furthermore, if this refocusing of the lens not only allows us to reconfigure our conceptions of a musical past, how might it begin to assist us in developing a fresh consideration of our musical present? What traditions are now actively contributing to our regional soundscape which we might run the risk of overlooking if we conform to outdated ways of listening? To begin to answer these questions, I look toward what I understand as two major (and majorly problematic) omissions from the phenomenon which we loosely refer to as "southern music":

- 1) musics created by Native Americans from and within the South and
- 2) musics created by immigrants and foreign-born peoples now living within the South.

⁴ Jim O' Neal, "Missing Chapters in Blues History," Keynote Speech, *Living Blues Symposium* at the University of Mississippi, 2011.

Why should Native American music be an integral part of a discussion of southern music? The sole reason, which should be self-explanatory, is that Native Americans were, of course, the *first* southern musicians. The general absence of attention to Native American song and dance in anthologies, compilations, journals, books, archives, and other outlets and repositories devoted to southern music is about as perplexing as it is unfortunate. Of course there is a myriad of both historiographical and pedagogical reasons which are partially responsible for this continued neglect and the blame should not be cast in one direction alone. And the systematic ethnic cleansing which the U.S. government violently imposed on hundreds of thousands of southeastern Native Americans throughout the first half of the nineteenth century created gaping demographic absences which would have no minor consequence for the South's evolving conceptions of regional identity and Indianness. But a closer look reveals that southeastern American Indians were not only present but heavily engaged in some of the region's most pivotal moments, from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement, and this should not be taken lightly as long as we are genuinely dedicated to comprehending a complex picture of the southern past. Fortunately, this glaring omission is a problem which some scholars of southern culture are now remedying. In 2008, at the height of buzzing public and scholarly interests in southern culinary culture, the University of North Carolina's *Southern Cultures* journal included Rayna Green's excellent article "Mother Corn and the Dixie Pig," which points out the trendy "foodie" scene's neglect of important historical and contemporary foodways among the region's Native people.⁵ A few months later, *Southern Cultures* also featured historian John Troutman's profile on North Carolina's Tuscarora blueswoman and slide guitarist Pura Fé, whose CDs can now be found among those recorded by Buddy Guy and Sleepy John

⁵ Rayna Green, "Mother Corn and the Dixie Pig: Native Food in the Native South," *Southern Cultures* 14 (University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

Estes in the blues section of record stores across the country.⁶ Troutman's 2009 book *Indian Blues: American Indians and The Politics of Music, 1879-1934*, is a momentous first step into an intriguing and otherwise embarrassingly underexplored territory: the role of professional Native American musicians and performers throughout the formation of the American music industry. Nearly every semester, professors at my own institution assign to their undergraduate Southern Studies 101 students, alongside works by Faulkner and Agee, Native American readings such as Choctaw author LeAnne Howe's 2002 novel *Shell Shaker*, thereby emphasizing the Native presence as an integral part of the "southern narrative" – a curricular inclusion which probably would not have been considered ten years ago, at least outside of the Anthropology department. In short, Native American Studies are increasingly becoming a part of Southern Studies, and it is my hope that this project will join in on that conversation by shedding some light on an otherwise unexamined Native American musical tradition.

In reference to the second portion of this thesis, one may ask the question: Why is the music of immigrant populations in the region important to a discussion of southern music? First of all, with the exception of Native Americans, all southerners' ancestors were, either by choice or force, part of an immigrant group of one form or another at some point in the past. Demographic studies reveal that ours is a region which has for many generations been largely racially binary, but which is now experiencing rapid influxes of immigrant people from an array of nationalities, religious backgrounds, and ethnic identities. The crucial legacy of the South's black/white racial dichotomy can hardly be overstated but the topic has sometimes had the tendency of overshadowing some of the region's more subtle ethnic and demographic variations. Even in regions of the most drastically stratified black/white relations, like the Mississippi Delta,

⁶ John Troutman, "Blues Power in the Tuscarora Heartland: The Music of Pura Fé," *Southern Cultures* 15 (University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

for instance, there have long existed culturally significant pockets of Chinese, Italian, Lebanese, and Mexican people. Perhaps food and labor-related studies have demonstrated the most tangible contributions of these ethnic groups most clearly in recent years, and I can't seem to find any reason that music shouldn't take part in that effort as well.

Although it is true that the South as a whole has not experienced the sort of widespread ethnic plurality of the nation's other regions, the southern states have been the site of steady and rapid increase in ethnic diversity over the past several decades, whereas the diversity of the non-southern regions of the country has plateaued or only increased incrementally. In his 2007 article "New People in the New South," sociologist Carl Bankston points out, "By 1990 the South had a greater percentage of immigrants than the Midwest, and although the West had become the primary immigrant destination by the end of the twentieth century, its rate of proportional increase had begun to level off somewhat by the twenty-first century, while the immigrant portion of the South continued to grow."⁷ The influx of Latin American peoples to the region – particularly Mexicans and Central Americans – is certainly the most significant factor of this increase in recent years, and though this diaspora is sometimes met with a painfully familiar bigotry and racism from some southerners, not all of the cultural contributions of the South's Latino groups are going completely unnoticed by documentarians of southern culture. In recent years, scholars have begun to realize the fruitful benefits of looking toward the communities and lifeways of our new Latino neighbors. Studies such as Heather Smith and Owen Furueth's *Latinos in the South*, Robert Quan's *Lotus Among the Magnolias*, and Deborah Weiner's *Coalfield Jews* have all sought to explore the complex existences of a third marginalized culture thriving within societies long defined by racial duality. The "Global South"

⁷ Carl L. Bankston III, "New People in the New South: An Overview of Southern Immigration," *Southern Cultures* 13 (Winter 2007): 24.

initiative in southern studies is currently reckoning with these demographic changes and is accepting international influence – in terms of both foreign import to the South as well as local and regional export from the South to other parts of the world – as a fundamental reality of the contemporary southern cultural landscape. In a Global South frame of thinking, there is perhaps just as much to say about the current blues scene in Tokyo, Japan, as there is to say of the current blues scene in Clarksdale, Mississippi. And likewise, we should begin to look toward the Mexican music scene in Montgomery, Alabama, the Greek music scene in Tarpon Springs, Florida, the Czech music scene in New Braunfels, Texas, or the Italian music scene in Marion County, West Virginia, as important spaces within the greater region’s sonic spectrum. Immigrant musical expressions are occurring more and more frequently on southern soil. Just last year, the Smithsonian Folkways Records label issued a CD of brand new recordings by Los Hermanos Lovo, a Salvadoran *chanchona* group who make their home in Leesburg, Virginia. Official releases aside, current social media outlets allow for convenient, unforeseen access into the self-documentary efforts of various subcultures. Today, a perfunctory query for footage of Mexican-American music performances on YouTube will result in a display of numerous homemade videos of horn-driven *corridos* belted out in a Spartanburg backyard, couples dancing the *zapateado* at a picnic near Pelham, Alabama, and Mariachis crooning of unrequited love in south Memphis nightclubs. Who are we to say that these relatively unknown musicians and performers are not important players within the contemporary southern soundscape?

Let me state it clearly that my aim here is not to simply cast blame for the longstanding omission of some obscure or routinely overlooked musical traditions I find interesting or believe are pertinent to the story of southern music. After all, the notion of “southern music” as a singularly identifiable idea is vague at best, and there are probably as many definitions of

“southern music” as there are people who have ever performed or listened to it. That being said, there is a recognizable canon of sorts – a loose canon, perhaps – which has consistently asserted its identity and dominance through repetition and continued reinforcement over the past several decades. This is not to imply that the canon has not undergone some moments of change and reifying over the years, but the general consensus concerning the nucleus of southern music reveals itself through the milestones and icons which have been so thoroughly analyzed, anthologized, and memorialized time and again in publications, recordings, and other commentary on southern music. Fortunately, though, this is beginning to change.

As important as origins and subsequent contributions are when we talk about traditional music, I also think it is important to understand that the notion of “influence” can be as problematic as it is helpful. In a recent video interview, when historian Charles Reagan Wilson asked country music scholar Bill Malone what he predicted the recent immigrant groups of the South would bring to the future of southern music, Malone replied, “What we like are fusions. I think most fans don’t want to hear some unalloyed copy of something they’ve heard in the past. They want to hear an Elvis Presley.”⁸ Malone, whose 2003 book *Southern Music / American Music* suggests a synonymous relationship between the music of South and nation, makes a valid point here: that cultural amalgamations and creolizations often serve as the very alchemy of what we admire and find attractive about certain performers or musical traditions. Any careful examination of a southern musical genre will find these unexpected cultural or ethnic combinations lurking behind every corner. In fact, there is still yet much to be spoken for the Hawaiian guitar presence in country and blues music, the Swiss-Alpine influence in country music yodeling, the Czech and German influence on Texas swing, the impact of Latino music on

⁸ “Bill Malone, Country Music Scholar,” *Southern Spaces*, January 20, 2006, <http://www.southernspaces.org/2006/country-music-scholar>.

southern blues musicians; the Mexican influence on New Orleans and Gulf Coast brass band traditions, and much more. These combinations are often attractive to audiences because they bring exotic flair and a new sense of excitement to an otherwise seemingly familiar form. A perfect example of this kind of crossover popularity are Hank Williams' post-World War II hit singles "Jambalaya" and "Kaw-Liga," both of which made use of regional imagery and exoticized ethnic tropes to wild success. But is there more going on here to Malone's "unalloyed" idea? Is it really that "most fans" don't want a reenactment of the old and familiar or is it *also* that they don't want to have to do the work of familiarizing themselves with the completely new and unfamiliar? A fusion implies that there is a familiar element in addition to something new. But what if it's *too* unfamiliar, too foreign? Perhaps we should begin to alter our concept of what is acceptable and what is not. "Influence" is problematic as a mandatory prerequisite because its importance relies on a well-grounded, dominant form adopting some bedazzling, exotic aspects of a foreign or relatively new subdominant form. But what is a new, unfamiliar, and subdominant tradition for one group of people is *anything but* that for the community that created and continuously nurtured and reformed and maintained it – often through centuries of creative genius. So what if we altered our conception of authenticity to accept the fact that sometimes "influence" is beside the point? That said, this is also not an attempt to infer that origins are unimportant or that a study of, say, a hundred variants of the ballad "John Henry" or "Barbara Allen" is only exhausting soils long depleted of their riches. This is simply an engagement in a conversation about refiguring new ways of listening to and thinking about southern music, and I believe this shift can be most effectively enacted if we, in addition to listening back, also take the time to listen *out*.

To attempt to cover the entire story of ethnic and indigenous musics in the South would be not only preposterous but downright impossible. The subject is simply far too vast and varied for one undertaking and an attempt to do so would not do much justice to individual musical phenomena and their respective and often complex genealogies. For this reason I have chosen an episodic approach. In each case I bring out an example of a musical tradition or phenomenon which I find interesting and explore its cultural significance as well as the larger meanings surrounding its documentation or lack thereof. In one way, this is as much a story of markets, audiences, media and filtered channels of dissemination as it is any one tradition or its practitioners, and it is my hope that this will round out the larger picture of how a musical culture simultaneously responds to and exists within the world around it. The first chapter of this project serves as a brief history of the fiddle tradition among the Choctaw people as it has appeared in writing, photographs, and other documentation since the early nineteenth century. As obscure as this subject may seem, my undertaking here is far from a fetishist examination, and it is my hope that this initial exploration will serve as a catalyst for further inquiry into an otherwise little-known tradition. It is my assertion that the Choctaw fiddling tradition was purposely neglected by various documentarians throughout the past two centuries because it didn't conform to their predetermined notions of Indianness. Like Cecil Sharp's omission of the mountain banjo, anthropologists and ethnographers crossed the Choctaw fiddle off their lists of monograph-worthy modes of behavior and ritual. However, the Choctaw fiddle still managed to assert its existence by showing up, time and again, in the various writings and documentary efforts of random observers and chroniclers who did not happen to carry or enforce the same set of exclusory parameters as their academically inclined contemporaries. As it turns out, the scant documentation of the Choctaw fiddle would occur largely through happenstance.

Perhaps default documentation is a recurring theme in this project, as the second chapter explores how a brief and relatively unadulterated moment in the American commercial recording industry allowed for a microcosmic outpouring of ethnically diverse regional creativity. In 1929, while New Orleans was recovering from an intensely heated year-long streetcar strike, several northern urban-based recording companies came to the city for periods of a week or two at a time and set up makeshift recording studios in the back and upstairs rooms of hotels, union halls, and music stores. Employing a kind of willy-nilly shotgun audition approach, companies such as Victor, Columbia, Okeh, and Vocalion opened their doors to a beautiful and multifaceted musical world. Cajuns, Sicilians, African-Americans, Cubans, French-speaking Creoles, and Anglo-Americans were all lining up together to have their voices eternally engraved in the black wax. The recording log books from these sessions tell a fascinating tale in their own right, as the ethnic and musical diversity of the recording artists – some very famous and others virtually unknown – speaks volumes of the fluidity and freedom of musical spheres in eras and locales of intensely guarded social confines and boundaries – a piercing universal reality which continues to resound to this day. The central character of this story is a man named Castrenze Cuccia, a Sicilian-born, Albanian-speaking New Orleanian musician whose complex ethnic identity decidedly situates him in the marginalia of American musical history. But the story of his 1929 recording session also serves as a keyhole glance into a rich cultural world whose music is otherwise undocumented, and it is my hope that bringing Cuccia's music out of the darkness of the vault will help to kindle some interest in exploring the music of other southern artists like him whose musics do not fit comfortably into routinely maintained categories.

Recent musicological scholarship increasingly shines light on the fact that one of the great qualities of the phenomena of music is that it has the strange tendency of showing up in

places and incarnations where it is least expected. Throughout the ages, musical cultures have operated beyond their predetermined confines and limitations. In the introduction to their recent scholarly anthology *Postnational Musical Identities*, ethnomusicologists Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid observe, “Music is always in constant flux, music is the perennial undocumented immigrant; it has always moved beyond borders without the required paperwork.”⁹ Perhaps one of the keys to successfully understanding culture is to relinquish to its movements rather to oversee its casting of a frozen moment in time and place. If we begin to open our ears to the new and unfamiliar, maybe we can appreciate culture *not* as though it were an insect encased in amber, but perhaps as the strange whistling of a bird making its way from shores unknown. So let’s now enjoy the “pleasant custom” as we listen out for the fleeting sounds which are bound to soar overhead.

⁹ Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid, *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario* (Lexington Books, 2008), 12.

*That started when the white people were doing it. But then, one Choctaw did it differently, and it was not the same as the white man's dance. He made it himself...learning by himself. He learned through God by himself. He learned with his heart how to do it. That's how it originated.*¹⁰ – Ida Mae Frazier, Choctaw chanter

AN INDESCRIBABLE TUNE: GLIMPSES OF CHOCTAW FIDDLING

The Choctaw Indian Fair takes place every mid-July in the piney recreation grounds behind the Golden Moon Hotel and Casino on the federally recognized sovereign reservation land belonging to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, which lies just west of the small city of Philadelphia, Mississippi. At the fair's entrance, the dizzying neon chaos of rollercoasters, ferris wheels, and cotton candy vendors forms an awkward juxtaposition to the adjacent humble brick building whose small sign reads *Choctaw Museum of the Southern Indian*. Beyond the museum stands a row of booths bedecked with hand-painted signs advertising traditional American Indian cuisine: "Frybread," "Hominy," "Indian Tacos." Nearby, an open-air concrete pavilion is designated for the demonstration and sale of locally made crafts and traditional Choctaw handiworks such as split-cane basketry, colorful beadwork, and ornate embroidery. While the carnival portion of the fair certainly appears to attract the most non-Indians – mainly white and black Mississippians from nearby towns and counties – the Choctaws themselves, from the very young to the elderly, convene in the largest numbers on the rows of bleachers and lawn chairs arranged before Choctaw Central High School's football field, which for the entire week leading up to the fair, is temporarily converted into the site of the World Championship

¹⁰ "Ida Mae Frazier: A Choctaw Chanter," *Nanih Waiya* 3 (Pearl River, Mississippi: Choctaw Central High School, 1975), 41-44.

playoffs for southeastern stickball, a sort of Muskogean version of lacrosse with an intense level of contact along the lines of professional hockey. The adjacent high school basketball gymnasium serves as the exhibit hall where each of the reservation's eight official Choctaw communities – Bogue Chitto, Bogue Homa, Conehatta, Crystal Ridge, Pearl River, Red Water, Tucker, and Standing Pine – displays their own dioramic booths representing their respective townships' ongoing legacies and attributes to the greater contemporary Choctaw Indian community. A blue-ribbon first-place prize has been placed before the display representing the village of Tucker, who have chosen to emphasize the educational, cultural, and religious themes of their community. An elaborately embroidered green and white dress is featured prominently alongside several high school and college diplomas, athletic trophies, beadworks, a hand-carved wooden cross, and other significant ephemera. One of the Choctaws' signature black felt wide-brim hats – a "shapo" (derived from the French *chapeau*) with accompanying patchwork bandeau hatband hangs on the display's rear wall next to a banner declaring, "Tucker: Unity through Choctaw Sovereignty," and just below, a fiddle propped upright in its open case.



