

SONG OF THE HILLS: LEAVING A LEGACY by Bob Gray

A recent email from my sister included the phrase: The trouble with life is that there's no background music. I smiled, said "yep" and continued reading. Later, I recalled those words and wondered: Is it true?

After due consideration to my sister and the cleverness of the thought, no, it's not true. I will bet that if you think of the three most important occasions of your life, at least two – and probably all three – had music in the background. Graduation? Marriage? The "Big Birthday"? Even the elevator up to your first job probably had music playing in the background.

Ah, but elevator music is a good place to start unraveling the hidden truth of her assertion. Because just being music doesn't make it good. "Happy Birthday" is as stupid and boring a song as I've ever heard. Muzak can be coma inducing. "Here Comes the Bride" is more a threat than a promise (and can be chilling – depending on the bride). And I'll bet a dollar against a dime that you can't whistle three consecutive notes of your graduation score.

The background music to life should be inspiring, invigorating, emotional - GOOD. And if you live in the Texas Hill Country, you are in the midst of much of the best music ever created. If you don't hear it you're not listening, and it's time to rectify that. You should be reaching out for it. One way to do so is to join us - the Texas Heritage Music Foundation.

Our Foundation is not an "entertainment" organization – but rather one that promotes the heritage and history of Texas music. Of course, without those entertainers, there would be no heritage and history. That so many of them are able to create beauty, excitement, reflection, introspection, joy - and yes, even excite patriotism – should be remarkable in the extreme and deserves your notice. Preserving their efforts and tracing their influence is important to your own history and understanding of the world.

Our job at the Foundation is to preserve and promote all of those things by archiving the music, tracking the performers and tracing influences, endowing talented newcomers, and documenting the role Texas music has played in society. To do this we need your support.

People who think nothing of spending thirty to a hundred bucks per ticket to watch a sporting event – which goes to players and owners making millions and is only uplifting if your team wins – won't spend half or less of that amount to share an enthusiastic, energetic, even enthralling evening with a talented artist whose sole mission is to make you smile through tears. Here at the Texas Heritage Music Foundation, we want to preserve and encourage that talent. We want to leave a legacy to all our posterity – the lilting and the rough, the exciting, funny, and romantic, the deeply introspective and intelligent, along with the facile and down-home meanderings – all are part of the roots growing the arbor of Texas music.

This culture of musicians and performances, of bootscootin' and sh*t-kicking, of cowboys and storytelling, is not invulnerable. It cannot survive indifference. We need your help! This heritage is yours, too.

There is uniqueness to this area of the Texas Hill Country. It remains quintessentially and profoundly Western. Pretty much everywhere else – they're faking it. I mean, how many horse-riding real cowboys are there in the concrete confines of Austin or Houston?

Although Hill Country inhabitants are not the homogenous (and boring) species found in large cities, we tend to cooperate with our neighbors better and lend a helping hand without being asked. Unlike large cities, the vast majority of everyday business is done without a contract being faxed or messengered over. A handshake still carries moral and legal weight. Unlike most anywhere else, here in Texas hitting a woman in public will get your ass kicked by the twenty-five nearest male witnesses. Most of the men have hat-hair and don't care. Gallantry and chivalry are neither laughed at nor avoided. More definitive and legendary battles for freedom took place in Texas than any place in the country. And, as everyone knows, Texas is the only state that was once a constitutional republic on its own, and joined the union with the explicit understanding that it could secede if its citizens felt their freedom threatened.

Each of these aspects, and dozens of others concerning life in Texas, is the base line for songs of the Texas troubadours, which are themselves part of the tradition and uniqueness of the area. They can be credited for spreading folkways, wisdom, and experiences among the disparate groups that settled and, yes, civilized the area over the past couple of centuries. Their tradition has continued alongside of, and is largely responsible for, the others. And it is possible *only because* Texas music is still alive here.

If a major component of that which personifies and distinguishes our area of Texas – let's call it the "Song of the Hills" – disappears, what's left of unique hereabouts won't be far behind. For a culture to survive and prosper requires a message – and a means of delivering it. Music is our way of delivering that message. The Texas Heritage Music Foundation is our means of conserving it.

For my part, I sincerely thank those still writing and willing to entertain me with new and old songs. May they long continue to successfully deliver the romantic and real life values I cherish, that I moved to Texas to re-discover. One of the best ways to encourage them is to support the organization that supports this tradition – the **Texas Heritage Music Foundation**.

You want to leave a legacy to your children that has meaning – that encourages a good life lived with decent values. A few dollars from you – and those like you who care about the future – \$20 for a personal membership, will ensure that those things happen.

The Old Texas West, and how it interfaces and ameliorates the remainder of American society, is told, often captivatingly, in today's original Texas music. Please support it – keep the values alive – this is about the only place they still exist.