Home with the Armadillo:

Public Memory and Performance in the 1970s Austin Music Scene

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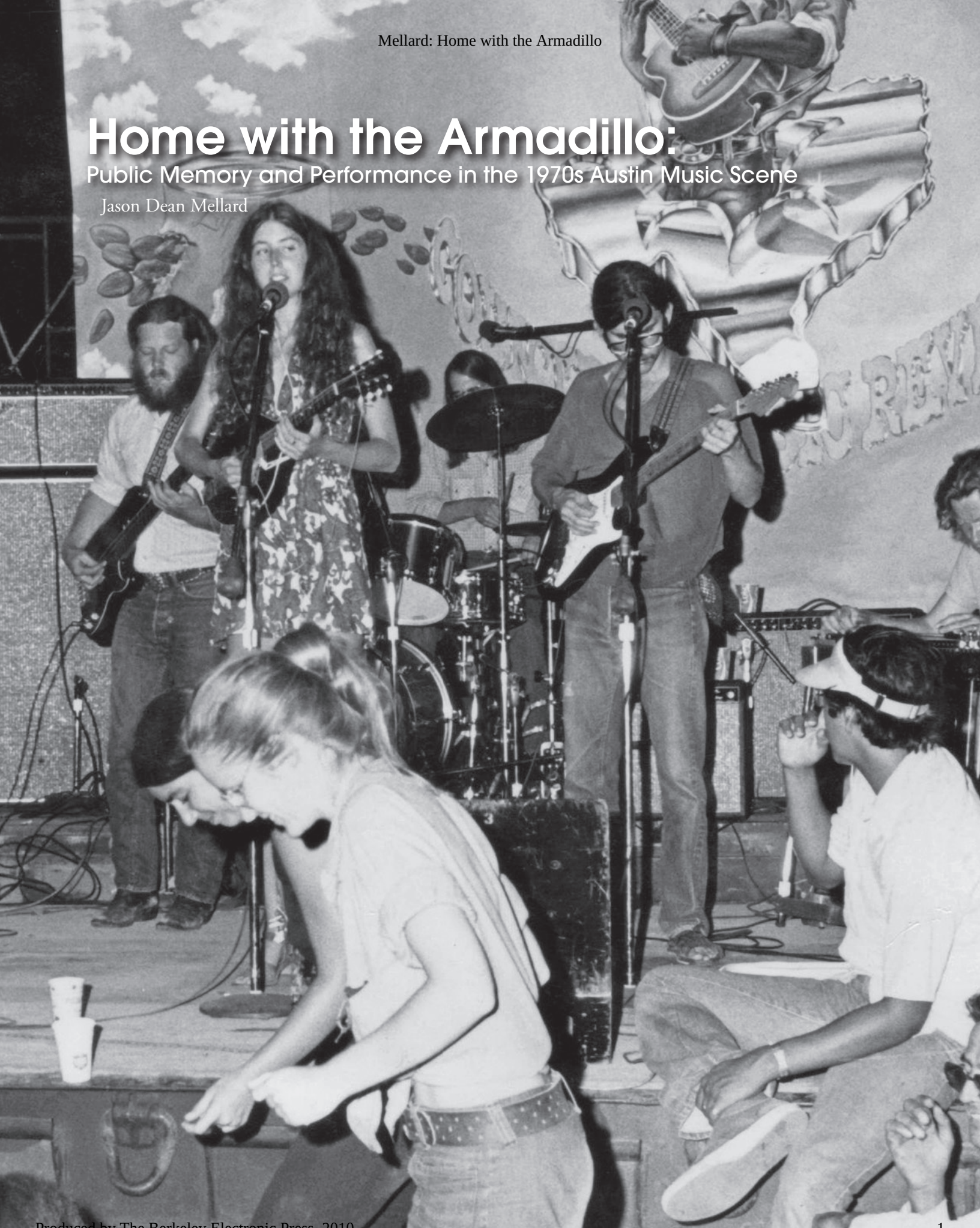

Greezy Wheels performing at the Armadillo World Headquarters. Photo courtesy of the South Austin Popular Culture Center.

"I wanna go home with the Armadillo
Good country music from Amarillo and Abilene
The friendliest people and the prettiest women
You've ever seen."

These lyrics from Gary P. Nunn's "London Homesick Blues" adorn the wall above the exit from the Austin Bergstrom International Airport baggage claim. For years, they also played as the theme to the award-winning PBS series *Austin City Limits*. In short, they have served in more than one instance as an advertisement for the city's sense of self, the face that Austin, Texas, presents to visitors and national audiences. The quoted words refer, if obliquely, to a moment in the 1970s when the city first began fashioning itself as a key American site of musical production, one invested with a combination of talent and tradition and tolerance that would make of it the self-proclaimed "Live Music Capital of the World."[1]

In many ways, the venue of the Armadillo World Headquarters served as ground zero for these developments, and it is often remembered as a primary site for the decade's supposed melding of Anglo-Texan traditions and countercultural lifestyles.[2] This strand of public memory reveres the Armadillo as a place in which "hippies" and "rednecks" closed the political, social, and generational gaps of the 1960s by coming together to revel in the joys of "good country music from Amarillo and Abilene."[3] In doing so, these individuals created a new musical sub-genre known as "progressive country" (an amalgamation of honky-tonk, Western swing, folk, blues, rock and roll, and other influences), which would help redefine mainstream country music and provide a foundation for the "Americana" singer-songwriter tradition that continues to flourish in Texas today.