Fig 1: Tucker Community Display, Choctaw Indian Fair, Neshoba County, MS, 2011.

Onstage at the nearby amphitheater, Miko (or chief) Beasley Denson announces the winner of the Choctaw Indian Princess pageant for the 2011-12 season. In turn, as a testament to her versatility as cultural ambassador, the newly crowned Choctaw Princess, Miss Kursten Watkins, delivers an acceptance speech twice: once in the Choctaw language and again in English, and then she belts out a Choctaw rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner" as the official colors – the American, Mississippi, and Mississippi Choctaw flags – are hoisted to the top of the flagpole. This is followed by a demonstration of various traditional Choctaw dances, many of which belong to the larger family of southeastern Muskogean “stomp dances” in which a line of men and women, alternating by gender and succeeding from old to young, form a counter-clockwise rotating human circle as the men sing vocables in a call-and-response pattern and the women keep time with their *shakers*, which are sets of turtle shells or aluminum snuff cans filled with beads or pebbles and strapped to their calves, making a distinctive percussive sound when they shuffle. In customary Choctaw fashion, a singer – or *chanter* – leads the dances by standing apart from the main group and strikes two sticks together to set the rhythm while he chants the melody of the song and the group falls in line with the provided cadence. Here the group demonstrates several of each of their three traditional dance types: religious dances, war dances, and social dances. After the “Tick Dance,” the “Snake Dance,” and the “Stealing Partners Dance,” the chanter explains that the next selection, the “House Dance,” showcases the cultural diversity of the Choctaws’ dances. One of the elder men in the group, R.J. Willis, then exits the interior of the dance circle, disappears into the bleachers, and quickly reappears with fiddle and bow in hand, blasting through a lively rendition of the old southern classic, “Sally Gooden.” The chanter then switches to his temporary role as square dance caller, cuing the coupled dancers as they glide to the next formation in movements invoking the promenade, the do-si-do, and the

French quadrille. It is a phenomenon straight out of the days of the old frontier, and its retention within the Mississippi Choctaw community speaks to the ongoing and alluring power of fusing tradition, influence, and innovation in southern musical creativity.

So when and where did this tradition arise? Despite the fact that many scholars of both fiddling traditions and southeastern American Indian culture and history are aware of the use of fiddles in Choctaw music, almost no one seems to know much about the tradition's history or the specifics of its origins. Most pieces of scholarly commentary on the subject tend to vaguely sum up the tradition, usually within a sentence or less, by accrediting it to the Choctaws' adaption of the white settlers' music and dance styles in the early nineteenth century. Otherwise, there is almost never any mention of song repertory, bowing styles, tunings, notable tradition bearers, or any of the other standard basic information one would typically take the time to document about a given musical form. Ethnomusicologist David Draper, who currently studies and documents the contemporary music and dance customs of the Mississippi Choctaw, regrets the common lack of documentary attention given to the community's ongoing fiddle tradition: "Although some pieces do not have specific titles, no research has been initiated on whether they are original compositions of Choctaw speakers. Probably, the titles of the borrowed songs have simply been forgotten."¹¹ In their definitive and otherwise exhaustively thorough near twenty-year study of Choctaw performative traditions, *Choctaw Music and Dance*, musicologists James Howard and Victoria Levine briefly describe their observation, similar to my own, of an electrifying House Dance at the Choctaw Indian Fair in the summer of 1974, and although they took the time to include this description in their study, they did not mention the House Dance in their section

¹¹ David Draper, "Identity, Retention, and Survival: Contexts for the Performance of Native Choctaw Music," *Music of the First Nations: Tradition and Innovation in Native North America*, Ed. Tara Browner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 70.

devoted to the Choctaws' traditional dances. The folklorist Jared Snyder points out that some folklorists and other cultural documentarians have tended to repeatedly overlook or even disdain the use of certain musical instruments among some groups because the instrumentation may have demonstrated evidence of "outside" influence, a modern substitution for an older form, or perhaps the instrument just seemed an odd aberration of the cultural fabric and did not appear to be representative of the community's standardly accepted cultural qualities.¹² Snyder makes this tendency evident in the case of the numerous and severely under-documented African-American accordionists beyond French Louisiana, and I believe there may be something similar at play in the story of the Choctaw fiddle.

Neglect of the Choctaw fiddle tradition certainly seems to have been the trend among documentarians in preceding generations. One of the major scholarly resources on the Choctaw, David Ives Bushnell's 1909 study *The Choctaw of Bayou Lacomb*, was published by the Smithsonian Institution as part of the Bureau of American Ethnology's series of monographs devoted to ethnographic field studies of individual American Indian groups and their settlements. While living among the Choctaw of Bayou Lacomb, Louisiana, from 1908 to 1909, Bushnell is extremely thorough in his observations and describes in minute detail almost every major facet of Choctaw life: their history, artifacts, material culture, foodways, clothing and ornamentation, craftways and other material culture, language, religion, worldview and belief systems; their birthing, marriage and funerary rituals, myths, and of course, their dances and songs. Unfortunately, there is no mention of the fiddle. Instead, Bushnell makes the problematic claim

¹² Jared M. Snyder, "Squeezebox: The Legacy of Afro-Mississippian Accordionists," *Black Music Research Journal* 17 (1997): 37-57.

that “the only instrument known to the Choctaw is the drum...”¹³ (However, Bushnell does discuss the Choctaws’ use of more than *one* drum, one of which is an interesting sort of fusion between a colonial era snare drum and a West African hand drum.) I suppose it is *possible* that Bushnell did not run across any Indian fiddlers for the almost entire year he spent in Bayou Lacomb but I believe this is pretty unlikely. The anthropologist H.F. “Pete” Gregory, who has documented and written extensively about various aspects of folk tradition in Louisiana for the past forty years, believes that fiddling was probably a fairly common practice among most of the state’s Indian groups, especially the Choctaw, throughout the nineteenth century. In his essay “A Promise from the Sun: The Folklife Traditions of Louisiana Indians,” Gregory states, “Indian fiddle players have a long history in Louisiana, even though little has been written about them, and their music is virtually unrecorded.”¹⁴ In 1908, during the same year in which Bushnell was conducting his survey of Bayou Lacomb’s Choctaw community, the young fieldworker Mark Harrington was conducting research about two hundred miles up the road, documenting and photographing the Choctaw of Neshoba County, Mississippi. On an assignment sponsored by George Heye, archaeologist and founder of the Museum of the American Indian, Harrington was there to gather and catalogue exemplary pieces of Choctaw material culture in an effort to begin to establish the base for the new museum’s growing crafts collection. In the process, Harrington photographed several Choctaw craftspeople and their families, including Hickman Thomas, who in addition to being an accomplished silversmith, was also a fiddler. But Thomas’s music was not of particular interest to Harrington, at least not as much as the handmade silver hatband and

¹³ David Ives Bushnell, “The Choctaw of Bayou Lacomb, St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana,” *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 48* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1909), 22.

¹⁴ H. F. “Pete” Gregory, “A Promise from the Sun: The Folklife Traditions of Louisiana Indians,” in *Louisiana Folklife: A Guide to the State* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, 1985), 134.

embroidered bandolier shoulder sash that he was wearing when Harrington snapped his portrait, both of which have resided at the Museum of the American Indian to this day.¹⁵



Fig. 2. Hickman Thomas, Neshoba County, MS, 1909. Courtesy, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, NO2661.

David Bushnell's omission should not come as a particular surprise compared to the absence of the fiddle from the eighty-four wax cylinder recordings made in and around Neshoba County, Mississippi, in 1933 by the premier and astoundingly prolific chronicler of American Indian musics, Frances Densmore. While Densmore is extremely thorough in her effort to capture a plethora of varied Native American song styles, including a couple of songs which she believes bare evidence of African American influence, no fiddling can be heard on any of her recordings of Mississippi Choctaw music.¹⁶ As in the case of Bushnell's fieldwork, one has to suspect that fiddles may well have been present in at least one if not all of the various Mississippi communities Densmore visited during her extended research, but were perhaps overlooked or

¹⁵ "Collections Search," *National Museum of the American Indian*, accessed October 10, 2011. <http://nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/item.aspx?irn=363588>

¹⁶ Frances Densmore, *Choctaw Music*, Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 136, 1933.

deemed un-recordable in pursuit of more conventional examples of Choctaw musical tradition. It should be noted that Densmore often sought out and rejected certain song types, and especially denied those which she thought exhibited modern influence, because she and her contemporaries were mainly preoccupied with capturing what they thought of as endangered forms of community ritual. For example, in her introduction to *Choctaw Music*, Densmore discusses how she deliberately sought out the oldest (and not necessarily the best) singers, and often requested that they sing the oldest songs in memory, thereby automatically excluding anything which was tainted by modern currents. So it should not be surprising that Densmore might have viewed fiddle playing as suspect activity rather than a community-engaged art form. In her book *American Indians and Their Music*, which was published a few years prior to her work in Mississippi, Densmore wrote,

*The Apache is believed to be the only tribe that has used a stringed instrument. The Mexicans usually carry a violin and play it with their dances, and the 'Apache fiddle' was probably adapted from that source. It has only one or two strings, the body is shorter than that of a violin and cylindrical in shape, and one end is pressed against the player's abdomen when it is played. The bow is short, with a curved stick. Examples of this instrument are in the United States National Museum at Washington.*¹⁷

It is anyone's guess as to whether Densmore did or didn't see fiddles in the hands of Mississippi Choctaws, but her declaration that the Apache are the only Indians known to "use a stringed instrument" is almost the musical equivalent saying they are the only tribe who are aware of automobiles. However, Densmore is not referring to recreational use of the fiddle in everyday life, but rather its adaption into the core of tribal ceremony and ritual, and for her, this description of the Apache fiddle's altered material state – its physical Indianization – more solidly legitimizes its place in the American Indian musical canon. The Choctaw fiddle, on the

¹⁷ Frances Densmore, *American Indians and Their Music* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1926), 93.

other hand, serves much more of a secular function, so it may well not have been of much interest to Densmore for this reason.

Other documentary efforts which took place in Mississippi throughout the first decades of the twentieth century also reflect a presupposed standard of cultural authenticity, even though the contexts were different from those of Densmore and Bushnell. Folklorists and ballad hunters like Howard Odum, Arthur Palmer Hudson, Herbert Halpert, and John and Alan Lomax all amassed troves of ballads, instrumental tunes, work songs, and other types of music from both white and black musicians throughout the state. Fiddle tunes were often among the sought out repertory, especially in Herbert Halpert's case, as he recorded and analyzed an impressive plethora of regional Anglo-American fiddle tunes from various parts of Mississippi. But neither Halpert nor any of his fellow songhunters showed much interest in looking toward the music of the state's Native American presence. Alan Lomax may have been the one exception to this bias, as he occasionally alluded to the impact of Native American musical aesthetic on various regional performance styles in the south, particularly as evinced in Appalachian balladry and Cajun singing, but unfortunately he never focused much on documenting Native American music itself. However, on a recording trip to Senatobia, Mississippi, in 1942, he did record the fiddling and singing of blind African American multi-instrumentalist Sid Hemphill, whose father Doc Hemphill had been a regionally acclaimed Choctaw fiddler in the late nineteenth century. And nearly forty years later, Lomax would also film a wonderful Choctaw-Coushatta fiddler in Elton, Louisiana, named Deo Langley, whose interesting interview will be visited later in this text.

Obviously, it is difficult to pinpoint when American Indians first put rosined bow to string, but there are numerous accounts, photos, letters, and other documents of fiddles in the presence of southeastern Indians for many decades. In a recently published article in the

newsletter of the Oklahoma Historical Society, historian J. Justin Castro outlines a brief history of fiddling among the Cherokees of the Arkansas and Missouri Ozarks and their successors in frontier “Oklahoma Territory” as well as present-day Oklahoma. Castro insists that fiddling has been a longstanding tradition among the western Cherokee, and like me, he hypothesizes that the absence of scholarly and documentary attention to the music is a direct product of continuous and deliberate omitting on the part of cultural mediators.¹⁸ So if fiddling was widespread among the Cherokee as well as the Choctaw, one may wonder how common a musical practice this may have been among other southeastern Native groups. This is a difficult question to assess, but my guess is that the evidence for such activity will likely reside in sources where fiddling is not the main focus. However, this is a worthwhile study which still is yet to be undertaken and should eventually be situated among other studies of Native American chordophonic music. Though relatively little research has been conducted in this field, fiddling has long been a widespread phenomenon among many of the indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America. In the American southwest, the Tohono O’odham and the Apache each have their own distinct fiddle traditions. In Alaska and the contiguous Yukon Territory of western Canada, the Gwich’in Athapaskan people practice their complex style of fiddling, which exhibits varying degrees of cultural fusion, innovation, and relative isolation. The Chippewa, Metis and Six Nations people of the upper Midwest and neighboring Manitoba, Canada, practice a unique fiddle style, as do a few of the Iroquois and other American Indians in the northeastern U.S. who dwell between the beautifully complex and deep-rooted fiddle traditions that hail from New England and Nova Scotia, where musicians like the celebrated Mi’kmaq fiddler Lee Cremo has made a profound influence on the rich Cape Breton tradition. This is not to mention the

¹⁸ J. Justin Castro, “From the Tennessee River to the Tallequah: A Brief History of Cherokee Fiddling,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 87 (2009): 388-407.

numerous Central and South American indigenous groups who play fiddles: the Yaqui and the Huichol in northern Mexico, the Huasteca in north-central Mexico, the Tarascan/Purepecha in west-central Mexico, the multiple Maya-affiliated groups from southern Mexico and the Yucatan peninsula, Guatemala, and other parts of Central America, and the numerous fiddling traditions among South American indigenous identities like the Quechua and other *altiplano* people living in the Bolivian and Peruvian Andes.¹⁹ Suffice it to say that fiddling is nothing new among many of the indigenous peoples of the “New World.” Like other aspects of culture among the Americas’ indigenous groups, there is both widespread pan-tribal stylistic overlapping as well as peculiar community-distinct idiosyncrasy.

Unfortunately there has been very little scholarly devotion to this vast subject, with one outstanding exception being Smithsonian Folkways Recordings’ excellent compilation disc, *Wood That Sings: Indian Fiddle Music of the Americas*, which was produced in 1997 in cooperation with the National Museum of the American Indian. In the CD booklet’s introductory essay, producer and ethnomusicologist Daniel Sheehy argues that American Indian fiddle music should not simply be mistaken for another symbol of white Europeans’ colonial dominance over indigenous America. Instead, Sheehy sees the Indians’ use of the fiddle as an intriguing glimpse into the workings of Native American innovation and adaptation in the face of overbearing cultural and historical odds; that despite the Americas’ lack of a preexisting knowledge of chordophonic music, American Indians took the European fiddle and appropriated the instrument as something which became distinctly their own:

¹⁹ Daniel Sheehy, “The Violin in Native Latin America,” CD booklet notes: *Wood That Sings: Indian Fiddle Music of the Americas* SFW 40472 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1997), 6.

Indeed, the instrument's widespread acceptance is testimony to the special attraction of the European violin in early colonial times, considering that, apart from the musical bow, chordophones were virtually nonexistent in pre-Columbian life. When viewed more closely and within this broader musical and cultural context, however, the Indian violin's construction, the manner in which it is played, its repertoire, and the cultural significance of the performance context of which it is a part more often point to the contrary – the persistence of Native culture in the midst of a politically and economically dominant non-Indian society.²⁰

The *Wood That Sings* project seeks to substantiate the various American Indian fiddle musics as real traditions with uniquely indigenous attributes, and to dispel the misconception that these are simply tenuously interpreted adaptations of classical European musical forms. Sadly, no examples of Indian fiddle music from the American south are featured on the CD, even though Hickman Thomas's photograph graces the album cover. The severe lack of recordings of southern Indian fiddlers likely accounts for this unfortunate absence, and hopefully this text will, in some ways, serve as a kind of southern complement to the work that was started by the Smithsonian's effort to bring an otherwise unheralded yet fascinating musical world to light.

Fiddling on the Frontier

The fiddle was the instrument of the American frontier, so naturally it would make its way into the hands of Native Americans. Its portability, its ability to lead and to accompany, its use as both a stand-alone "solo" as well as a group instrument, its efficiency for entertaining and accompanying at dances, its dynamic range allowing it to be play both high melody and low swells in addition to all the notes in between, its distinct ability to produce otherworldly sounds and to simulate something as familiar as the human voice, its versatility: all of these virtues have made the instrument an attractive musical implement to various cultures and musicians around the globe. Alan Jabbour, the foremost authority on American fiddling traditions, accredits

²⁰ Sheehy, 7.