This story of the Armadillo World Headquarters as a place in which disparate social groups set aside their differences and joined together in common celebration of live music has been told often enough to become part of Austin's cultural mythology. Archived sources, oral histories, and personal memories go a long way in supporting this notion, but there are also discrepancies between the folklore and fact connected to the Armadillo.[4]

In national histories of American music, the mentions of "Austin, Texas," "the 1970s," and the "Armadillo World Headquarters" may immediately bring to mind such names as Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings. Even in Austin itself, public memory tends to conflate the national success of Willie Nelson, the aesthetics of the decade's "hippie-redneck" confluence, and the audiences that gathered at the Armadillo. Barry Shank, one of the scene's prominent historians and critics, has argued that for "a brief moment—the much acclaimed era of the cosmic cowboy and the Armadillo World Headquarters—Austin music appeared to define the cultural meaning of being Texan."[5]

Yet, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings only played the Armadillo World Headquarters a combined total of approximately one dozen times, the former making at least seven appearances

and the latter only five. The majority of those performances occurred between late 1972 and early 1974, less than two years of the Armadillo's decade-long tenure, which ran from 1970 to 1980. Rock guitarist Ted Nugent played the Armadillo World Headquarters more often than Jennings did, as did The Ramones. Stanley Hall's Austin Ballet Theatre graced the Armadillo stage with far greater frequency than Willie Nelson.

Despite the tendency to identify the venue primarily with the development of the progressive country subgenre, the Armadillo hosted an astoundingly diverse array of musical styles, including gospel, honky-tonk, Western swing, conjunto, Tejano, zydeco, Cajun, blues, R&B, rock and roll, and others. Former audience members fondly recall performances by such prominent artists as the Clash, Bruce Springsteen, Frank Zappa, Ravi Shankar, and the Pointer Sisters. In addition to those concerts, there were numerous non-musical events, such as appearances by the National Lawyers Guild, the Underground Press Syndicate, Timothy Leary, John Henry Faulk, Cheech and Chong, and the San Francisco Mime Troupe.[6]

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To truly understand the history and larger significance of the Armadillo World Headquarters, some important questions need to be answered. Just who performed at the Armadillo? When did they do so and why? What were the larger cultural implications of these performances and, for that matter, the larger implications of the entire 'social scene' that existed at the Armadillo? Finally, how do we reconcile popular perceptions about the Armadillo and its role in promoting certain types of music with the reality of what actually took place there? These questions are important to address, because they can help us better understand a number of intriguing points regarding public memory and popular music in relation to this important transitional period in Texas music history.[7]

It is critical to examine the history of music venues themselves, since researchers and reporters often focus mainly on musical performances or songs as the primary expression of deeply meaningful social experiences. Such experiences certainly reflect the significance of the relationship between artists and audiences, but there are also many other factors involved in the larger live music experience, including the role of club owners, booking agents, stage managers, poster artists, bartenders, audiences, and, of course, the venue itself. All of these components work together to help create a specific event—and a unique "experience"—at a particular place and time.

Bruce Springsteen at the Armadillo, 1974.
Photo by Nancy Goldfarb Le Noir.
Courtesy South Austin Popular Culture Center.

This article draws on extensive research into the performance calendar of the Armadillo World Headquarters, along with interviews and other sources, in an attempt to document which artists performed at the Armadillo World Headquarters from August 1970 to December 1980. It also looks at the role that a number of different individuals, from musicians to staff, played in the day-to-day operations of the club. Finally, this article explores the larger social and cultural implications of the Armadillo's musical lineup in an attempt to sort fact from fiction regarding the history of this now legendary venue.

The story of the Armadillo World Headquarters is rooted in Austin's long and vibrant live music traditions. Historically, Austin's neighborhoods south of the Colorado River housed working-class Anglos and Mexican Americans, along with the businesses they owned and frequented. In 1970, Eddie Wilson,

Micael Priest Calendar for Armadillo, 1972. Photo courtesy South Austin Popular Culture Center.

manager for local group Shiva's Headband, located an abandoned armory-shaped structure amidst an auto repo lot, a cafeteria, and a roller rink near the intersection of Barton Springs Road and South First Street just south of the river. Wilson, who had been looking for a new performance space for Shiva's Headband and other groups, decided to lease the building. He and a group of collaborators soon christened their new venue the Armadillo World Headquarters. It would become the epicenter of Austin's bourgeoning music scene for most of the 1970s.[8]

The physical structure of the Armadillo did not exactly prove ideal for the near-utopian imaginings it often housed. A large, open central space with inadequate roofing made, at least initially, for poor acoustics and precluded effective climate control. Though renovations would eventually correct many of these issues, public memory often continues to enshrine the place as it was in its threadbare beginnings. In addition to the large central performance space, a network of surrounding rooms constantly shifted in function to meet the needs of the Armadillo's ever-changing mission—offices, makeshift apartments, art galleries, recording studios, bakeries, and arcades came and went.