American Indians with contributing much to southern fiddling styles, particularly in terms of melodic contour. Jabbour insists that the fiddle styles that developed within the South occurred as the musical byproducts of a multicultural frontier. In a lecture given at Indiana State University several years ago, Jabbour stated, “The fact is that American Indian music of the Eastern Woodlands and Plains favors a descending tune contour. Today’s American Indian powwows are an excellent contemporary window into the same musical tradition, and one can hear thousands of tunes that follow the same overall melodic contour as the Upper South fiddle tunes.”²¹ Here Jabbour is implying that descending contour – the tendency of a melodic statement to start off at a high register and end relatively low – is a likely indication of Native American influence because so few British fiddle tunes, especially those played outside of America, display that characteristic. This unique cascading quality is particularly prevalent in southeastern fiddling styles, and large numbers of American Indians were still living beside and among southern whites during the era in which these early styles were beginning to develop and flourish, thereby making for some interesting musicological possibilities.

This biracial proximity may at least partially account for the prevalence of Indian imagery in the titles of many southern fiddle pieces. Tunes like “Lost Indian,” “Indian Ate a Woodchuck,” “Two Indians and One Squaw,” “Indian War Whoop” and many others invoke visages of Indianness, and while a handful of these tunes certainly do harken back to the early days of the southern frontier, some of this fascination with American Indians grows out of the savage stereotypes and mystical romanticism of the minstrel stages and particularly Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West shows, which toured the country to immense popular reception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and featured the composer Karl King’s orchestrated

²¹ Alan Jabbour, “Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier,” (lecture delivered at Indiana State University, December 6, 2001).

accompaniment with sternly hypnotic minor-key melodies superimposed onto a dominant X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X drum pattern, crudely lampooning the music of Oglala Sioux Indians.²² This music has continued to dominate popular notions of Indian music in the American public and beyond, from its employment in everything from Disney cartoons to honky-tonk music to the Atlanta Braves' controversial "Tomahawk Chop," but it has little basis in any particular form of American Indian musical aesthetic. Some of this musical stereotyping was adapted into southern fiddling, so it is important to note here that these stylizations should not be mistaken for genuine Native American influence.

One of the earliest known references to Indian fiddling comes from an unlikely piece of writing. Although he grew up as a freedman after having been born in upstate New York in 1808, Solomon Northup spent twelve years of his adulthood as a slave in the deep South. While tracking down employment as violinist for a circus outfit in Washington, D.C., Northup was drugged and kidnapped by black market slave traders and immediately sold at auction in New Orleans. After more than ten tumultuous years in captivity, friends and relatives eventually discovered Northup's whereabouts and assisted him in his escape to freedom back north, where he subsequently wrote his astounding memoir, *Twelve Years a Slave*, which has become a classic antebellum text of the African-American slave experience. At some point toward the middle of his term as a slave, Northup is held captive in south Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, where he finds himself laboring in a lumber camp alongside a community of Indians. Northup describes a scene in which a traveling group of Indians from Texas are visiting the settlement, and the local Indians provide their Texan neighbors with some south Louisiana hospitality and entertainment:

²² Stephen Wade, CD booklet notes: *Hobart Smith – In Sacred Trust: The 1963 Fleming Brown Tapes* SFW 40141 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2005), 56.

On one occasion I was present at a dance, when a roving herd from Texas had encamped in their village. The entire carcass of a deer was roasting before a large fire, which threw its light a long distance among the trees under which they were assembled. When they had formed a ring, men and squaws alternately, a sort of Indian fiddle set up an indescribable tune. It was a continuous, melancholy sort of wavy sound, with the slightest possible variation. After the first note, if indeed there was more than one note in the whole tune, they circled around, trotting after each other, and giving utterance to a guttural, sing-song noise, equally nondescript as the music of the fiddle. At the end of the third circuit, they would stop suddenly, whoop as if their lungs would crack, then break the ring, forming into couples, man and squaw, each jumping backwards as far as possible from the other, then forwards – which grateful feat having been twice or thrice accomplished, they would form in a ring, and go trotting around again. The best dancer appeared to be the one who could whoop the loudest, jump the farthest, and utter the most excruciating noise.²³

It is interesting that Northup finds the sounds of the Indian's fiddle so bemusing. After all, Northup had worked for years as a professional fiddler himself, so his tastes were likely biased in favor of the quadrilles, schottisches, and reels with which he was likely more familiar, as he was obviously not accustomed to the rhythmically driven monotonic vagaries of southeastern indigenous music. The text situates African Americans and American Indians together in a laboring and music-making setting, thereby reiterating the importance of transcultural interchange on the southern frontier.

Cross-cultural exchange certainly branded the identities of a generation of “half-blood” southeastern Indians in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who found themselves serving as intermediaries between their own communities and the federal agencies that would eventually uproot them, violently force them out west, and open their homelands up to white settlement. Born in Mississippi in 1791, David Folsom was the son of Nathaniel Folsom, a white trader, and a woman of royal Choctaw lineage named Ai-ni-chi-ho-yo. Young David received some formal education as a child and his knowledge of English, along with his high position in the Choctaw community as a royal clan member, eventually put him in good standing to serve as

²³ Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Buffalo: Derby, Orton and Mulligan, 1853), Electronic edition, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/northup.html>.

an ambassador to the federal and missionary entities which had interests in Choctaw territory. At a Folsom family reunion in 1926, Choctaw historian Czarina Conlan pointed out that even when he was a small child, Folsom had a gift for impressing people both in and outside of his community. According to Conlan, “The Indian Commissioners liked him very much, for to them he was a most unusual lad even at that age. He was ever on the alert to please the officers and always in a good humor. He was musically inclined and showed talent to a marked degree. He made himself a violin and played well on it, so the officers at the agency said.”²⁴ This seemingly insignificant anecdote about Folsom’s musical capacity echoes some of the larger themes of his dichotomous place in Choctaw history. Folsom was exposed to Anglo culture enough to want to learn how to play the fiddle, yet he was innovative and resourceful to the extent that, in the confines of his own community, he could singlehandedly build and master the instrument himself. Although he disapproved of its consequences, David Folsom was reluctantly involved as tribal intermediary to the negotiation of the 1830s federal treaties that led to the partial removal of the Choctaw to the Oklahoma territory on the Trail of Tears, an action he opposed from its inception until his death.

Removal & Religion

For the majority of southeastern Indians who experienced the Removal, the catastrophes they endured were certainly colossal in scope. After falling prey to constant governmental trickery and harassment, being torn away from their homes and townships – many of them sick with starvation and disease – and being forcefully driven to desolate and unfamiliar lands, most of them simply wanted to rebuild the livelihoods and communities they had left behind. The fiddle certainly played a role in this reconciliatory effort, as the music served as a familiar

²⁴ Czarina C. Conlan, “David Folsom,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 4 (1926): 340-55.

reminder of their southern origins, and the dances in which they engaged would help to reignite their senses of community and spirit in a new and unforgiving landscape. Music historian J. Justin Castro claims that nineteenth-century Cherokee fiddler Andrew Griffin literally walked the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma carrying his fiddle in a flour sack.²⁵ This scenario doesn't seem like too much of a stretch, given the abundance of accounts of Native American fiddling in Indian Territory during and immediately following Indian removal. Oklahoma historian Rodger Harris explains, "Fiddling arrived in the Indian Territory during the 1830s and 1840s with the resettlement of the five Southeastern tribes. Indians and intermarried whites brought the string tradition with them."²⁶ Upon arrival in Indian Territory, the major destination for the Choctaws was a place called Doaksville, a small township founded by a white trader from Mississippi named Josiah Doak, whose former trading post in Mississippi had been the site where the first Choctaw removal treaty, The Treaty of Doak's Stand, was signed by Andrew Jackson in 1820. After being privy to the weight of the Removal in the early 1820s, Josiah Doak packed up his goods, moved west, and set up shop in Indian Territory, preceding the Choctaw's arrival by several years.²⁷ When some 15,000 Choctaws began to arrive to Oklahoma in 1830-31, Doaksville became their headquarters. Apparently the town was quite an active place in the 1830s. Its proximity to the Red River allowed for convenient import and export of goods via steamboat, and the town was able to support two newspapers, a hotel, a significant commercial district, and of course, live music.²⁸ Alvin Goode, a young missionary to the newly settled Indian Territory, wrote of a multicultural and bustling scene in downtown Doaksville in 1843:

²⁵ Castro, "Cherokee Fiddling," 388-89.

²⁶ Rodger Harris, "Fiddling," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* (2007), <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/F/F1001.html>.

²⁷ John Wesley Morris, "Doaksville," *Ghost Towns of Oklahoma* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 67.

²⁸ Jon D. May, "Doaksville," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* (2009), <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/D/DO002.html>.

“There were cabins, tents, booths, stores, shanties, wagons, carts, campfires; white, red, black and mixed in every imaginable shade and proportion and dressed in every conceivable variety of style, from tasty American clothes to the wild costumes of the Indians; buying, selling, swapping, betting, shooting, strutting, talking, laughing, fiddling, eating, drinking, smoking, sleeping, seeing and being seen, all bundled together.”²⁹ A couple of years later, a missionary named Reverend William Graham observed a smaller and much more relaxed scene in Indian Territory, where about two hundred Choctaws had recently arrived from Mississippi and were beginning to settle. Graham, who was teaching Bible classes at a nearby schoolhouse, wished to catch a firsthand glimpse of some of the debauchery he had heard about, and was met with a surprisingly domestic sight:

*On reaching the camp, we found, with very few exceptions, the squaws busily engaged. Some were beating corn for tomfuller, (a kind of hommony [sic],) some in plaiting baskets of cane, and others in cooking. While the men were loitering around, some grazing their ponies; one was making a rude attempt to extort music from an old violin; but as the day was exceedingly hot, most of them were extended upon the green grass beneath the shadowy boughs of the tall forest trees.*³⁰

Upon his graduation from Princeton Seminary, a young missionary named John Edwards was assigned to work among the recently settled Choctaw in Indian Territory in the early 1850s. Edwards, along with Choctaw linguist Cyrus Byington, helped to establish a significant missionary effort in the region and became enthralled with the Choctaw and their various customs and folkways. Later in his life, Edwards gave numerous lectures about the Choctaw, with information culled from journals he had kept during his tenure as a reservation missionary just before the Civil War. In one such lecture he gave in 1880, Edwards observed, “Dances are frequent, especially on Saturday night. They keep it up till morning, and then spend the Sabbath

²⁹ Henry Sinclair Drago, *Red River Valley: The Mainstream of Frontier History from the Louisiana Bayous to the Texas Panhandle* (Charles N. Potter Publishers, 1962).

³⁰ Reverend William Graham, “Visit to a Choctaw Camp,” *The Ladies Repository* 8 (1848): 12.

in sleep. The movement seems to be a kind of stamping trot around a circle, to the music of a violin. These are frequently occasions of great licentiousness. The question is never discussed whether a Christian may attend them. If he does, he loses his standing in the church at once.”³¹ Edwards’ statement reinforces a familiar rift that runs through much of southern music: the often strictly maintained boundary between sacred and secular in musical performance, and it is interesting to view this in a context of Native American music-making.

Emma Ervin Christian experienced something of a biracial childhood in Indian Territory during the late-nineteenth century, and years later she wrote a brief memoir about the various Choctaw Indian games, pastimes, and ceremonies she had witnessed as a child. She recalled having noticed major differences between the community dances in which her white relatives partook and those of her more traditional Choctaw neighbors:

*Their way of dancing was so different from our old fashioned dance, which was so popular (when I was girl) with the whites and the half breeds. The Indians had no one to call for them, but lined up opposite each other, the men on one side, the women on the other. The man at the head of the line would step out and dance a long time, swinging his partner occasionally, until he was tired. Then he would swing out and onto the front of the line- then the next couple would dance, until all had danced, then they would join hands, circle around and swing to seat. Their music was a violin and a tom tom.*³²

Christian’s recollection firmly places the fiddle within what she distinctly remembers as traditional Indian dances, as opposed to those which were attended by “the whites and the half breeds.” In this instance, fiddling is an integral element of the Choctaws’ musical schema, rather than some novel and whimsical accoutrement for momentary entertainment.

³¹ John Edwards, “The Choctaw Indians in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 10 (1932): 392-425. Lecture given in 1880, reprinted 1932.

³² Emma Ervin Christian, “Memories of My Childhood Days in the Choctaw Nation,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 11 (1933): 1034-39.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, fiddles had become such an emblematic fixture of Native American life that they were beginning to appear in popular representations of Indian Territory. In the early 1900s, Alexander Posey, a Creek Indian journalist and humorist, published a steady series of columns under the pseudonym “Fus Fixico” in the *Indian Journal*, the nation’s first Indian-published daily newspaper. Written in a kind of tongue-in-cheek Indian vernacular, Fus Fixico’s ramblings were often comically veiled commentary reflecting the anxieties of Indian country’s swift cultural and demographic changes and heavy political currents, particularly the burgeoning statehood of Oklahoma. One major recurring character in Fus Fixico’s letters is an Indian medicine man named “Hotgun,” whose talent for playing the fiddle is constantly being attested to by Fixico himself: “So Micco Hutka was give a big dance, and Hotgun he was make music on the fiddle. Long time ago out in the mountain, Old Devil he was show Hotgun how to play on fiddle just like he do himself...They was lots a Injins be at the rag and lots a gals, too, what the preacher was not had chance to marry.”³³ Again, the harsh divide between sacred and secular appears within a context of Indian fiddle music. Fiddling has often been considered by many to be the “devil’s box,” and Fixico implies that trope here in the case of Hotgun’s musical apprenticeship with “Old Devil.” As it turns out, Alexander Posey based Hotgun off of a local Muskogee Indian of the same name whom he greatly admired. In an earlier, non-Fixico editorial, Posey wrote of the real Hotgun: “He is a noted mechanical genius among his tribe. He can make anything, from a pocket knife to a first-class residence. He can also knock the bottom out of any preacher’s grace by his rare performance on the fiddle.”³⁴ As

³³ Alexander Posey, “Fus Fixico Letter No. 7,” *The Fus Fixico Letters: A Creek Humorist in Oklahoma*, ed. Daniel Littlefield and Carol A. Hunter (University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 63.

³⁴ Alexander Posey, *The Fus Fixico Letters: A Creek Humorist in Oklahoma*, ed. Daniel Littlefield and Carol A. Hunter (University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 63.

before, Posey pokes fun of the pious world of organized religion by juxtaposing it with the raucous, secular power of the Indian fiddle.

Homecoming

On an October day in 1929, an Oklahoma Choctaw man named Henry Hall and his two sons, Clarence and Harold, walked into a recording studio in Dallas, Texas, and recorded six songs for Victor Records. They called themselves “Big Chief Henry’s Indian String Band,” and serendipitous circumstances had led them to stand before the microphone that afternoon. Several months earlier, the Halls had attended and performed at the Choctaw Indian Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi. The reason for their visit to Mississippi is not quite clear but it is known that another of the fairgoers that year was a fellow by the name of H.C. Speir, a Jackson businessman who just three years earlier had gone from being a small business owner to one of the most successful talent scouts in the American recording industry. Located on Farish Street in Jackson’s predominately black commercial district, Speir’s Music Store had attracted scores of African-Americans who wanted to buy the latest blues and gospel recordings from the “race” record catalogues of companies like Columbia, Okeh, Paramount, Victor, and Vocalion. Speir soon realized that he was working in the middle of blues country – the perfect location to scout talent for the major labels whose products he was already selling – so he began to audition blues singers by recording aluminum-disc demos on a machine in the back of his store and mailing them off to various record labels. Speir was responsible for introducing the world to Robert Johnson, Charlie Patton, Son House, Skip James, the Mississippi Sheiks, and many others. One of his least known discoveries was Big Chief Henry’s Indian String Band, whom he had heard

while visiting the Choctaw Indian Fair near Philadelphia, Mississippi. In the late 1960s, blues historian Gayle Dean Wardlow located and got to know H.C. Speir, who by then was living in retirement in Clinton, Mississippi. In a later interview, Wardlow recalled Speir's enthusiasm for various types of southern music despite his well-known affiliation with the blues: "Normally, you think about him as the guy who was responsible for all the great black talent, but he found a lot of white talent, too. He loved white fiddle music. He found a Choctaw Indian fiddle band from Oklahoma that was at the Philadelphia Choctaw Festival in the summertime and got them on Victor. Big Chief Henry was his name."³⁵ Unfortunately, very little evidence remains of Big Chief Henry's Indian String Band other than a handful of photographs and their three 78 rpm records. Interestingly, aspects of both their visual and musical personas tend to straddle a line between white hillbilly and Plains Indian. One of the few photographs of Big Chief Henry's String Band pictures them holding their instruments in front of their tour-mobile, which is decorated with a hand-painted inscription of their band name and an illustration of a war-bonneted Indian chief profile. The real Big Chief Henry, however, is standing between his two sons and donning a wide-brimmed Choctaw *shapo*. While two of the songs they recorded, "Indian Tom Tom" and "Indian's Dream," certainly capitalize on their Indian identity, the other songs in their small catalogue, like "Banks of the Kaney" and "BluebirdWaltz," are more typical of standard ragtime-tinged instrumentals performed by white (and black) string bands of the era. With Henry Hall on the fiddle, Clarence on the banjo, and Harold on guitar, they embody the great family string band tradition of the classic southern pre-war recording era, albeit with a Choctaw twist. Although they only recorded six sides, their music has not gone completely unnoticed. One of their songs was recently featured on a box set released by Columbia Records

³⁵ "Godfather of Delta Blues, H.C. Speir: An Interview with Gayle Dean Wardlow," ed. Pat Howse and Jimmy Phillips, *The Peavey Monitor*, 1995.

called *You Ain't Talkin' to Me: Charlie Poole and the Roots of Country Music*. Poole, the influential 1930s North Carolina banjo player and country music recording pioneer, often claimed that Big Chief Henry's String Band's recordings were among his very favorites.³⁶ When they weren't at home on the Choctaw reservation in Oklahoma, Big Chief Henry's String Band traveled and performed together at county fairs, barrooms, and medicine shows across Oklahoma, the southeast, and beyond. The details of their road adventures are not known, but Clarence Hall's daughter, Bonnie Johnson, says the traveling band did occasionally become target to some of the South's rampant ethnic prejudices of the era: "The Indian race was very mistreated in those days."³⁷ Johnson says that the family moved away from Oklahoma sometime during the Depression, when the music business started to dwindle and life on the road was beginning to take its toll. The Hall family eventually packed up their belongings and moved to Olympia, Washington, where Henry and his two sons worked various carpentry jobs in the Pacific Northwest, in what Bonnie Johnson called "a land that loved Native Americans."³⁸ But in their heyday, in an era of heightened romanticization and popular intrigue with Indian imagery and lore, Big Chief Henry's Indian String Band had found a small window through which they could briefly play on the audience's expectations of that imagery while simultaneously presenting the public with something that was perhaps slightly less familiar: their real Choctaw Indian selves.