The venue's staff made the most of these accommodations, and a talented group of visual artists—Kerry Awn, Ken Featherston, Jim Franklin, Danny Garrett, Henry Gonzalez, Jack Jackson, Guy Juke, Bill Narum, Micael Priest, John Shelton, Sam Yeates, and others—created a vision of the Armadillo that transcended its humble physical existence. The kitchen was a constant in the Armadillo equation and, under the stewardship of Jan Beeman, it became well-known among national touring acts for its hearty meals and down-home hospitality.[9]

Perhaps the most popular of the Armadillo's modifications was an outdoor beer garden that expanded the venue's capacity and gave it an outside stage. In all, the "Dillo," as it was often called, was an unwieldy, awkward, but charming beast that lived up to its namesake. It seemed an unlikely space from which to transform the cultural identity of the State Capital, but, through the labor and imagination of a spirited legion of participants from 1970 to 1980, that is precisely what happened.

The Armadillo World Headquarters' founders had reason to believe that an audience existed for such a musical experiment in Austin. Countercultural performance venues had briefly flourished in the last half of the 1960s, but they had met with daunting community opposition. The Vulcan Gas Company—founded by Don Hyde, Houston White, Gary Scanlon, and Sandy Lockett—was the most well-known of these places, and its location downtown on Congress Avenue stood in defiance of

the conservative propriety guarded over by the capitol building at the end of the street. The Chequered Flag, the Eleventh Door, the IL Club, the Jade Room, the New Orleans Club, and others provided similar spaces for folk, blues, and occasional psychedelic rock performances. However, all of these operations were small, most were failing, and none possessed the sheer ambition of the mammoth venue about to rise south of the river.[10]

The "hippie" side of the Armadillo's musical equation, then, had substantive local provenance, but the rampant talk of a "hippie-redneck" convergence in the early 1970s would have been inconceivable to many of the recent denizens of the Vulcan Gas Company or the psychedelic rock pioneers who had decamped from Austin to San Francisco during the mid-to-late 1960s. When asked about how hippies and rednecks interacted in the Austin of this era, Powell St. John, former band mate of Janis Joplin when she first moved from Port Arthur to Austin in 1962, replied curtly, "[T]hey didn't." Reflecting for a minute, he then recounted several instances of harassment and violence that constituted hippie-redneck relations in his memory of 1960s Austin.[11]

Tolleson hoped to model the Armadillo after John Lennon's Arts Laboratory, which endeavored to combine film, dance, theater, and music under one roof.

However, by the early 1970s, a number of those who had left Texas for San Francisco during the 1960s began to stream back to Austin, and the Armadillo World Headquarters provided this native counterculture a welcoming home. In time, the Armadillo became perhaps the most recognizable representation of the 1970s Austin scene. Other live music venues arose over the decade with their own sub-cultural allegiances—blues and R&B at Antone's, a more locally-oriented progressive country scene at the Soap Creek Saloon, punk at Raul's—but the Armadillo put Austin on the musical map and went far to create the network of performers, audiences, and media that continue to nurture Austin's current musical community.

This sensation was not yet in full effect, however, in August 1970, when Eddie Wilson and others opened the Armadillo. In addition to Wilson, pivotal figures in the early days included Vulcan Gas Company veterans Jim Franklin and Bobby Hedderman, Shiva's Headband frontman Spencer Perskin, and lawyer Mike Tolleson. Franklin became the club's artistic guru and emcee, living in an apartment he had built just offstage at the venue. Mike Tolleson joined Franklin and Wilson and championed the idea of making the Armadillo not just a concert venue, but a community arts incubator of sorts. Recently returned from London, Tolleson hoped to model the Armadillo after John Lennon's Arts Laboratory, which endeavored to combine film, dance, theater, and music under one roof.[12]

These were the ideas that defined the Armadillo World Headquarters in the beginning and set the stage for Austin's much-heralded hippie-redneck confluence during the height of the progressive country scene. However, it is important to consider just how these ideals manifested in the club's everyday practices, as well as the recurring tensions between these ideals and the realities of a working music venue. What was the music scene truly like at the Armadillo, and what impact did the club have on the long-term musical history of the city and the state? The first step in answering these questions is to determine which artists played the venue, and to what extent their music drew on both countercultural ("hippie") and traditional ("redneck") sources.

While researching newspapers of the period for a larger project concerning the cultural politics of Texas in the 1970s, I began keeping a log of advertisements and concert reviews of performances at the Armadillo. As this research progressed, the value of that ongoing log in reconstructing the venue's event calendar became clear. It seemed evident to me that, in order for historians to fully understand the Austin music scene of the 1970s, and to be able to separate fact from fiction, it was essential to build a set of substantive, accurate data on which to base further research. So, from those initial advertisements and reviews in the *Daily Texan* (the University of Texas at Austin student newspaper), *Austin American-Statesman*, *Texas Observer, Rag*, and *Austin Sun,* I expanded and confirmed the calendar of performances through artist contracts, booking calendars, posters, ticket stubs, photographs, and correspondence and conversation with former Armadillo staff.[13]

This effort has not yielded a completely accurate re-creation of the day-to-day activities at the Armadillo, but it is sufficiently comprehensive to identify patterns in the place's history and to check those patterns against some of the most enduring stories related to the venue. The significance of this endeavor lies not only in the minutiae it yields in reconstructing a significant 1970s venue in the larger field of American music but also in its ability

to plumb the very strong presence of the Armadillo in Texas's public memory as the "cradle" of progressive country music.