³⁶ Henry Sapoznik, CD booklet notes: *You Ain't Talkin' to Me: Charlie Poole and the Roots of Country Music*, Columbia Records, 2005.

³⁷ Bonnie Johnson, email correspondence with the author, November 3, 2011.

³⁸ Bonnie Johnson, November 3, 2011.



Fig. 3: Big Chief Henry's Indian String Band circa 1930. Photo courtesy of Bonnie Johnson

Indian on a Stomp

In the summer of 1985, the folklorist and musicologist Alan Lomax made one of his last sweeps through southern Louisiana, conducting interviews and filming some of the best vernacular musicians in the French-speaking bayou and prairie regions of the state. Traveling with a small film crew, Lomax was gathering the final bits of footage for a project he had been working on for nearly three years, an hour-long video documentary titled *Cajun Country*, which was one of several installments of a larger series of national public television programs he produced on traditional music called the *American Patchwork* series. On a tip from the great Cajun musician Dewey Balfa, Lomax and his crew visited and filmed an elderly Choctaw fiddler in Elton, Louisiana, named Deo Langley, whom Balfa touted as one of the region's most influential yet underappreciated fiddlers. Although the interview is rather awkward, due largely to Lomax's brash interviewing style and Langley's obvious shyness, some interesting facts come to light about Langley's ethnically complex upbringing. After playing a fine fiddle tune, "Indian

on a Stomp,” Langley tells Lomax that his mother had been a Choctaw and his father, also a fiddler, had been a Coushatta Indian.³⁹ Growing up in a bilingual Indian household within a French-speaking region of an English-speaking nation, Deo Langley had, by means of cultural survival, become fluent in four languages. His father, grandfather, and several uncles, on both the Choctaw and Coushatta sides of his family, had all been fiddlers. Canray Fontenot, one of the most celebrated black Creole fiddlers from Louisiana, credited Langley as a major influence on his fiddle playing when he was a kid. Fontenot’s first instrument had been a homemade cigar box fiddle, but when his father saw that young Canray was developing the craft, he soon traded “three dozen eggs and a sack of flour to Deo Langley, a real fine Indian fiddler, for a bright red fiddle.”⁴⁰ Additionally, the Balfa Brothers included a version of Langley’s “Indian on a Stomp” on their debut album in 1967, and since then the tune has been a favorite among Cajun music lovers in Louisiana and beyond.⁴¹ But unfortunately, apart from Lomax’s brief video footage of Deo Langley, there are no other known recordings of this fine Choctaw musician. Langley died in 1991, and his music has since remained in the depths of cultural obscurity, despite the fact that he was a figure of tremendous formative influence to several of Cajun music’s greatest and most widely heralded musical exports. As with so many other American Indian fiddlers, Deo Langley’s important contribution to southern music may go unrecognized for years, but his legacy lives on in music which will continue to inspire and haunt for generations to come.

For at least as long as two centuries, Choctaw Indians have been expressing themselves through the European violin, and their music has continually been neglected, overlooked, or discarded because it hasn’t conformed to predetermined archetypes and cultural expectations.

³⁹ Deo Langley interview, “Lomax Louisiana footage,” *Cajun and Creole Music Collection*, Edith Garland Dupre Library, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

⁴⁰ Michael Doucet, CD notes: *Canray Fontenot: Louisiana Hot Sauce Creole Style* CD 381, Arhoolie Records, 1993.

⁴¹ *The Balfa Brothers: Play Traditional Cajun Music*, Swallow LP-6011, Swallow Records, 1967.

Documentary efforts have consistently sought to confine American Indians to these prefabricated templates of cultural authenticity through the direct and intentional omitting of what was determined to be unrepresentative musical phenomena. But if anything, music succeeds when it is a foil to our expectations. That is where much of its power resides, and it is a tragedy that we have so often trained ourselves not to try to understand what we don't already expect. Perhaps one way to reckon with that loss is to acknowledge the mistakes we've made in the past; to at least momentarily abandon our preconceived ideas of what should be, and to begin to open our ears to sounds unknown.

ORPHAN CALYPSO: LOCATION RECORDINGS OF ETHNIC & IMMIGRANT MUSIC IN THE PREWAR SOUTH

A few years ago, my father, who is a folklorist, began gathering oral histories in southwest Georgia and southeast Alabama for the Veterans History Project, an ongoing nationwide program coordinated by the American Folklife Center at the Library Congress to document various first-person accounts of Americans at war, from the last living World War I veterans to soldiers recently returned from Afghanistan and Iraq. A family friend had suggested that my dad contact a man named Vincent Melillo, a veteran who had apparently served in World War II in addition to the Korean War, and had been living out his retirement in our hometown of Columbus, Georgia, for the past fifty years. Melillo's lengthy military career sounded interesting enough to call for an interview but what really caught my father's attention was that Melillo supposedly knew dozens of old songs and accompanied his singing by beating together a pair of rib bones. When my dad mentioned this to me, I immediately high-jacked the interview opportunity myself and tracked down the ninety-year-old Melillo, who was living with his daughter in a plain brick house in the Benning Hill area of Columbus – an ethnically diverse neighborhood adjacent to Fort Benning, one of the largest military bases in the country. What interested me most about Melillo was the fact that he possessed command of a now rarely played percussive instrument which has a deep history in American musical culture. While previous generations of bone players used the ribs of a hog or other readily available animal bones, most bone players today, like Melillo, prefer using a more reliable pair of rib-shaped pieces of carved

wood, which are held in one hand and struck together to make a percussive *clickety-clack* sound in a fashion somewhat similar to the musical spoons. Although bones players today are few and far between, this form of instrumentation has been around for at least two centuries and was once a widespread musical practice throughout the nineteenth century. Several photographs from the Civil War era depict musicians playing the bones, and an African American bones player served as the subject of a widely known 1856 portrait by American genre painter William Sidney Mount. This musical tradition had once been a staple of the American musical landscape but it has long since faded into the cultural margins, and this was the sole reason I was eager to meet Mr. Melillo and hear him play.

However, there was much that I was to learn yet about this man and his fascinating musical repertoire. Vincent Melillo was born in 1920 and spent his childhood moving in and out of orphanages and foster homes in Boonton, New Jersey, an industrial town seated along the Rockaway River. As a child, Melillo wandered through the streets of Boonton and lived among people of various ethnicities, and encountered many different musical genres and styles. A blackface minstrel troupe's visit to his orphanage exposed him to bones playing, and from his Sicilian neighbors he heard the romantic sounds of Neapolitan love ballads accompanied by accordions and mandolins. Throughout his life he had been a voracious radio fanatic and possessed a phonographic memory, frequently entertaining friends and neighbors by mimicking jingles and commercial advertisements with impressive likeness. As the Great Depression encroached upon his New Jersey community, Melillo fittingly adopted the era's popular allegorical songs into his repertoire, singing numbers like "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?," "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum," and a funny version of the comedic song "The Roaches and the

Bedbugs,” in which the downtrodden narrator-singer awakes to find that his home has been invaded by insects:

*I woke up this morning, I glanced upon the wall
The roaches and the bedbugs, they were playing a game of ball
The score was six to nothing, the roaches were ahead
A bedbug hit a home run and kicked me out of bed!*

By the time that I got my tape recorder rolling, I was already blown away by the breadth and diversity of Melillo’s musical interests. When I asked him if he had picked up any “foreign songs” on his frequent travels overseas, I was certainly surprised to hear him answer by launching into a calypso he had learned “from the locals” while he was stationed in Trinidad during World War II:

*Adolf Hit-a-ler! Adolf Hit-a-ler!
You are looking at the British Empire
You start an invasion
You must take Britain for Poland
But you’ll be a fail-ee-ure
Britain is supported by A-mer-i-ca!*

First recorded by the West Indian singer Clifford Morris (aka “Mighty Destroyer”) in 1941, the song “Adolf Hitler” is a wartime calypso which satirizes Nazi tyranny in an intense moment of international crisis.⁴² Like the formation of blues culture in the American South, Trinidadian calypso is a working-class music which rose to popularity in the 1920s-40s, and playfully

⁴² Richard K. Spottswood, *Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings in America, Volume 5* (University of Illinois Press, 1990), 2916.

combines thinly veiled double entendre with sardonic commentary on the economic and racial hierarchies operating within an unjustly stratified society.⁴³ But more than half a century after the fact, hearing Vincent Melillo's Jersey-inflected impersonation of a West Indian Calypsonian immediately throws us into some fascinating if not uncharted musical territory. What is there to say of a northern-born Italian-American war veteran's bones-accompanied performance of a Trinidadian folk song in twenty-first-century Columbus, Georgia? Is this, too, "southern" music? Or is it not rooted enough in the South's musical genealogy to be considered as such? Is there a regional musical precedent for such a seemingly "out of place" performance? Furthermore, should its "southernness" (or its perceived lack thereof) even matter? Where do we place it? Although this particular performance is obscure and perhaps of relatively little historical consequence, I believe that Vincent Melillo's calypso not only defies immediate categorization but boldly throws a curveball into our genre-plagued mentality which so often relies on signifiers of familiarity and predictability, and thereby brings monolithic notions of regional music into question. In short, Vincent Melillo is hitting a homerun and kicking us out of bed.

Historicizing Immigrant Music in the South

Today, as the South undergoes significant demographic changes it simultaneously witnesses the arrival of many as-of-yet "undocumented" musical identities, and it is impossible to foresee yet exciting to consider the many adaptive forms these new cultural forces may take on in the future. Will a Mexican *violinista* living in the Blue Ridge Mountains begin to embrace

⁴³ Samuel Charters, *A Language of Song: Journeys in the Musical World of the African Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2006), 212.

the bluegrass fiddle? Will a Pakistani sitar player in the Mississippi Delta develop an interest in playing the blues? Questions like these are certainly interesting to entertain, but perhaps it is both presumptuous and culturally biased to expect that these hypothetical scenarios of ethnic cross-pollination should mandatorily serve as the basis for regional legitimacy. What if some immigrant musicians living in the South choose not to engage with preexisting regional traditions? Or what if they simply are unaware of such traditions? One of the major concerns commonly expressed by xenophobes in today's heated immigration debate is the widely held fear that foreign-born peoples will be unable to assimilate into "American culture," which is often a generic and thinly veiled code for white-dominated mainstream middleclass suburbia. I fear that when we begin to talk about musical hybrids or "influence," we can sometimes run the risk of slipping into a similar mentality which by its very nature favors a dominant and familiar narrative and looks with suspicion towards the unfamiliar and unexpected. Perhaps it is time to depend less on this type of thinking, or to at least be aware of the approach's limitations and potentially unconstructive consequences.

Indeed, I feel that we should readily embrace our new neighbors as important contributors to our region's multicultural patchwork. On the other hand, simply attaching the "southern" descriptor to any and all forms of immigrant tradition currently being practiced in the South certainly doesn't bring us as listeners any closer to an understanding of the "new" and "unfamiliar" music we're hearing. In their 2010 article "New Pasts: Historicizing Immigration, Race, and Place in the South," scholars Barbara Ellen Smith and Jamie Winders warn against forced attempts to "southernize" Latinos or to Latinize the South. Smith and Winders argue that arbitrarily declaring recently arrived Latinos as "southerners" by default of their geographical status does a disservice to both Latino and U.S. South regional identities in that it generally

bypasses or only briefly touches on the complex historical contexts which created either culture. To avoid this pitfall, Smith and Winders encourage scholars to engage with historical parallels and interactions to substantiate and complicate their claims. “Absent such historicization,” they explain, “the story of immigration to the South will remain incoherent not simply or even primarily because it is ongoing but also because it does not possess a coherent plot. It has, in other words, yet to become a southern story that both partakes of and is incorporated within regional meanings, identities, histories, and self-representations.”⁴⁴ Despite their warnings, Smith and Winders’ call encourages scholarly engagement with Latino cultures in a regional studies framework so long as the research provides sufficient historical context and is not pigeonholed by quaint provincialism and externally forced regionalizing. In terms of musical expression, this problem is certainly a relevant and understandable concern, as the formation and proliferation of regional performative traditions, both at home and abroad, have always been inextricably engaged with local and regional ramifications of class, gender, race, politics, and any other number of intersecting complexities.

This conjures up some valid questions: If southern identity has been largely determined through a history of black-white racial tensions, does bringing the immigrant narrative into the equation run the risk of downplaying those crucial elements which have, in so many ways, defined the region? As much talk there is these days of music as a “universal language” which “breaks down barriers,” it is important to remember that musical cultures are certainly not always immune to the polarizing hierarchies and disparities which set people apart from one another in other aspects of their everyday lives. In his 2002 article “The Influences of Hispanic

⁴⁴ Barbara Ellen Smith and Jamie Winders, “New Pasts: Historicizing Immigration, Race, and Place in the South,” *Southern Spaces*, November 4 2010, <http://www.southernspaces.org/2010/new-pasts-historicizing-immigration-race-and-place-south>.

Music Cultures on African-American Blues Musicians,” folklorist Peter Narváez offers some perspective on the issue of ethnic equity in American music: “Egalitarian quests for multiculturalism can be offset by the lingering legacy of ‘melting pot’ ideology. Cultural examinations of ethnicity exemplify this, for they frequently focus on minority-dominant relations, that is, the ‘contributions’ of an ethnic group to the ‘majority’ culture. Unless the linear, vertical focus of such scholarship is balanced by greater breadth, our perceptions will remain oversimplified and skewed.”⁴⁵ Narváez illustrates how various southern blues musicians, from Blind Lemon Jefferson to Professor Longhair, have continuously borrowed and reconditioned the music of Latin Americans in order to stimulate and enliven their own unique musical expressions. Although it is clearly not his intention to take away the “blackness” from blues or to diminish the music’s significance within African American communal history, Narváez’s examples definitely bring into question assumptions of blues as a “racially pure” art form. Instead, we are left with a complex image of a tradition which was born of and evolved through transcultural borrowing on many levels – not exactly a symbiotic melting pot of some long-lost imaginary racial utopia, but certainly a cultural product of ingeniously combined creative forces.

This sort of retrospective approach for substantiating contemporary immigrant culture – what Barbara Smith and Jamie Winders call “historicizing” – may well serve as a useful method for further understanding and complicating much of what has been generally accepted and canonized as undeniably “southern” music. Indeed, even the most unquestionably influential artists from South have made use of sounds which originated from lands well beyond the confines of the family farm. Consider Jimmie Rodgers, now heralded as the “Father of Country

⁴⁵ Peter Narváez, “The Influences of Hispanic Music Cultures on African-American Blues Musicians,” *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 14, No. 2 (Autumn, 1994), 203-224.

Music,” and how his signature “blue yodel,” which jumpstarted a nationwide craze in American music, was not an original invention but an ancient tradition deeply rooted in pastoral customs of Europe’s Central Alps.⁴⁶ Likewise, in the early 1920s, when the exotic twang of the Hawaiian “slack-key” steel guitar became all the rage in American popular entertainment, a textile millworker living in Columbus, Georgia, named Jimmie Tarlton struck out for the West Coast and soon found himself learning directly from one of the genre’s most popular recording artists, Hawaiian guitar sensation Frank Ferera.⁴⁷ A few years later, Tarlton himself, along with his singing partner, Tom Darby, would go on to record more than sixty sides for the Columbia and Victor labels between 1927 and 1933, all of which exhibited Tarlton’s unique Hawaiian-flavored blues guitar style.⁴⁸ There are many examples of this sort of cross-cultural musical transitioning in the South, some more elusory than others. Often, seeking out the provenance of a particular song or tune will lead one to unexpected geographic origins. For instance, the country singer Eddy Arnold’s distinctive and memorable 1949 hit song “Cattle Call” had originally been recorded, to little success, by a lesser known cowboy singer named Tex Owens in 1934. Owens likely composed the lyrics himself but he adapted the melody directly from a 1928 recording of Polish concertina player Bruno Rudzinski’s tune titled “Pawel Walc” (“Paul’s Waltz”).⁴⁹ In New Orleans, the infectious call-and-response song “Iko Iko” has long been a standard of local Jazz and brass band repertoire and has become emblematic of the whimsical spirit of Mardi Gras and parade culture, but few who know the song realize that the melody originated from a Cuban *son* titled “Son de la Loma” (“Song of the Hills”) recorded by the popular 1930s Cuban group, Trio

⁴⁶ Timothy Wise, “Lullabies, Laments, and Ragtime Cowboys: Yodeling at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *American Music* 26 (Spring 2008), 13.

⁴⁷ Patrick Huber, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 245.

⁴⁸ Ed Kahn, CD booklet notes: *Darby & Tarlton – Complete Recordings* BCD 15764 (Bear Family Records, 1995).

⁴⁹ Chris Strachwitz, CD booklet notes: *Polish Village Music: Historic Polish-American Recordings – Chicago and New York, 1927-1933*. Arhoolie / Folklyric CD 7031.

Matamoros.⁵⁰ Jazz historian Jack Stewart has conducted fascinating research on the lingering impact of a Mexican marching band's visit to New Orleans as part of the World Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition of 1884. Stewart describes how one of the band's waltzes, titled "Sobre las Olas" ("Over the Waves"), was likely debuted at the exposition and subsequently was adopted into local brass band repertory, and has since moved far beyond. "Over the Waves" is a popular melody now played by fiddlers and other instrumentalists throughout the South, from Florida to West Virginia.⁵¹

If there is such an abundance of these types of connections, why, then, is there also such a lack of scholarship on the subject? In her 2004 article "Mainstreaming American Musical Multiculturalism," ethnomusicologist Anne K. Rasmussen emphasizes the nation's cultural plurality as a fundamental element of its musical history: "As an advocate of diversity, I posit that musical multiculturalism is really nothing new and should be moved from the margins of American music *back* into the mainstream."⁵² I argue the same about southern music, though many of the South's peculiar instances of multiculturalism have perhaps been more sporadic and elusive than in the more ethnically diverse regions of the nation such as the Pacific Coast, the urban Midwest, or certain parts of the Northeast. But in the South, perhaps more so than these other regions, it seems that once a template is set in place it tends to stay there for a while. Scholars such as Tony Russell and Karl Hagstrom Miller have discussed at length the numerous kinds of interchange and borrowing which took place between southern white and African American musicians in the Jim Crow era despite marketing techniques and other cultural forces

⁵⁰ Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo, Volume 1* (Chicago Review Press, 2007), 368.

⁵¹ Jack Stewart, "The Mexican Band Legend: Myth, Reality, and Musical Impact; a preliminary investigation" *Jazz Archivist* 6 (December, 1991), 1.

⁵² Anne K. Rasmussen, "Mainstreaming American Music Multiculturalism," *American Music* 22 (Summer, 2004), 296-309.

which sought to systematically divide music along lines of black and white. In the following pages I will examine how the South's particular musical template, which is still largely influenced by the lingering legacy of that black/white, "race"/"hillbilly" binary put forth in the 1920s, has continuously been trumped and challenged by a constant presence of ethnic and immigrant musicians. As these stories will illustrate, the fact remains that immigrant music in the American South is nothing new and has yet to be reckoned with by adequate historicizing. Now is as good a time as any!

Commercial Location Recordings in the Prewar South

The commercial ventures of recording southern vernacular music in the 1920s-40s provide an interesting glimpse into the interplay of regional expressions and market demands. The recording outfits who sought out traditional southern music during the prewar era were all northern-based companies located in places like New York City, Chicago, Camden, New Jersey, and Richmond, Indiana, and were setting up shop in southern cities such as Atlanta, Charlotte, Memphis, Jackson, and New Orleans. This draw to southern location recording had developed almost overnight in a twist of fate which has now become an oft-told legend in American music history. In the summer of 1923, an Atlanta furniture salesman named Polk Brockman encouraged Okeh Records executive Ralph Peer to record local country musician Fiddlin' John Carson. Peer was hesitant to record Carson, believing the rugged musicality to be too crude for commercial phonographs, a medium which until that point had been reserved almost exclusively for professional theatrical entertainers and performers from the Vaudeville circuit. But Peer reluctantly agreed and recorded a 78rpm of Fiddlin' John, all 500 copies of which sold out

instantly. Peer had been at the forefront of an unanticipated revelation: that vernacular music could sell in large quantities to working-class southerners who desired to hear something of themselves in the mass mediated commercial market world.⁵³ Peer then began seeking out and recording more and more southern musicians, and his competitors at other record labels soon followed suit. Southern traditional music began saturating the phonograph market.

Location recording sessions during this era would typically consist of a talent scout and a recording engineer setting up a makeshift studio in a prearranged locale and sending out for local and regional talent – sometimes by printed advertisement but more often by word of mouth. Recording equipment in those days was a bulky technology, so the recording teams generally required large, open yet relatively quiet spaces like auditoriums, gymnasiums, and hotel ballrooms. Frank Walker, who was one of Columbia Records’ major scouts for southern talent in the 1920s, claimed that recording locales, particularly those in the South, were often chosen for comfort and feel as much as they were for convenience:

*You had to give them an atmosphere that it was home, so you didn’t pick a fancy place to record in. You usually took the upstairs of some old building where it looked pretty terrible. You hung some drapes and curtains and you also made it look and act a bit like home. You brought in a little of the mountain dew to take care of colds or any hoarseness that might happen, and also to remove a little of their fears of strangers doing this sort of work. You try to make them feel at home, and we felt the only way we could ever get that was in their own native habitat. You couldn’t have done this in New York.*⁵⁴

As careful as they were at trying to make their subjects feel at home, recording scouts like Walker and Peer often employed an ad hoc, shotgun approach to auditioning talent which occasionally resulted in their accidentally capturing the unexpected by default. At a Victor

⁵³ William Howland Kinney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1980-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 148.

⁵⁴ Mike Seeger, “Frank Buckley Walker: Columbia Records Old-Time Music Talent Scout” *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly* 8, 1972.

session at the Memphis Auditorium in February of 1928, a session which also yielded great solo recordings by Mississippi bluesmen Ishman Bracey and Tommy Johnson, respectively, a group of three men who called themselves the New Arkansas Travelers made two whimsical recordings, “Handy Man” and “I Tickled ‘em,” which Victor released as part of their “hillbilly” catalog. It is difficult to know why these recordings were categorized as such, but perhaps the scouts may not have been listening closely enough to discern that the group was not a mountain string band at all, but a trio of Englishmen singing nineteenth-century British beer hall songs.⁵⁵ A few years later at the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, one of Ishman Bracey’s and Tommy Johnson’s musical contemporaries, the now disproportionately mythologized Robert Johnson, was supposedly so crippled by nervousness at his debut recording session that he could only perform by facing the wall with his back turned to the other people in the room, which consisted of a couple of A&R men and a duo of Mexican musicians who were waiting their turn to record.⁵⁶ And decades later, Tejano guitarist and singer Andres Berlanga would recall to musicologist Chris Strachwitz how he and his accordionist partner, Francisco Montalvo, had sat in a small hotel room and watched “a colored fellow” play and sing some fine blues that day in 1936.⁵⁷ Although moments like these occurred from time to time in recording locations, immigrant musicians were not nearly as common a presence as they were in the numerous sessions which took place in Chicago and New York throughout this era. However, it is interesting to reassess recording sessions as occasions which brought arrays of varied musicians together in close proximity, and even though the catalogues and advertisements certainly conveyed a race-based musical separatism, there was interaction and creative exchange

⁵⁵ Richard K. Spottswood, album notes: *Old-Country Music in a New Land: Folk Music of Immigrants from Europe and the Near East*, New World Records NW 264, 1977.

⁵⁶ Peter Guralnick, *Searching For Robert Johnson* (Miami: Dutton Press, 1989), 134.

⁵⁷ Chris Strachwitz, DVD commentary: *Chulas Fronteras*. Directed by Les Blank and Chris Strachwitz. Flower Films, 1976.

nonetheless, both within the studio and beyond. The location recording sessions which took place in New Orleans in the middle to late 1920s were particularly fruitful and diverse, and the following pages will illustrate how this recording activity stands as a meaningful cultural precedent for the historicizing of immigrant and ethnic music-making in the South.

The Italian Hall: Location Recordings of Ethnic Vernacular Music in 1920s New Orleans

Lined with antebellum mansions and shaded by a dense canopy formed by the meandering branches of enormous live oak trees, Esplanade Avenue is one of the more grand and beautiful of downtown New Orleans' old streets. On the French Quarter side of the avenue, there on the 1000 block between Rampart and Burgundy streets, tucked into the middle of the seemingly endless stretch of alternating Greek Revival and Victorian architecture which is interrupted only by the occasional dive bar or corner grocery, stands a rather imposing and somewhat oddly situated structure – a large three-story Italianate building with an entrance where passersby are greeted by two marble lions, each bearing a coat-of-arms. Though it now functions as a high end apartment complex, the giant letters carved into the stone cornice give some indication of the building's former glory: "UNIONE ITALIANA." Informally referred to by locals as "the Italian Hall," from the 1910s to the 1970s the location functioned as the center of Italian life in New Orleans. Serving as a sort of combination recreation center, union office, and cultural headquarters, the Italian Hall housed close to thirty different Italian organizations and boasted a grand ballroom which took up the better part of the top two floors.⁵⁸ For many recently arrived Italian immigrants in the early days of the twentieth century, the place offered a

⁵⁸ Ann Woodruff, "Society Halls in New Orleans: A Survey of Jazz Landmarks, Part II," *The Jazz Archivist* 21 (William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University, 2008), 24-25.

variety of services. As Gasper Schiro, senior historian and archivist at New Orleans' American Italian Cultural Center explained to me: "Say a fellow's fresh off the boat – can't speak English, doesn't know anybody. He could go down to the Italian Hall and maybe get lined up with a little work. 'Oh yeah, so-in-so's got a deli down on Decatur Street' or whatever – help him get his feet on the ground. And say he's got a family member who dies and he doesn't have any money to pay for a funeral, they would take care of it and give 'em a proper funeral. Of course, he had to pay his dues."⁵⁹ But not all of the Italian Hall's activity was mundane day-to-day business. The Hall hosted grand dances and holiday socials which brought together various members of the local Italian community and regularly featured some of the city's finest jazz ensembles, many of which were composed of Italian musicians. The *Unione Italiana* also served as the headquarters and meeting place for two Sicilian benevolent societies: the *Cefalutana Society* and the *Contessa Entellina Society*, each of which had its own distinct brand of Sicilian identity, as each was named after their members' place of ancestral origin. And though they are no longer headquartered in the Italian Hall, both organizations are still in existence today.



Fig. 4: The Italian Hall, 1020 Esplanade Avenue, New Orleans. Photo by the author

⁵⁹ Gasper Schiro, interview with the author, December, 2011.

One of the most significant events for which the Italian Hall is still remembered among music enthusiasts in New Orleans took place on November 15th of 1929, when it became the site of what it is generally believed to be the city's first racially integrated recording session. It occurred with a commercial session by an outfit called the Jones & Collins Astoria Hot Eight, so named for the fact that there were eight of them, including bandleaders David Jones and Lee Collins, and they played jazz – then commonly referred to as “hot” music – and their steady gig was playing the lobby of the nearby Astoria Hotel on Rampart Street.⁶⁰ The band was made up of African American musicians except for one member, clarinetist Sidney Arodin, who was white. The group laid down half a dozen spectacular cuts that day for the New Jersey-based Victor Recording Company, whose talent scouts and engineers were in the middle of a ten-day recording stint in New Orleans, having set up shop on the upper floors of the Italian Hall and putting the word out for local talent. But these certainly were not the first commercial recordings of vernacular music to be made in New Orleans. Throughout the 1920s there had been a number of visits made by northeastern and Midwest-based commercial companies to New Orleans which had yielded some great musical discoveries, beginning in early 1924 with the OKeh label's sessions with several New Orleans jazz bands, some of which, like Anthony Parenti and his Famous Melody Boys, were active members of the local Sicilian community.⁶¹ Some of these earlier New Orleans recording sessions had taken place on one whole floor of the St. Charles Hotel and the third floor of Werlein's Music store on Canal Street.⁶²

⁶⁰ Bruce Boyd Raeburn, “The Prehistory of New Orleans Music: Treasures from the Hogan Jazz Archive.” Website: <http://www.afropop.org/multi/interview/ID/166>.

⁶¹ Ron Sweetman, “Recording Activity in New Orleans in the ‘Twenties.’” Website: <http://www.bluesworld.com/NODiscog.html> Posted August 12, 2001.

⁶² Samuel Charters, *A Trumpet Around the Corner: The Story of New Orleans Jazz* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 224.

The log books and discographies from New Orleans commercial recording sessions tell of a diverse and multifaceted world. Richard “Rabbit” Brown, a blind African American street singer from the notorious and ill-reputed Battlefield neighborhood, recorded a total of six sides for Victor in March of 1927. While some of Brown’s songs were strictly blues, much of his repertoire consisted of topical narrative ballads based on real life events, such as the “Sinking of the Titanic” and the lesser known “Mystery of the Dunbar Child,” a stranger-than-fiction story-song about a controversial kidnapping which had occurred in Opelousas, Louisiana in 1912.⁶³ Two of his ballads, unfortunately never recorded, spoke of the rougher side of New Orleans life: “Gyp the Blood,” which chronicled a deadly duel between two powerful Storyville District bar owners, and “Downfall of the Lion,” a song about the 1890 mafia-conspired assassination of police chief David Hennessy and the hysteria which ensued afterward, resulting in the lynching of eleven Italian-Americans.⁶⁴ Although Brown was known for performing these songs for tips on the sidewalks of the French Quarter, it is anyone’s guess as to why they weren’t recorded. Perhaps Brown or the recording executives didn’t feel that their salacious, controversial subject matter was suitable for a wide commercial audience base, but it could have easily been that the songs were simply too long for recording in an era when the average record was less than three and a half minutes long. Such was the fate for most lengthy narrative ballads in the prewar recording era; they simply did not get recorded.

Intentional omission on the part of recording executives was likely the fate for a song which was recorded in New Orleans in 1928 by another bluesman and songster named Armenter Chatman, also known as Bo Carter, who grew up in the multiracial and musical Chatman family

⁶³ *This American Life* Episode 352: “The Ghost of Bobby Dunbar.” Aired March 14, 2008.

⁶⁴ Kevin S. Fontenot, “Times Ain’t Like They Used to Be: Rabbit Brown, New Orleans Songster,” *The Jazz Archivist* 13, William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University, 1998-99.

of Bolton, Mississippi, and was a frontman for the string band the Mississippi Sheiks. This Brunswick Records session was the first of what would become more than a hundred recording sessions for Carter, and for the light-skinned songster of mixed Anglo-Afro-Choctaw heritage, it was somewhat fitting that the first performance he ever put to wax was titled “The Yellow Coon Has No Race,” a song which reflected something of the artist’s own complicated racial position in a heavily policed society which drew hard lines between black and white. Unfortunately, Carter’s first piece was rejected by the record company so no known recording exists of the song. Blues historian Paul Oliver believes that Brunswick likely canned the acetate because of its racy subject matter, so to speak.⁶⁵ All that remains of the song today is one verse which was remembered by a young guitar student of Bo Carter’s brother, Sam Chatman:

He can't be an Irishman 'cause his feet ain't so flat

He can't be a Dago 'cause he ain't so fat

He can't be a Choctaw 'cause his looks ain't so mean

*He can't be a Jew 'cause his nose ain't so keen*⁶⁶

Here and perhaps more than in any other composition of its era, Bo Carter explicitly exclaims the difficulties and frustrations of leading a multiethnic existence within a society defined by its oppressive, systematic maintenance of racial categories and demarcations. To be sure, the singer is certainly not free of his own racisms either, as is evinced by the string of derogatory slurs consistent with the popular racist imagery of the day. However, it is difficult to say what purpose(s) these epithets are serving. Is Bo Carter really poking fun of Irishmen, Italians, Jews, and Choctaws? Or is he lampooning the sort of twisted logic which was constantly used

⁶⁵ Paul Oliver, *Barrelhouse Blues: Location Recordings and the Early Traditions of the Blues* (Basic Civitas Books, 2009), 32.