On a technical note, the data are arranged in two formats. First, there is a chronological calendar that shows the order of performances from 1970 to 1980. This calendar confirms the basic rise-and-fall narrative of the venue, in which an early, experimental period as a "community arts laboratory" (1970-1972, with over 200 performances) helped spawn the explosive progressive country moment that gave the Armadillo a national profile (1973-1976, with over 1000 performances). This was followed by a change of leadership and a settling into a less utopian-minded, but more musically diverse and financially stable, middle age (1977-1980, with nearly 900 performances). By my count, approximately 900 acts played the Armadillo over the course of a few more than 2,000 evenings.[14]

The second format consists of a list of acts found in the calendar, followed by the artists' genre identifications and dates of performance. Correlating these helps track the predominance of any genre at any given time in the Armadillo's history and determines which artists played the space most frequently. With some margin of error, those artists who performed there most often include the following:[15]

Act	Number of Performances
1. Greezy Wheels	123
2. Balcones Fault	84
3. Too Smooth	76
4. Bugs Henderson	66
5. Doak Snead	46
6. Dogs at Play (Beer Garden stage)	44
6. Steam Heat/Extreme Heat	44
7. D. K. Little	40
8. Cool Breeze	38
9. Electromagnets/Eric Johnson	37
10. Freddie King	34
11. Wommack Brothers	31
11. Marcia Ball/Freda and the Firedogs/ Bronco Brothers	31
12. Shiva's Headband	30
13. Man Mountain and the Green Slime Boys	28
13. Paul Ray and the Cobras	28
13. Cedar Frost	28
14. Plum Nelly	25
14. Alvin Crow	25
15. Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen	23
15. The Fools	23
15. Starcrost	23
16. Michael (Martin) Murphey	22
16. Kenneth Threadgill	22
17. Jazzmanian Devils	21
17. Hank Alrich/Tiger Balm/Diamond Rio	21
18. Butch Hancock	20
18. Doug Sahm	20
18. Jon Emery and the Missouri Valley Boys	20
18. Forty-Seven Times Its Own Weight	20
18. The Point	20
19. Buckdancer's Choice	19

Asleep at the Wheel, Freddie King, Alvin Crow, and Marcia Ball may be the names on this list that are most often recognized as being associated with the Austin music scene of the 1970s. The prevalence of Greezy Wheels, Balcones Fault, Too Smooth, and Bugs Henderson may initially surprise some readers. However, with one exception, these are all local and regional artists who could be readily booked to support a touring act or headline a performance in their own right with a built-in local following. Their regular performances went far in determining an aesthetic and identity for the space. To the extent that the Armadillo anchored a scene based on a perceived unity between artists and audiences, these local groups proved extremely significant.

Although local artists structured the day-to-day experiences of the Armadillo World Headquarters, they did not necessarily put on the shows that dominate public memory. Touring acts of national stature generated a great deal of enthusiasm among audiences and created the scene's sense of self-importance by anointing Austin as a significant musical destination. Of those national acts, the following appeared most frequently:

Act	Number of Performances
1. Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen	23
2. Roy Buchanan	18
3. Charlie Daniels	14
4. Jimmie Spheeris	11
5. Flying Burrito Brothers	10
5. New Riders of the Purple Sage	10

6. Leo Kottke	9
7. Doug Kershaw	8
7. Papa John Creach	8
7. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee	8
7. Spirit	8
7. Taj Mahal	8
7. Wet Willie	8
8. Doc and Merle Watson	7
8. Frank Zappa	7
8. Little Feat	7
8. Loudon Wainwright III	7
8. Marshall Tucker Band	7
8. Peter Rowan/Rowan Brothers	7
8. Ruby Starr	7

Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen played frequently enough that they often came to be considered local, despite the fact that they hailed from Michigan via the San Francisco Bay Area. Commander Cody, too, had a significant influence on the aesthetics of the local scene. He recorded his 1974 album *Deep in the Heart of Texas* (with its evocative Jim Franklin cover) live at the Armadillo. Cody also encouraged other West Coast musicians to relocate to Austin, including Asleep at the Wheel and Cornell Hurd.

In addition to Commander Cody, the remaining artists on the list suggest that the progressive country scene in Texas did not necessarily sustain itself with frequent visits by nationally touring country artists. To the extent that it gestured toward a larger trend, Austin's progressive country aligned itself with California country-rock (the Flying Burrito Brothers, New Riders of the Purple Sage, and artists indebted more to the albums *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* and *Nashville Skyline* than to the more traditional country represented by Nashville's Grand Ole Opry) and Southern Rock (Charlie Daniels, Wet Willie, Little Feat, the Marshall Tucker Band, Ruby Starr of Black Oak Arkansas, and most of the roster of Georgia's Capricorn Records).[16] Even those artists with established country roots (Doug Kershaw, Doc Watson) performed for Armadillo audiences in somewhat of a folk vein.

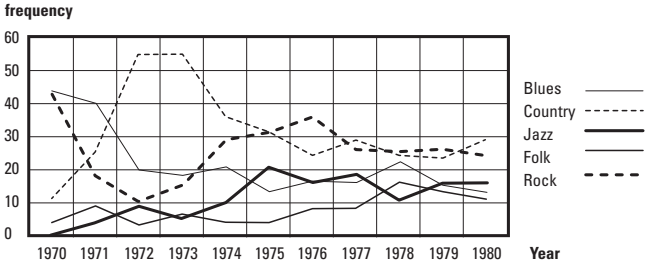
While these are the acts that played most frequently, they still do not suggest the tremendous depth and breadth of the list of artists who played the Armadillo. The Kinks and Blondie shared a bill, as did Joe Ely and the Clash, the Ramones and the Runaways, and Ray Charles and David Allen Coe, to say nothing of George Clinton, Jimmy Cliff, Tom Waits, Tom T. Hall, Iggy Pop, Bette Midler, or Devo. Not all of these performances resonated equally with audiences, which is perhaps why stories of some artists circulate more intensely than others.

Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen at the Armadillo. Photo courtesy South Austin Popular Culture Center.

Frank Zappa looms large in such lore as an artist whose offbeat sensibilities fit well with the venue's self-image, and he returned the favor to Austin audiences by recording his live album *Bongo Fury* at the Armadillo with Captain Beefheart in 1975. Bruce Springsteen also comes up frequently in conversations with those remembering noteworthy concerts in the hall. He turned in a blistering set of performances in the spring of 1974, a pivotal moment in both his own career and that of the Austin music scene. Booked for Friday and Saturday nights, Springsteen quickly endeared himself to the Armadillo audience by appearing a day early when he enthusiastically joined local honky-tonk singer Alvin Crow onstage Thursday night. The experience so excited and exhausted Armadillo audiences that few today claim to remember that the British super-group Genesis played their first and only Armadillo show the Sunday night following Springsteen's Saturday encore.[17]

Though gaps persist in the record thus compiled, at this stage it does help verify certain patterns over time at the Armadillo World Headquarters. These patterns demonstrate much of the life and identity of the place as it fits into the larger narratives of Texas and American music of the 1970s. These patterns suggest a series of propositions, four of which the remainder of this article will briefly elucidate.

First, progressive country did indeed dominate performances at the Armadillo for a period of time in the early 1970s. Based on the calendar, the following graph charts the percentage of several genres' rates of performance on the Armadillo stage over the 1970s.



For example, if an audience member were to walk into the Armadillo World Headquarters on any given night in 1973, there was a 55% chance that he or she would find a country or country-identified act on stage. The preponderance of such acts from 1972 to 1974 would seem to be the most significant fact yielded from the graph, along with the corresponding decline of blues and rock during that period. This moment, then, marks the beginnings of the progressive country scene with which the Armadillo has been most closely identified.[18]

A number of scene narratives date the origins of progressive country to a single performance—that of Willie Nelson at the Armadillo on August 12, 1972.[19] After that night, supposedly, everything fell into place for a distinctive regional country scene to develop. The data substantiate this claim to an extent, as the number of country-identified artists at the Armadillo explodes in the fall of 1972. It should be noted, however, that Nelson's country performance, while an essential catalyst to the developing scene, was not unprecedented on the Armadillo stage. Guy Clark, Jerry Jeff Walker, John Prine, Freda and the Firedogs, Bill Neely, Kenneth Threadgill, and Earl Scruggs had all taken the Armadillo stage prior to Nelson's first appearance, although their repertoires tended to reflect more of a folk or singer-songwriter approach, rather than the "hard" country influences that Willie Nelson brought to the scene.[20]

Armadillo audiences would likely have seen Guy Clark or Marcia Ball as youth culture peers, elevated by their artistry, no doubt, but peers nonetheless—and an Earl Scruggs or Bill Monroe represented a safe, distant, folk past in Appalachia. The modern honky-tonk sensibility that Nelson carried with him, on the other hand, evoked for many the decade's "silent majority," the contemporary white working class, a contingent of Austin portrayed as antagonistic to the university-based youth culture. At the same time, the slippage between folk and country labels for such individuals as Kenneth Threadgill or Jerry Jeff Walker is a reminder that the hybrid nature of progressive country drew on numerous generic conventions. It repackaged and redirected, but did not eclipse, the youth counterculture's enthusiasm for folk, rock, and the blues.

Though Willie Nelson's presence proved catalytic, he by no means anchored the progressive country aesthetic that persisted at the Armadillo. Nelson's relationship with the venue proved to be a relatively short and intense one during the years of 1972 and 1973. Nelson and the Armadillo then endured a falling-out in the wake of Nelson's first picnic over a series of financial, personnel, and firearm-related misunderstandings.[21] In fact, Willie Nelson supported and patronized the nearby Texas Opry House (later renamed the Austin Opry House) as an alternative venue to the Armadillo World Headquarters.[22]

Nelson's split with the Armadillo and the rise of the Opry House draws our attention to the fact that the progressive country phenomenon enabled the success of an array of venues in Austin and across the state. The proportionate decline in country bookings at the Armadillo after 1975 did not necessarily reflect a decline in Austin's interest in country music. Instead, the proliferation of other local venues for progressive country often took away country acts that might have otherwise performed at the Armadillo.