⁶⁶ John Miller, Online forum: weeniecampbell.com, “Re: Bo Carter unissued sides?” June 17, 2011.

throughout the era to categorize groups of human beings along the lines of physical characteristics? Paul Oliver contends that another reason which might have affected Brunswick's decision not to issue the song could have resulted from the fact that the "coon song" genre – the type of defamatory music which accompanied blackface minstrelsy – had already fallen out of popularity by the time of Carter's first session.⁶⁷ That may indeed have been the case, but it is also possible that "The Yellow Coon Has No Race" is not an actual "coon song" at all, but a satire of one instead. Whatever the case, the composition is certainly telling as it relates to regional racial politics of the era and Bo Carter's peculiar and difficult place within them, and the fact that the record company rejected this recording is a rather ironic and resounding echo of the categorical anxieties expressed by the song itself. Not only did Bo Carter feel as if he had no place within the racially stratified social structure of the era, unfortunately neither did the executives who edited his fantastic recordings.

Cajuns and Creoles in the Prewar Recording Studio

Other New Orleans sessions during this era yielded troves of astounding material – music which until that point had been heard by virtually no one outside of southern Louisiana. On April 27, 1928, accordionist Joe Falcon, accompanied by his guitar-playing wife Cleoma Breaux Falcon, recorded a wild and invigorating tune called "(Allons a) Lafayette." It would be the first recording of Cajun music, a rich regional music tradition which in the coming years would develop into a marketable genre of its own, exhibiting its widespread appeal in the success of

⁶⁷ Oliver, 32.

popular songs like Hank Williams' 1952 hit song "Jambalaya."⁶⁸ Shortly after the Falcons' first session, the black Creole accordion virtuoso Amédé Ardoin and his white Cajun musical partner, fiddler Dennis McGee, together made several monumental recordings for Columbia Records, laying down the definitive groundwork of fiddle-and-accordion duets for generations of Zydeco and Cajun musicians to follow. While the vast majority of Cajun music captured during this early recording era was essentially upbeat dance music, a few of the artists who recorded during this time performed lesser known songs and tunes which are no longer common to the standard regional repertory. One such artist was Alcide "Blind Uncle" Gaspard, a singer and guitarist from Avoyelles Parish, who in addition to playing in a trio, also performed solo, having recorded several older narrative ballads such as "Natchitoches" and "Sur le Borde de l'Eau" ("On the Water's Edge") which exemplified an earlier and more introspective variety of Acadian music-making.⁶⁹ Documentation of this music has been scant, and these recordings of Blind Uncle Gaspard's singing and guitar playing serve as a brief and fascinating offering of a severely under-documented type of French Louisiana song styles. The series of Cajun and Creole recordings made in New Orleans during 1928-29 not only serve as the premiere documents of a now globally celebrated tradition, but they simultaneously demonstrate the extent to which commercial record companies in the prewar era were, often by default, picking up on some older and obscure musical traditions for which there is little or no documentation. Recordings such as those made by Blind Uncle Gaspard provide a rare, keyhole glimpse into a musical world for which there is still much to be discovered.

⁶⁸ Charlie Seeman, CD booklet notes: *Le Gran Mamou: A Cajun Music Anthology – The Historic Victor & Bluebird Sessions, 1928-1941, Vol. 1*. Country Music Foundation Records, 1990. CMF-013-D.

⁶⁹ Ron Brown, CD booklet notes: *Blind Uncle Gaspard / Delma Lachney / John Bertrand: Early American Cajun Music*. Yazoo 2042.

Castrenze Cuccia and the Uncovering of Arbëreshë Music in New Orleans

As far as rare glimpses go, perhaps none are as tantalizing as the fascinating story behind two scratchy 78 rpm test pressings which reside deep in the vaults of the Victor Records archive. They were recorded on November 14, 1929, by a Sicilian-American guitarist and singer named Castrenze Cuccia, who on that afternoon had walked into the Italian Hall during the middle of what must have been one of its busiest and most exciting periods of time. A small team of talent scouts from the Victor Recording Company of Camden, New Jersey, had been hosting auditions and conducting recording sessions throughout the week. On the day previous to Cuccia's session, the country singer Jimmie Rodgers, who was then in the prime of his popularity, had shown up and recorded one track, "Hobo Bill's Last Ride," which eventually became one of his most well-known and widely covered compositions.⁷⁰ The day *after* Castrenze Cuccia's session would see the arrival of the Jones-Collins-Astoria Hot Eight and their racially integrated, groundbreaking performance of "Astoria Strut" which would also, though to a lesser extent, become something of a hit. The Victor company's session ledgers show that during the previous week, a number of Cajun musicians and bands, following in the footsteps of Joe and Cleoma Falcon, had all left their homes in rural Louisiana and traveled to the Italian Hall on Esplanade Avenue to try their hand at the phonograph record business. Several of them, like Soileau Couzens and Bixy Guidry, had made some fine recordings which continue to stand up with the best of prewar Cajun recordings to this day.⁷¹ But sandwiched in the middle of all this musical hustle and bustle was a musician whose particular brand of playing and singing must have been even more anomalous and perplexing to Victor's talent scouts than the exhilarating squeezebox

⁷⁰ Sweetman, "Recording Activity in New Orleans in the 'Twenties.'"

⁷¹ Seeman, 11.

music of the French-speaking Cajuns, despite the fact that, in some ways, Castrenze Cuccia was right at home.

Little is known concerning the life of Castrenze Cuccia, but according to government records, he was thirty-six years old when the census was administered in 1930, just months after he made his two recordings for Victor. He had immigrated to New Orleans from Sicily in 1923, and he eventually moved into a quaint shotgun style house on Alvar Street in the Marigny neighborhood of New Orleans, about three blocks from the Mississippi River, where he lived with his wife Mamie and their two-year-old daughter, Antonina.⁷² His occupation in 1930 is listed as “Proprietor, Shoe Repair,” which, according to New Orleans Italian historian Gasper Schiro, would have been a pretty typical (though probably not extravagant) way for a Sicilian to make a living in 1920s New Orleans.⁷³ According to the census, neither Castrenze nor his wife spoke English. Although Cuccia made his living primarily as a cobbler, he must have been partial to the performing arts, as a number of articles in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* refer to his participation in various Sicilian community plays and dances which took place at the Italian Hall in the late 1920s and early 30s.⁷⁴ Several of these performances were sponsored by the Contessa Entellina Society, which was headquartered in the Italian Hall.

⁷² United States Census, 1930. Ancestry.com

⁷³ Interview with Gasper Schiro

⁷⁴ “Italian Societies Give Benefit Play,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 20, 1929.



Fig. 5: Castrenze Cuccia, 1931. Image courtesy of *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*

So Castrenze Cuccia must have been pretty familiar with his surroundings when he stood before the Victor's microphone on that November afternoon in 1929. The first song Cuccia recorded was "U'Parrineddu," a simple up-tempo waltz piece sung in the Sicilian language. The song likely bears some relation to a folktale of the same title, a story which was documented in Sicily in the 1870s by renowned Italian folklorist Giuseppe .⁷⁵ According to , "U' Parrineddu" tells the story of a mother with three children, the elder two of whom refuse to perform their daily housekeeping chores. The third and youngest child, Parrineddu, whose name means "Little Priest," agrees to clean the house and in doing so immediately finds seven coins, with which he buys some sausage to share with his mother and siblings. The narrator then asks the audience who benefited most from this discovery. When the audience answers "Parrineddu," the storyteller shouts back with a phrase which rhymes with "Parrineddu" but which translates roughly as this: "Go stick your nose in the piss pot!" So it's a comical bit which pokes fun of the listener for immediately jumping to the safety of moral high ground.

⁷⁵
(Routledge, 2008), 523.

. Edited by Jack Sipes and Joseph Russo

RECORDING BOOK <small>Copy for</small>											
Serial No.	Mark	Date	Artist	Title, Composer, etc.	Page	7621	Publisher	Copyright	Date of Copyright	Linked	Catalog No.
				<u>THURSDAY - NOVEMBER 14, 1929</u>							
56532-1	✓		CASTRENZE CUCCIA (With Own Acc on Guitar) (New Orleans, La.)	U' PARRINEDDU (Sicilian)			Southern Music Pub Co				1929
	-2		(U.S.F.)	(arr by G. Cuccia)							
56533-1	✓		*	U' PARRINEDDU (A)							
	-2			(arr by G. Cuccia) (Time 4:00 to 6:00)							
56529-1	✓		CASTRENZE CUCCIA (With own Guitar acc) (New Orleans, La.) (USF)	KUR TE PASE TE PAREN HERE-Part 1 (Albanese)			Southern Music Pub Co				1929
	-2		*	(arr by G. Cuccia)							
56530-1	✓		*	KUR TE PASE TE PAREN HERE-Part 2 (Albanese)							
	-2			(arr by G. Cuccia) (Time 10:00 to 1:00)							
				SPECIAL RECORDS (FOR PERSONAL USE ONLY) (Piano Duo-played by Mother and Daughter)							
				MRS LUCY W. METCALF (PRIMO)							
				MISS SYLVIA F. METCALF (SECONDO)							
56531-1	✓		*	AT THE RACES							
	-2		(New Orleans, La.)	(August Work) (Time 3:30 to 4:00)							
				PIERRE SALVATORE (With Own Acc on Piano)							
56538-1	✓		(New Orleans, La.)	I' IDIZZI DA LE BITA (Cajun)			Southern Music Pub Co				1929
	-2		(USF)	(Giuseppe Heso)							
56539-1	✓		*	GARSTIA DA QUERRA (Cajun)							
	-2			(Salvatore Fiora) (Time 5:45 to 6:45)							
57152-1	✓		INTERNATIONAL NOVELTY ORCHESTRA (Gibelli, Dir) (New York) (USF) Sax-Trumpet-Trombone-Tuba-Drums	SURENO I REALIDAD (Spanish)			No other information				
	-2		*	(Francisco Moure) (Time 4:15 to 4:45)							
				PLEASE NOTE:- REFER TO RECORDING BOOK PAGE 7607-VICTOR NOVELTY ORCH. ADD MATRIX #6 to DVE 56776.							

Fig. 6: Victor recording book for November 14, 1929. Image used with permission from Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings, University of California, Santa Barbara Libraries

The second song which Castrenze Cuccia recorded, “Kur te Pase te Paren Here,” is not as interesting for its narrative as it is its provenance and other cultural ramifications. Unlike “U’Parrineddu,” which is sung in the more predictable Sicilian-Italian, Cuccia performed his second piece in a tongue which likely caught Victor’s recording scouts off guard. “Kur te Pase te Paren Here” is an Albanian title which translates, more or less, as “The First Time I Ever Saw You.” Why would a New Orleans Sicilian sing a song in Albanian? The most logical explanation for this seemingly unusual performance is that Cuccia must have surely been part of an ethnic group called *Arbëreshë*, who are essentially Italians of Albanian ancestry. The history of the *Arbëreshë* people is long and complex, but in short, their story began in the mid-fifteenth century when the Ottoman Turks began expanding their empire by invading eastern Europe and taking over lands that had previously been predominately Christian territory. This included the takeover of Albania, a relatively small nation which quickly fell to Ottoman rule upon the defeat

of Albanian ruler George Skanderberg.⁷⁶ Thousands of Albanians then began fleeing to various parts of western Europe, where they settled and began their lives anew, mainly as farmers and merchants. Some of them quickly acclimated into the dominant cultures of their new home countries, but in some rural and remote regions of western Europe, some of them managed to maintain much of their native Albanian language, dress, music, religion, foodways, and other important aspects of their native culture and traditional livelihood for multiple generations. Perhaps the most significant of these groups were the Albanians who had settled in rural southern Italy, particularly in the regions of Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Molise, and on the island of Sicily. Albanians would continue to migrate to and populate these regions in a series of waves throughout the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, and it was these Albanian-speaking southern Italians who would come to be known as the Arbëreshë.⁷⁷ Many people who identified as Arbëreshë would be among the thousands of boatloads of Italians who immigrated to North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although places like New York, Chicago, and other major American cities experienced influxes of people from all regions of northern, central, and southern Italy, in New Orleans particular the vast majority of Italian immigrants who came to the city during this time had originated in Sicily.⁷⁸ And though many of these Sicilians did not identify as Arbëreshë, there *was* a significant enough influx of people within this ethnic minority that in 1886 they established their own benevolent organization, “la Societa Italiana di Beneficenza Contessa Entellina,” otherwise known as the Contessa Entellina Society, which immediately dedicated itself to serving New Orleans’ Arbëreshë community and

⁷⁶ Bret A. Clesi, “The Arbreshe and Contessa Entellina,” 1967. Contessa Entellina website: <http://contessaentellina.net/csociety.htm>.

⁷⁷ Clesi.

⁷⁸ Gasper Schiro interview.

preserving its culture and history.⁷⁹ They continued speaking their particular brand of the Albanian language and practicing Byzantine Catholicism, as opposed to the Roman variety, which is one major aspect of the Arbëreshë way of life which sets them apart from other Italians. They found themselves within the exciting, multicultural mix of New Orleans, and managed to stubbornly sustain a distinct cultural identity within an unforgiving and rapidly changing urban landscape. Today, the Contessa Entellina Society is still going strong, although its qualifications for membership are rather strict. In order to even be considered for nomination to the organization's governing body, "the Contessiotti," one must be the oldest living son of an Arbëreshë family – a tried and true technique, according to Gasper Schiro, for "keeping the bloodline pure."⁸⁰ Meetings are carried out in the Arbëreshë language and notes are taken in the traditional Cyrillic script. But as great as the Contessa Entellina Society has been at preserving its heritage and promoting Arbëreshë culture, it is too bad that so little traditional music from this fascinating New Orleans culture has found its way onto recordings. The one exception to this absence is the rejected pair of Victor recordings made by Castrenze Cuccia in November of 1929.

So what role can a case like Castrenze Cuccia's possibly play in a fresh consideration of southern music scholarship? What can we take away from this story? Perhaps one lesson here teaches us that within the routine process of seeking, recording, selecting, categorizing, marketing, canonizing, and memorializing, we should always be mindful of what may possibly be evading our scope because of our own shortsightedness. Although Victor rejected his two songs, the rudimentary guitar picking and obscured, dissonant singing which Castrenze Cuccia left behind on a roughly engraved aluminum disc remain to this day as an eerie reminder of the

⁷⁹ Clesi.

⁸⁰ Schiro interview

precariousness of the relationship between vernacular cultures and the methods and media which by which they are documented and disseminated. Likewise, a closer examination of the inner workings of the broader commercial phenomenon in which Cuccia was a participant – the location recording trend in the prewar South – reveals significant discrepancies between the relative cultural mobility of southern musical innovations and a burgeoning industry which worked to classify and segregate them. On the other hand, it was this same industry which allowed for many working class southerners' voices to be heard in times and places far beyond their own.

CONCLUSION

Current critical thinking regarding vernacular music in the U.S. South increasingly works to reveal the constructs which contribute to the ways in which audiences have heard and thought about southern music. Central to this direction of thought is the critique of documentary agendas and the uncovering of romanticized perspectives. From the eighteenth century to the present day, the Choctaw Indians have nurtured and maintained a rich and unique fiddle playing tradition. However, despite having been interviewed, photographed, and recorded throughout multiple generations, the fiddle has remained nearly absent from all documentation of the Choctaw people and their music. This was no slight oversight on the part of the folklorists and anthropologists who set up their microphones and cameras before their vulnerable subjects, but an intentional disregard for a music which was often believed to be too unremarkable for posterity. That assumption rested on a problematic series of qualifications for what and what was not acceptable Indian music-making. When the negatives were developed and the needle dropped into the waxen groove, the images seen and the sounds that were heard only portrayed a partial truth: the vague etchings of a manipulated world. But in the real world, the Choctaw people – in addition to driving automobiles and buying groceries and wearing t-shirts and living in brick houses – also kept fiddling.