George Majewski and Carlyne Majer's Soap Creek Saloon, for instance, was one of the most popular alternate progressive country venues. Because of artist Kerry Awn's extensive calendars

advertising performances there, we have a near-complete record of the acts that played the Soap Creek stage.[23] This gives us an extensive data set, which can be compared to that compiled for the Armadillo World Headquarters.[24] The acts that played Soap Creek Saloon most frequently are as follows.[25]

Act	Number of Performances
1. Paul Ray and the Cobras	282
2. Alvin Crow	190
3. Greezy Wheels	175
4. Marcia Ball	135
5. Uranium Savages	112
6. Doug Sahm	90
7. Augie Meyers	77
8. Delbert McClinton	74
9. Lewis and the Legends	69
10. Plum Nelly	47
11. Mark Luke Daniels	46
12. Steam Heat/Extreme Heat	42
13. Joe Ely	37
14. Buckdancer's Choice	33
15. Ponty Bone	31
16. The Lotions	30
15. Stevie Ray Vaughan	30
18. The Fabulous Thunderbirds	29
19. Omar and the Howlers	23
20. Jon Emery and the Missouri Valley Boys	22
21. Junior Franklin	21
22. Roky Erickson	20

At first glance, Soap Creek Saloon might seem to have been even more locally and regionally-oriented in its bookings than the Armadillo. Though the 20 acts that played most frequently at both venues were all local or regional, it is also notable that the top five acts at Soap Creek performed a total of nearly 900 evenings, while the top five Armadillo artists only racked up around 400. In total, the Armadillo booked more acts over its decade tenure, but this also meant that a smaller number of local acts logged more stage time at Soap Creek Saloon. A number of factors accounted for this difference between the two venues, including size, national reputation, and cost, all of which go a long way in establishing the two venues' particular roles in the scene.[26]

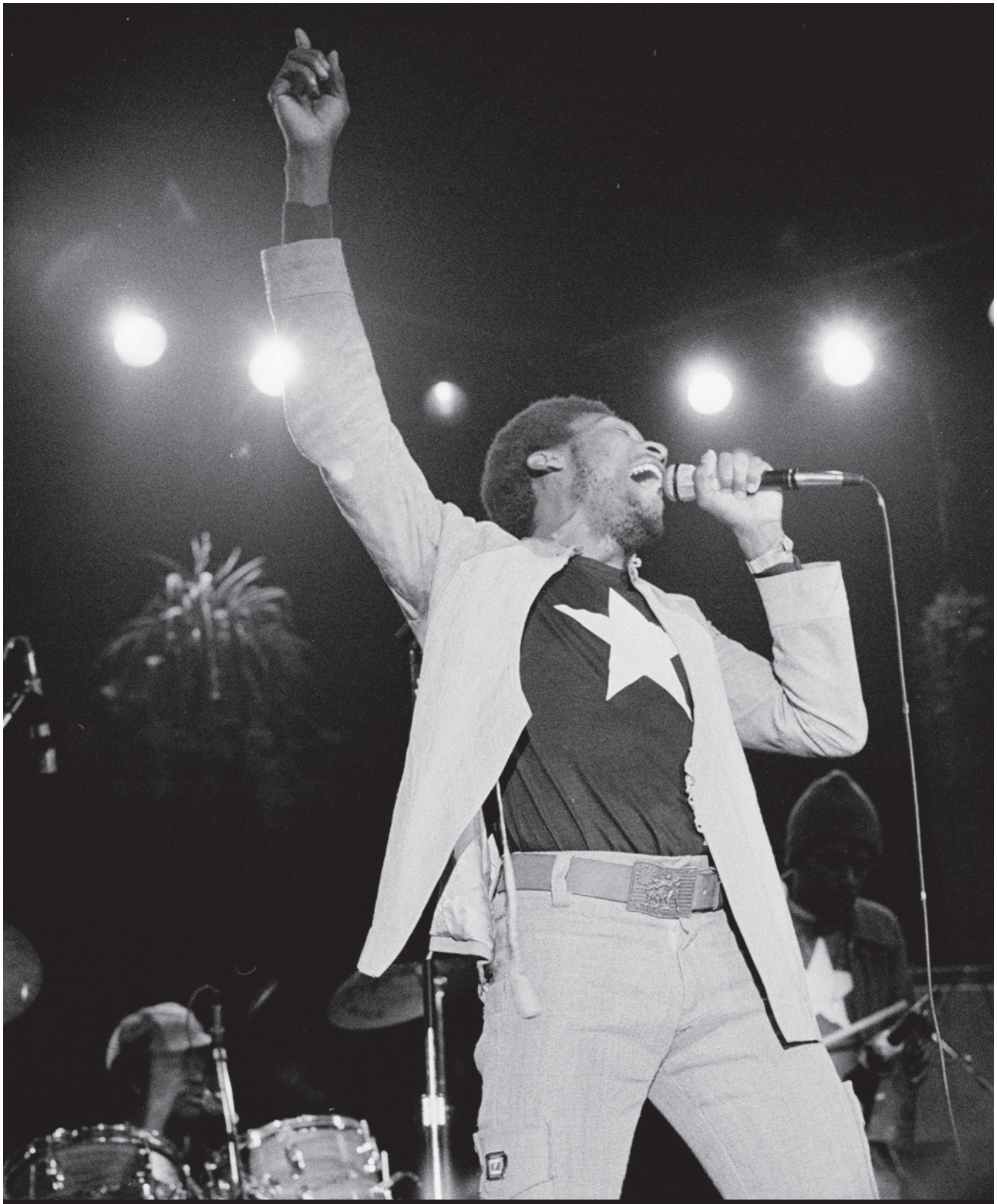
This is not to suggest that national touring acts could not be found at Soap Creek. Albert Collins, Clifton Chenier, and the Meters all put in significant time there. Carl Perkins and Muddy Waters also played the club. However, on the whole, the Armadillo stage tended to act as a kind of connective tissue between Austin's artists and audiences and the larger American music industry, while Soap Creek self-consciously nurtured the local dimensions of progressive country.[27] Finally, while such new venues as Soap Creek spread the progressive country trend broadly across the city's nightlife, the Armadillo World Headquarters continued to diversify its genre offerings.

So, while progressive country declined as the privileged genre at the Armadillo, what arose to act as country's complement? The second main point to be derived from the list of acts to play the Armadillo is a somewhat obvious one that bears repeating nonetheless—progressive country was not alone. Blues preceded country as the dominant genre at the Armadillo, and some variant of psychedelic rock, or at least florid, counter-culturally-inflected rock and roll, provided the venue's lingua franca throughout. These two forms regained much of their stature as the initial wave of progressive country subsided around 1975.

In fact, the Armadillo World Headquarters' status as a countercultural space (the hippie side of the hippie-redneck confluence) dates to the venue's very origins in Texas psychedelia. The core of the venue's early personnel and audience overlapped significantly with the Vulcan Gas Company, and the list of acts to play the Armadillo in 1970 does not look so different from that of the acts playing the Vulcan before it closed earlier that same year. Shiva's Headband, the artists who had been in some ways the Vulcan's house band, served in practically the same role at the Armadillo in 1970 and 1971, playing more than any other act during that period.[28]

The number of artists explicitly identified with late 1960s psychedelia declined over time, but that period's aesthetics, concerns, and musical language remained the primary backdrop for each of the hybrid genres (country-rock, blues-rock, folk-rock, and jazz-rock) that took the Armadillo stage. This observation matters, as the traditional music styles that are often read as the "redneck" side of the hippie-redneck equation frequently encompassed elements of folk-rock or bluegrass that had a broad audience in the American counterculture, rather than the hard country that actually had quite limited representation in the Armadillo scene.

In the same vein, blues also preceded country as a dominant genre at the Armadillo World Headquarters. Here, too, the Armadillo built on countercultural foundations laid by the Vulcan Gas Company. At that venue, African-American blues acts included James Cotton, Sleepy John Estes, John Lee Hooker, Lightnin' Hopkins, Freddie King, Mance Lipscomb,



Jimmy Cliff at the Armadillo World Headquarters.
Photo courtesy of Coke Dilworth Collection in The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin.

Lee Clayton, Willie Nelson, and Billy Joe Shaver at the Armadillo, circa 1973. Photo courtesy South Austin Popular Culture Center.

Fred McDowell, Jimmy Reed, Big Mama Thornton, Muddy Waters, and Big Joe Williams. In fact, after regional psychedelic and blues-rock acts, these blues performers easily rate among the artists most frequently appearing there. What first distinguished the experimental bent of the Armadillo was its addition of country-inflected music to this mix of blues and psychedelia. Indeed, perceptions of a shift from a blues-oriented to a country-oriented mode of performance over 1973 and 1974 in the eyes of local, white blues artists contributed directly to Clifford Antone's founding of a downtown club explicitly for blues acts in 1975.[29]

Prior to the progressive country explosion, though, the Armadillo had served as a regional node of the blues revival, picking up where the Vulcan left off and developing ongoing relationships with such Texas artists as Lightnin' Hopkins, Robert Shaw, Mance Lipscomb, and Freddie King. Al "TNT" Braggs, Lowell Fulson, Etta James, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and Big Joe Turner, too, put in appearances in the early years. These musicians served as mentors for aspiring white blues artists in the local audience, including Paul Ray and the Cobras, Storm, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, the Nightcrawlers, and various other acts that comprised the early careers of such notable white blues players as Doyle Bramhall, Denny Freeman, and Jimmie and Stevie Ray Vaughan. Even as the blues scene sprouted rival centers of gravity in venues such as Antone's and the One Knite, blues performance remained at a fairly stable level on par with the level of country-influenced performance through most of the Armadillo's history.