The commercial record companies which sought out southern vernacular music in the 1920s and 30s, too, advertised an altered universe which was parallel to the reality they so frequently claimed to represent. Recording executives from Chicago, New York, and Camden,

New Jersey, set out to capture what they believed to be authentic southern music, and sometimes what they received was another thing altogether. They could select and reject these performances at will, depending on whether or not there was potential for marketability. By 1929, this was a process they had not yet perfected, and the results of these sessions are sonic remnants of a multicultural region in continual musical flux. That year in New Orleans, scores of musicians from a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds had traveled from near and far and arrived at the Italian Hall on Esplanade Avenue in the hopes of having their music heard and appreciated by the outside world. Some of them succeeded while others played tunes and songs which would never be heard again. Yet the commercially released recordings of this era would serve as the virtual backbone for the American folk music canon for generations to follow. Now is the time to recognize the discrepancies which caused absences in our conception of a southern musical past, and let us begin to conceive of an equitable definition of southern music which makes room for sounds we have not yet heard. *Listen out!!*

LIST OF REFERENCES

***LISTEN OUT: AN ANNOTATED DISCOGRAPHY AND RESOURCE GUIDE TO
INDIGENOUS AND IMMIGRANT MUSICS IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH***

While I must admit that a discography may seem an antithetical way to conclude a project which repeatedly seeks to emphasize the constant flux, unpredictability, and livingness of musical tradition, it must be taken into consideration this not a means to an end but a mere scratching-of-the-surface of an underexplored topic. In short, this discography is an access point from which the reader may begin to simply gain a clearer picture of what all is out there, and what all is worthy of further study. In addition, part of the attempt here is to illustrate the vastness and diversity of immigrant and indigenous musics in the South. While a case like Castrenze Cuccia's may seem like a curveball out of left field, it is imperative to remember that his music, however obscure, rejected, and seemingly inaccessible, was in many ways representative of a larger cultural story. Perhaps each of these entries represents such a fascinating story, and it is my hope that this discography will point the way to future researchers and scholars who wish to build upon, expand, and challenge the phenomenon we call "southern music."

American Indian Music: Anthologies & Compilations - Various Artists

A Choctaw Christmas. Chahta Anumpa Aiiikhvna School of Choctaw Language.

The Chahta Anumpa Aiiikhvna School of Choctaw Language plays a crucial role in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's language preservation program. Here some of the program's teachers and students sing Christmas songs in the Choctaw language.

American Indian Music of the Mississippi Choctaws. United Sound Recordings, USR-3519. 1971, LP.

American Indian Music of the Mississippi Choctaws, Volume 2. United Sound Recordings, USR-7133. 1974, LP.

This two-volume series, which offers a sampling of traditional Mississippi Choctaw dances and chants recorded in Neshoba County, Mississippi, was compiled by musical director Minnie Hand. This collection features the Bogue Chitto Chanters, the Conehatta Chanters, and others.

Anthology of North American Indian & Eskimo Music. Smithsonian Folkways FW04541 / FE4541. 1973, compact disc.

This extensive compilation contains three historic recordings of Florida Seminole songs, including a 1930s recording of a song about the Seminoles' forced removal to Oklahoma in 1836-1840.

Beautiful Beyond: Christian Songs in Native Languages. Smithsonian Folkways SFW 40480. 2004, compact disc.

This CD offers an assortment of Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek choral performances of religious hymns and songs, as well as a recording of Walker Calhoun's (Eastern Band Cherokee) singing "Guide Me, Jehovah" accompanied by his drop-thumb banjo playing.

Caddo Tribal Dances. American Indian Soundchiefs Series. 1992, audiocassette.

This cassette features a number of traditional Caddo stomp dance songs recorded in Anadarko, Oklahoma, in 1955.

Ceremonial Songs of the Muscogee. Indian House Records, IH 3008

Tony Isaacs, prolific field recordist and founder of Indian House Records, recorded these seven ceremonial dances of the Muscogee Indians at Tallahassee Ceremonial Ground in November of 1997, featuring songleaders John Proctor, Jimmy Gibson, Eunice Hill, Phillip Deere, Leon Bell, Billy Joe Jackson, and Thomas Yahola.

Chahta Okla I Taloa Holittopa - Choctaw People Beloved Songs. Chahta Anumpa Aiiikhvna School of Choctaw Language

Another release by the Chahta Anumpa School of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma offers some Choctaw chants and stomp dances.

Cherokee Boogie: Indians and the Blues. Saga Blues. 2004, compact disc.

This themed compilation by French label Saga seeks to situate prewar blues performances such as Furry Lewis's "Big Chief Blues" and Tampa Red's "Seminole Blues" into a Native American historical context. Many of the artists featured, such as Charley Patton, Scrapper Blackwell, and Robert Wilkins, had significant Native lineage.

Cherokee Stomp Dance. Red Vinyl Records. 1993, compact disc.

This collection brings together a sampling of social stomp dances performed by members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina.

Chickasaw Social Songs and Stomp Dances – Chickasaw Nation Dance Troupe.

This release features the Chickasaw Nation Dance Troupe performing traditional Chickasaw social and ceremonial dances such as the "Jump Dance," "Friendship Dance," "War Dance," "Long Dance," and more.

Choctaw-Chickasaw Dance Songs, Volume 1. Choctaw-Chickasaw Heritage Committee. Sweetland Productions. 1977, LP.

Choctaw-Chickasaw Dance Songs, Volume 2. Dale McCoy Productions. 1977, LP.

Oklahoma Choctaw tribal elder Buster Ned arranged and produced these two recordings of traditional Choctaw and Chickasaw social dances, which brings together two tribal groups and demonstrates both the similarities and differences between each group's dance-song traditions.

Creation's Journey: Native American Music. Smithsonian Folkways SFW 40410. 1994, compact disc.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, in cooperation with the National Museum of the American Indian, curated this eclectic anthology which mainly features non-southern material with the exception of two selections by the Kingfisher Trio, an Oklahoma Cherokee gospel group.

Cry from the Earth: Music of the North American Indians. Edited by John Bierhorst. Folkways Records FW 37777. 1979, LP.

This collection, also released by Folkways Records, was compiled by folklorist John Bierhorst and features a Choctaw "Pleasure Dance," a Yuchi flute selection, and a Cherokee lullaby.

Dreaming About Chords. Issued with *Southern Cultures* 16 (No. 3.) Southern Folklife Collection at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. 2010, compact disc.

A diverse compilation of southern music which includes the rock anthem "We Are Lumbee" by Willie French Lowery's band, Lumbee.

Florida's Indians. Florida Humanities Council. 2007, compact disc.

This CD, which is part of the Florida Humanities Council's audio CD series, features songs and stories of the Miccosukee and Seminole Indians of southern Florida.

Heartbeat: Voices of First Nations Women. Smithsonian Folkways SFW40415. 1995, compact disc.

This diverse compilation of contemporary and historic recordings includes Betty Mae Jumper (Florida Seminole) singing play-party and animal songs, as well as performances by Ulali, a contemporary traditionalist group founded by North Carolina Tuscarora blueswoman Pura Fé.

Indian Rezervation Blues and More. Dixiefrog Records. 2009, compact disc.

This three-disc anthology released by French label Dixiefrog chronicles the modern American Indian experience in contemporary Native music as represented by a variety of genres and tribal affiliations.

Music of the American Indian, Volume 4: Delaware, Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek. Edited by Willard Rhodes. Library of Congress, Music Division, Recording Laboratory. 1954, LP.

Ethnomusicologist Willard Rhodes' sampling of Eastern Woodlands music includes such examples as a "Creek Counting Song" and a "Cherokee Pumpkin Dance Song."

Native America Calling: Music from Indian Country. Trikont Records US-0402. 2010, compact disc.

A collection of various contemporary recordings of American Indian music; includes performances by North Carolina's Pura Fé (Tuscarora tribe) and her intertribal group, Ulali.

Songs and Dances of the Eastern Indians from Medicine Spring & Allegany. New World Records, NW80337-2. 1985, compact disc.

This collection of Cherokee stomp dances was recorded at Medicine Spring Ceremonial Ground in Sequoyah County, Oklahoma, in 1975, and was produced and annotated by ethnomusicologist and Cherokee Nation member Charlotte Heth.

Songs of the Caddo: Ceremonial and Social Dance Music. Canyon Records CR-6146. 1999, compact disc.

Founded in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1951 by Native music enthusiasts Ray and Mary Boley, Canyon Records is the premiere record label dedicated to producing recordings of Native American music. Although the company's discography is extensive and their output continues to proliferate, Canyon has released very little in terms of southeastern native music. This CD is one exception: a collection of Caddo stomp dances recorded at the Hasinai Cultural Center in Hinton, Oklahoma, in the 1970s.

Songs of the Muskogee Creek - Part 1. Indian House Records IH 3001. 1969, compact disc.

Songs of the Muskogee Creek - Part 2. Indian House Records IH 3002. 1969, compact disc.

This two-volume set of Muskogee Creek stomp dances was recorded by ethnomusicologist Tony Isaacs at a Creek ceremonial ground near Seminole, Oklahoma, in 1969. Songleaders include Tema Tiger, Nette Gray, James Deere, Frank Jackson, Harry Bell, and David Wind.

Songs of the Seminole Indians of Florida. Smithsonian Folkways FW04383 / FE4383. 1972, LP.

This recording, now available in CD format from Smithsonian Folkways, represents a small selection from the 243 cylinder recordings ethnographer Frances Densmore made of Seminole Indian music in the Florida Everglades, 1931 to 1933, and serves as a companion piece to her publication *Seminole Music* (Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 161).

Stomp Dance – Volume 1. Muskogee, Seminole, Yuchi. Indian House Records IH 3003. 1978, LP, reissued onto compact disc in 1991.

Stomp Dance – Volume 2. Muskogee, Seminole, Yuchi. Indian House Records IH 3004. 1978, LP, reissued onto compact disc in 1991.

Stomp Dance – Volume 3. Indian House Records, IH 3005. 1991, compact disc.

Stomp Dance – Volume 4. Indian House Records, IH 3006. 1991, compact disc.

Indian House Records offers this four-volume CD series as a fine introduction to the breadth of traditional southeastern social and ceremonial stomp dances performed by Muskogee, Seminole, and Yuchi tribal members of Oklahoma.

Stomp Dance Blues – A Tribute to Johnna (with English lyrics). Indian House Records, IH 3101. 1999, compact disc.

This recording showcases Shawnee stomp dances recorded near Miami, Oklahoma, and includes the unusual piece “Jack and Jill,” a sort of stomp dance / blues hybrid sung in English by John Gibson.

Stomp Dance Songs of the Muscogee Nation – Vol. 1. Indian House Records, IH 3009. 1999, compact disc.

Stomp Dance Songs of the Muscogee Nation – Vol. 2. Indian House Records, IH 3010. 1999, compact disc.

This two-CD series offers a broad sampling of ceremonial songs of the Creek people of Oklahoma.

Tallahassee Ceremonial Ground of the Mvskokee Nation. Indian House Records, IH 3007. 1994, compact disc.

Recorded near Wetumka, Oklahoma, in 1994, this CD demonstrates the dances and songs commonly performed at the Tallahassee Ceremonial Ground during Green Corn and other important Muskogee ceremonies.

Traditional Voices: Historic Recordings of Traditional Native American Music. Canyon Records CR-7053. 1994, compact disc.

This diverse compilation, which brings together a sampling of Native performances from various regions and tribal affiliations, includes two performances by a Shawnee stomp dance group.

With Our Voices: Singing Our Historical Witness of Faith. United Methodist Church of Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. Nashville: UMCOR. 2001, compact disc.

Recorded live at the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference in Preston, Oklahoma, in 2001, this CD brings together a sampling of hymns sung by American Indians from a variety of cultural groups, including Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, and Yuchi performances.

You Ain't Talkin' to Me: Charlie Poole and the Roots of Country Music. Columbia Records / Legacy CK-92780. 2005, compact disc.

“On the Banks of the Kaney,” one of the six songs recorded by Big Chief Henry’s Indian String Band on October 14, 1929, makes an appearance on this boxed set dedicated to the musical world of country music pioneer Charlie Poole.

American Indian: Releases by Individual Artists & Groups

Bible-Way Quartet. *I Have Returned.* Cherokee, North Carolina. Self-released. 1977, LP.

The Bible-Way Quartet of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina offers a sampling of Christian songs performed in both the Cherokee and English languages.

Chief Jim Billie. *Alligator Tales.* SOAR Records. 1998, compact disc.

Big Alligator. Seminole Records. 1996, compact disc.

Old Ways. Seminole Records. 1995, compact disc.

Seminole Man. Seminole Records. 1993, compact disc.

Native Son. Independent Records. 1986, compact disc.

The charismatic singer-songwriter and Florida Seminole council member “Chief” Jim Billie has released a number of albums over the years, all of which deal with Seminole life in the Everglades of southern Florida. One song, “Alligator Tears,” which appeared on his 1998 album *Alligator Tales*, was nominated for a Grammy in 1999.

Clelland Billy. *Chahta Uba Isht Taloa, No. 3*. Chahta Records. 1976, LP.
Chahta Uba Isht Taloa, No. 2. C.R.S. Records. 1973, LP.
Chahta Uba Isht Taloa Oke. C.R.S. Records. 1971, LP.

Recorded at the Mary Lee Clark United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City, this three-part LP series features Clelland Billy and several others, including Reverend Isaac D. James, Sampson Tims, William Littleton, and the All Chahta Singers performing several traditional hymns in the Choctaw language.

Boiling Springs United Methodist Church. *Choctaw Hymns*. Chickasaw Historical Society. 2002, compact disc.

The congregation of the Boiling Springs United Methodist Church in Ada, Oklahoma, consists primarily of Choctaw and Chickasaw tribal members, who came together in 2002 to produce this CD of an all-day singing of gospel hymns in the Choctaw language.

Walker Calhoun. *Sacred Songs of Medicine Lake*. Mountain Heritage Center. 1997, compact disc.

Where the Ravens Roost: Traditional Cherokee Songs of Walker Calhoun. Mountain Heritage Center. 1992, compact disc.

In addition to being a renowned storyteller and active spokesman for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Walker Calhoun (1919-2012), was also a fine banjo player and singer. These two CDs demonstrate Calhoun's talent for singing ceremonial songs in the Cherokee language as well as his love for traditional old-time mountain banjo picking and singing.

Cherokee National Youth Choir. *Cherokee Sunday Morning*. Cherokee Nation Records. 2005, compact disc.

Jesus is Born Today. Cherokee Nation Records. 2003, compact disc.

Building One Fire. Cherokee Nation Records. 2002, compact disc.

Voices of the Creator's Children. Cherokee Nation Records. 2001, compact disc.

The Cherokee National Youth Choir is an active group which continues to release albums of religious material, all of which can be purchased via the official website of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

Pura Fé. *Follow Your Heart's Desire*. Music Maker Records. 2004, compact disc.

Caution to the Wind. Shanachie Records. 2005, compact disc.

Tuscarora Nation Blues. Dixie Frog Records. 2006, compact disc.

Hold the Rain. Dixie Frog Records / Music Maker Records. 2007, compact disc.

Full Moon Rising. Dixie Frog Records. 2009, compact disc.

Live! A Blues Night in North Carolina. Dixie Frog Records. 2011, compact disc.

Pura Fé, the Tuscarora singer-songwriter and slide guitarist of Durham, North Carolina, is undoubtedly one of the most active and influential of today's contemporary Native musicians who draw on traditional themes for inspiration. She tours regularly, and her recordings are among the most popular of today's contemporary Native American music.

Charlie Jones. *Choctaw Singing with Charlie Jones*. VIP Records. 1994, compact disc.

Oklahoma Choctaw tribal councilman Charlie Jones (1932-2004) recorded a handful of Choctaw language instruction booklets and CDs, but this recording stands as his sole musical release, and serves as an audio companion to his book *Talohoah Momah / They are Still Singing: A Choctaw Songbook*.

Willie French Lowery. *Proud to Be a Lumbee*. White Whale Records. 1976, LP.

Overdose. Radnor Records. 1970, LP.

Plant and See. White Whale Records. 1969, LP. Reissued by Paradise of Bachelors, 2012.

The late Willie French Lowery (1944-2012), was a Lumbee guitarist and singer-songwriter from Robeson County, North Carolina, who utilized traditional motifs and championed Lumbee pride and identity in his approach as a southern rock n' roll performer and recording artist. He often collaborated with other musicians and experimented with a variety of genres and traditions. Two of Lowery's collaborative efforts, "Proud to be a Lumbee" and "Plant and See," have garnered some recent success upon being reissued by North Carolina based independent label Paradise of Bachelors.

Rocky Ford Cherokee Indian Quartet. *Travel the Jericho Road*. B&B Recordings. 1984, LP.
This Oklahoma Cherokee gospel quartet sings spirituals and hymns in both Cherokee and English.

Ed Teague. *Pretty Little Gal with the Bright Blue Eye: Authentic Old-Time Mountain Music from Northeast Georgia, Recorded 2010-2011*. Backroads & Banjos Records. 2011, compact disc.

Folklorist Art Rosenbaum produced this album of North Georgia traditional banjo picker Ed Teague and his friends playing some of their favorite banjo tunes and old-time string band pieces. It includes a rendition of "Amazing Grace" sung in the Cherokee language by Clint Ledford, a friend of Teague's who learned the song as a child from his Cherokee grandmother, Rachel Garrett, in Caney Fork, North Carolina.

Ulali. *Mahk Jchi*. Thrush Records. 1997, compact disc.
Intertribal group Ulali

Gary White Deer. *Oklahoma Style Dance Songs, Vol. 1*. White Deer Studios. 2006, compact disc.

Oklahoma Choctaw historian, visual artist, and chanter Gary White Deer offers a sampling of Choctaw songs, both ceremonial and secular.

Ethnic & Immigrant Music: Anthologies & Compilations (Various artists)

Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami. Historical Museum of Southern Florida. 1999, compact disc.

Lithuanian Folk Songs in the United States: Recorded and with Notes by Jonas Balys. Monograph Series of the Ethnic Folkways Library, FM 4009. 1955, LP. 2007, compact disc reissue.

This collection, which mainly consists of performances by Lithuanian immigrants from the coal mining communities of Pennsylvania, includes two unaccompanied ballads sung by Uršulė Žemaitienė of West Virginia.

Mississippi River of Song: A Musical Journey Down the Mississippi. Smithsonian Folkways SFW40086. 1998, compact disc.

Music journalist and scholar Elijah Wald compiled this eclectic sampling of musical traditions found along the banks of the Mississippi River, from the Upper Midwest to the Gulf of Mexico. The last track on the CD is a Spanish "decima" – a ballad consisting of ten-line stanzas – sung by the late Isleño singer Irvan Perez of Delacroix Island, Louisiana.

Old Country Music in a New Land: Folk Music of Immigrants from Europe and the Near East. Compiled by Richard K. Spottswood. New World Records, NW-80264. 1977, LP.

Discographer Richard Spottswood's compilation of immigrant musics in America includes "I Tickled 'Em" by the New Arkansas Travelers, a British beer hall band who recorded two sides for Victor Records in Memphis in 1928.

Play Me a Polka: Tex-Czech Polkas. Rounder Records 6029. 1994, compact disc.

This compilation of selections by various Texas Czech bands was recorded in the early 1990s, and featuring some of the tradition's younger practitioners like The Moonriders as well as older groups such as the Joe Patek Orchestra and others.

Slidin' On the Frets: The Hawaiian Steel Guitar Phenomenon. Yazoo Records 2056. 2000, compact disc.

This collection brings together examples which demonstrate the widespread appeal of Hawaiian steel guitar music, and includes performances by southerners like Jimmie Tarlton, Sylvester Weaver, Cliff Carlisle, and others.

Texas Bohemia: Polkas, Waltzes, Schottisches / The Texas Bohemian-Moravian-German Bands. Trikont US-0201. 1994, compact disc.

This compilation of lively, whimsical performances was compiled by the German label Trikont Records, and was culled from a variety of recordings from independent labels, live performances, and homemade recordings.

Texas Bohemia, Vol. 2: Slow Music. Trikont US-0222. 1996, compact disc.

A follow-up to the previous collection emphasizes country waltzes and honky-tonk ballads.

Texas Bohemia Revisited. Trikont US-0384. 2011, compact disc.

This second follow-up includes a DVD of assorted footage from Czech dance halls in eastern Texas.

Texas Czech: Bohemian-Moravian Bands, Historic Recordings, 1929-1959. Arhoolie CD 7026

Arhoolie Records' collection of historical recordings of the Texas-Czech musical phenomenon serves as a fine introduction to this lively regional music tradition.

Traditional Musics of Alabama, Volume 1: A Compilation. Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, Alabama Traditions CD 201. 2001, compact disc.

A compilation of field recordings made by ethnomusicologist Steve Grauberger in the 1990s and early 2000s, this bold collection demonstrates the diversity of traditional music in the State of Alabama. It includes a Czech performance by the Baldwin County Polka Band, a Laotian bamboo harp song performed by Mobile fishermen Reagan Ngamvilay and Khamseng Darupeth, and a piece by Mariachi Garibaldi, a Birmingham mariachi group.

¡Viva Cackalacky!: Latin Music of the New South. Produced by David Garcia and students at UNC Chapel Hill. 2012, compact disc.

A first of its kind, this groundbreaking collection brings together recordings of Latin American music recorded in various parts of North Carolina from 1994 to 2012, and features merengue, salsa, nortena, mariachi, and other forms of Latino Music.

Voices of Florida. Florida Folklife Program. 2008, compact disc.

This four-cd set brings together interviews and musical segments from a diverse sampling of folklore among twenty-first-century Floridian, and deals with a variety of cultures, including the music of the state's Haitian, Southeast Asian, and Greek communities.

Ethnic & Immigrant: Releases by Individual Artists & Groups

Adolph Hofner. *South Texas Swing*. Arhoolie CD 7029

Adolph Hofner was perhaps the most influential and prolific of the Texas Czech recording artists in the postwar era. He recorded extensively but this collection brings together his most iconic recordings, including the hit “Shiner Song (Farewell to Prague),” which has become a standard in the Tex-Czech repertoire.

Agave Norteño. “El Corrido de la HB-56.” Joey International. 2012, compact disc.

Agave Norteño, a Mexican-American band based in Virginia, recently released this single in reaction to the State of Alabama’s passing of amendment HB-56, the nation’s strictest anti-illegal immigration law to date.

Afrississippi. *Alliance*. Hill Country Records. 2008, compact disc.

Fulani Journey. Knockdown South Records. 2005, compact disc.

Guelel Kumba, a Senegalese-American singer of Fulani griot lineage, teamed up with north Mississippi blues musicians to create this hybrid of West African and north Mississippi blues styles.

Bill Conly, Sr. and Bill Conly, Jr. *Songs of the Irish*. Louisiana Folklife Recordings, LFR LP 00085. 1985, compact disc.

The Louisiana Folklife Center in Natchitoches, Louisiana, produced this album of Irish tunes and songs performed by Bill Conly, seasoned multi-instrumentalist and Irish folksinger of Bienville Parish, Louisiana, accompanied by his son, Bill Conly, Jr., who is carrying on the tradition.

Brian Marshall and His Tex-Slavic Playboys. *Texas Lowlands*. Marszalek Records. 2005, compact disc.

Texas Polish Roots. Arhoolie CD 464. 1997, compact disc.

Brian Marshall, a third-generation Polish-Texan fiddler, continues to perform throughout eastern Texas and beyond, representing the best of Polish Texas roots music. Marshall’s music exhibits more recent Texas Swing influences in addition to older Polish-American fiddling styles.

Conjunto Cascabel. *Mi Juguete Preferido*. CD Baby. 2007, compact disc.

Conjunto Cascabel is a Mexican-American *conjunto* group based in Candler, North Carolina.

Conjunto Rio Verde. *Por Culpa de Tu Amor*. Sony U.S. Latin. 2007, compact disc.

Conjunto Rio Verde is a Mexican outfit based in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The Czechaholics. *#4 – Čtyři*. Self-released, 2011.

Beyond the Shadows. Self-released, 2009.

Ještě Jednou (One More Time). Self-released, 2008.

Spreadin’ the Tradition. Self-released, 2006.

The Czechaholics are an active traditional polka group who mainly perform in the Czech communities of east-central Texas. Their repertoire consists primarily of Texas Swing standards, accordion-driven polkas and other instrumentals in addition to original compositions.

Daniele Spadavecchia and Sicilian Swing. *Nozze Italiana*. Self-released. 2004, compact disc.

New Orleans Sicilian-American guitarist Daniele Spadavecchia and his group, Sicilian Swing, offer some Italian songs in the style of Louis Prima and others in addition to some traditional jazz numbers.

Diali Cissokho and Kaira Ba. *Resonance*.

Grupo Arrazador. *En Vivo, Vol. 1*. Self-published CD, unnumbered.

Irvan Perez. *Spanish Decimas from St. Bernard Parish*. Louisiana Folklife Recordings, LFR CD 088. 1988, compact disc.

Junkanoo Band. *Junkanoo Band – Key West*. Folkways Records, FW04492. 1964, LP.

Kim Yen. *Katrina Songs*. Self-published CD, unnumbered.

A self-published CD of Gulf Coast Vietnamese topical songs on the subject of Hurricane Katrina.

Los Hermanos Lovo. *¡Soy Salvadoreño! Chanchona Music from Eastern El Salvador*. Smithsonian Folkways, SFW40535. 2011, compact disc.

Mario Peralta. *Mario Peralta Plays Astor Piazzolla and Symphonic Tango*. Rose Records. 2004, compact disc.

Mario Peralta's New Gospel Sounds of Georgia. Rose Records. 2001, compact disc..

Mario Peralta. Rose Records. 1975, LP.

At The Regency. Rose Records, 691R-6413. 1973, LP.

Mario Peralta y su Bandeón. RCA. 1960, 45 rpm single.

Mario Peralta, master of the bandoneón - a type of Uruguayan accordion – moved from Uruguay to Atlanta in the 1960s and found steady work performing in the bar of the downtown Regency Hotel. Peralta has recorded a number of albums and continues to play in Atlanta.

Monarquía Norteña. *Rumbo al Sur*. Self-published CD, unnumbered.

Naji Hilal. *Taqaseem Min Alsamaseem (Improvisation from the Heart)*.

New Orleans Klezmer All-Stars. *Borvis*. Stretchy Records, 2003.

Fresh Out the Past. Shanachie Records, 1999.

Big Kibosh. Shanachie Records, 1997.

New Orleans Klezmer All-Stars. Gert Town, 1996.

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Pavelid Castañeda. *I Love You Much Too Much*.

Latin American Harpist: Pavelid. Pavelid Harp Productions, 2000.

Pavelid: The Latin Harp. Pavelid Harp Productions, 1996.

Rey Norteño. *Raleigh*. Zapco Records

A La Conquista. Zapco Records,

Archival Collections

Cherokee Indians, 1970-1974. University of California Los Angeles: Ethnomusicology Archive. 1974, reel-to-reel tape.

This collection consists of sixteen reel-to-reel tapes of Cherokee (Western Band) stomp dance performances recorded by ethnomusicologist Charlotte Heth in Oklahoma, from 1970 to 1974.

Ethnic and Cultural Groups Recorded by the WPA in Florida. Florida Memory
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/florida/ffgroups.html>

This online collection encompasses an impressive body of field recordings of Bahamian, Cuban, Czech, Greek, Italian, Minorcan, Seminole, Slovak, and Syrian musics recorded by musicologist Alton C. Morris and other WPA documentarians in Florida from 1937 to 1942.

Mickasukie and Seminole Indians, 1939. Indiana University, Bloomington: Archives of Traditional Music. 1935, 78 rpm records.

These six 78 rpm acetate discs comprise an interesting collection of Miccosukee and Seminole medicine chants and ceremonial songs sung by Josie Billie, and recorded by Robert F. Greenlee at a radio station in Miami Beach, Florida, in 1939.

Natchez and Tunica Indians, 1933. Indiana University, Bloomington: Archives of Traditional Music. 1933, wax cylinder recordings.

Fifty-five wax cylinder recordings of Tunica and Natchez songs performed by Sam Young (Tunica) and Watt Sam (Natchez), collected by Mary Haas and Morris Swadesh in Marksville, Louisiana, and Gore, Oklahoma, in 1933.

The Old Ways Live: The Claude Medford, Jr. Collection: A Catalogue Prepared for the Williamson Museum, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana. Northwestern State University of Louisiana, 1990.

Yuchi and Creek Indians, circa 1905. Indiana University, Bloomington: Archives of Traditional Music. 1905, wax cylinder recordings.

This series of Creek and Yuchi stomp dances and stories were recorded onto wax cylinders by anthropologist Frank G. Speck in Oklahoma in 1905.

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Venete, Seva. "The Hawaiian Tinge," *Jazz Archivist* 25, 2012.

Waschek, Brownlee. "A Study of the Czechoslovak Folk Music Translated to the Community of Masaryktown, Florida." M.A. Music Education, Florida State University, 1959.

Wood, Anna Lomax. "Musical Practice and Memory on the Edge of Two Worlds: Kalymnian Tsambóuna and Song Repertoire in the Family of Nikitas Tsimouris," *The Florida Folklife Reader*. Tina Bucuvalas, Editor. University of Mississippi Press, 2011.

Yehuda, Ayala-Ben. "Atlanta Becoming Big Market for Mexican Acts." *Reuters*, June 14, 2008.

Filmography

Cedars in the Pines: The Lebanese in North Carolina. Directed by Akram Fouad Khater and Danica Cullinan. North Carolina State University Khayralla Program for Lebanese-American Studies, 2012.

El Mosco y El Agua Alta = Mosquitoes and High Water. Directed by Andrew Kohler and Louis Alvarez. Center for New American Media, 1983.

Every Island Has Its Own Songs: The Tsimouris Family of Tarpon Springs. Directed by Peggy Bulger. Florida Department of State, 1988. 27 minutes, Color.

Folklorist Peggy Bulger's intimate portrait of Nikitas Tsimouris, a Greek-American in Tarpon Springs, Florida, who played the tsabouna, a type of traditional Greek bagpipe made from goatskin.

"El Corrido de la HB56." Music by Agave Norteno. Directed by Cesar Marfil Rubio. 2012.

Mexican norteña band Agave Norteno's take on Alabama's passing of amendment HB-56, which placed drastic restrictions on Mexican immigrant workers.

Spanish Voices: Spanish and English in the Southeastern United States. Directed by Walt Wolfram, Danica Cullinan, and Augustin Pasten. North Carolina Language and Life Project, North Carolina State University, 2010.

Online Resources

"Onda Carolina" www.ondacarolina.blogspot.com

This website bills itself as "North Carolina's Latin Music Blog."

Polka Beat. Polkabeat.com “Promoting Texas Polka Music and Heritage” Founded by Theresa Cernoch Parker in November 2011.

Sobre Las Olas / Over the Waves! Mexican Music from Nineteenth-Century New Orleans. Louisiana Digital Library.

VITA

Education

B.A., Southern Studies, University of Mississippi. 2009

Employment

Fieldworker. *Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area Study*. Florence, Alabama. 2005-2009

A feasibility study and regional folklife survey funded by state and national arts grants, in cooperation with the W.C. Handy Music Preservation Society.

Archivist & Darkroom Technician. *Rayko Photo Center & Gallery*. San Francisco, California. 2004-2005

Archival assistant. *Columbus State University Archives*. Simon Schwob Library. Columbus, Georgia. 2003

Panels, Workshops, Consulting

Panelist. "Musicians on Southern Music and Innovation," Music of the South Symposium, University of Mississippi, April 3, 2013

Presenter. "Countering Stereotypes with Choctaw Fiddling," Panel: *Tradition and Innovation in Southern Indian Music*, American Society for Ethnohistory Conference. Missouri State University, November 8, 2012

Panelist and Performer. *Symposium: A Celebration of Mississippi's Music Heritage*. Mississippi State University's Riley Center. Meridian, Mississippi. August 21, 2010

Presenter: "Black and White Interchange in Southeastern String Band Tradition." *Southern Studies Brown Bag Lecture Series*, University of Mississippi. February 17, 2010

Grants panelist. Traditional artist roster and folk arts apprenticeship grants selection. *Mississippi Arts Commission*. Jackson, Mississippi. 2010, 2006

Permanent exhibit panels writer. *Ma Rainey House Museum*. Columbus, Georgia. 2007

Workshop presenter: "Southern Folklore in Documentary Film." Alabama Community Scholars Institute. Florence, Alabama. July, 2006

Workshop presenter: "Traditional Music in Southwest Georgia." Columbus State University's Sister City Exchange Program with Kiryu, Japan. Columbus, Georgia. 2003, 2002

Recordings and Video

Associate Producer. *The Truth* - Precious Bryant. Terminus Records. Atlanta, Georgia. 2004

Associate Producer. *Fool Me Good* - Precious Bryant. Terminus Records. Atlanta, Georgia. 2002

Archival researcher. CD reissue: *In Celebration of a Legacy - Traditional Music of the Lower Chattahoochee Valley*. Historic Chattahoochee Commission. Eufaula, Alabama. 1999

Producer / Director. *A Boldness of Spirit: Columbus, Georgia's East Wynnton Neighborhood*. Funded by the Columbus Housing Initiative. Columbus, Georgia. 2002

Awards & Honors

Peter Aschoff Prize for “‘A Great Musician with a High Position’: Black and White Interchange in Traditional Southern Music”. *Center for the Study of Southern Culture*, University of Mississippi, 2008.

Community scholar certificate. *Alabama Community Scholars Institute*. Alabama Folklife Association. 2006

Georgia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program. One-year guitar apprenticeship to Georgia blueswoman Precious Bryant. Georgia Council for the Arts. 2001

Membership / Community

American Society for Ethnohistory

Chattahoochee Folk Music Society

Jimmie Tarlton Foundation

Phenix City, Alabama. Established in 1998 to raise funds for a headstone and historic marker at the currently unmarked gravesite of Country music pioneer Jimmie Tarlton in Columbus, Georgia.