A third conclusion to be derived from the calendar of performances at the Armadillo is that, by decade's end, the Armadillo World Headquarters became the Central Texas hub of jazz performance. The discrepancy between the common perception of who performed at the Armadillo and the list of acts that actually did is perhaps most evident when it comes to jazz, a genre not typically associated with the club or with the larger Austin scene at the time. Yet jazz played a major role in the Armadillo's middle and later years. Typically, participants explain this with the change in the venue's leadership. The club's ongoing financial troubles convinced Eddie Wilson to leave in 1976, and he turned over management to Hank Alrich.

Alrich, a musician himself, had a deep and abiding interest in both classic and avant-garde jazz forms and immediately began booking major jazz acts. However, the rise in jazz performance did not occur out of thin air, nor was it due solely to Alrich's personal taste. In fact, jazz performance spiked a year earlier, in 1975. Over the course of that year, a number of young artists began to embellish their rock performances with jazz aesthetics, leaning more heavily on improvisational passages and horn sections in ways that straddled the line between jazz and funk. Local bands that played together on bills and hewed to this developing jazz-rock or fusion aesthetic included Cool Breeze, Eric Johnson's Electromagnets, the Jazzmanian Devils, the Point, Starcrost, Steam Heat (later Extreme Heat), and 47 Times Its Own Weight, many of whom joined the roster of Michael Mordecai's Fable Records. The presence of this scene lent weight to Alrich's later decision to book more jazz acts and suggests a consistent, though admittedly small, audience for jazz.

After 1976, the calendar positively sparkles with jazz performance, including such legends as Count Basie, French violinist Stephane Grapelli, Sonny Rollins, and Charles Mingus, along with the pop jazz of Chuck Mangione and the kind of jazz rock associated with such progressive rock bands as Blood, Sweat, and Tears and Nova. Bookings even extended to the more difficult reaches of free jazz and jazz fusion with John

McLaughlin, Pat Metheny, Old and New Dreams, and Weather Report.[30] Alrich recalls that the Armadillo became one of the few venues between the coasts to book many of these artists: "When Carla Bley toured, Armadillo World Headquarters was the only Carla Bley Big Band gig between New York City and the West Coast scene…. I brought artists that nobody else in Texas brought. When I booked Pat Metheny, almost nobody outside the Northeast knew who he was."[31] The presence of a jazz contingent among the Armadillo performers is surprising, in part, because it departs from the pastoralist romance that drew the Texan and American counterculture to both country and the blues.

On closer examination, though, the counterculture's attraction to jazz makes sense and brings us to the final point to be derived from the calendar of acts to perform at the Armadillo World Headquarters. Common aesthetics join the performance of each of these generic forms by the Austin counterculture, whether at the Vulcan, Soap Creek Saloon, the Armadillo, or any of the myriad musical venues that sprouted across Texas during the 1970s. This article has gone to great lengths to distinguish among the genres popular in the Austin music scene over the decade of the 1970s. However, the countercultural interpretation of each of these (country, blues, rock, folk, jazz) rested in a parallel coupling of written expression to improvisation and sincere performance to technical brilliance. In this regard, the Austin scene exhibited qualities then characteristic of the broader field of popular music in the 1970s.

To place Willie Nelson's performance of "Bloody Mary Morning" on the *Austin City Limits* pilot episode alongside Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart's "Muffin Man" from *Bongo Fury* and next to the live tracks from Freddie King's *Larger than Life* recorded at the Armadillo, is to begin to understand something of the structural and performative similarities that belied the stylized poses of genre performance in the 1970s. Each was true, in a sense, to its genre, whether country or rock or blues, but their shared audience at the Armadillo should be no mystery. As native Texan (and former member of the highly successful band,

Interior of the Armadillo. Photo by Jim Richardson. Courtesy South Austin Popular Culture Center.

The Monkees) Michael Nesmith predicted in Jan Reid's seminal study of progressive country, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, "'There's another coming trend…. The development of music music, instead of country music, rhythm-and-blues music and so forth. The lines are becoming very cloudy, very obscure.'"[32]

The Austin scene's larger contribution to the national narratives of the 1970s lay in these artists' attempts to bridge and combine genres in ways that would sketch a future "Americana" field, with one eye toward collective tradition and another toward individual experiment and expression. The celebrated union of "hippies" and "rednecks" at the Armadillo can too easily be overplayed, but this is the larger kernel of truth from which it developed. The counterculture's quest for authentic, experimental expression made its peace with the traditional forms of Texas music and saw in them something valuable, aesthetically pleasing, instructive, and, well, fun.

In conclusion, the true story of the Armadillo World Headquarters is a good deal more complex than the prevailing mythology of its being primarily the birthplace of progressive country. By taking a more comprehensive look at the diverse artists and musical styles that appeared at the Armadillo throughout its ten-year history, we can see just how important a role the venue played in the larger music scene beyond just the development of progressive country. It is also clear that, while progressive country percolated up out of Austin's larger live music scene (including Soap Creek Saloon and other venues), the Armadillo provided the most high-profile arena, in which the diverse elements of progressive country came together to reach the largest audiences in Austin and beyond. To recognize the aesthetic commonalities of country, blues, rock, folk, and jazz performance at the Armadillo (which were grounded in improvisation, hybridity, and technical virtuosity tempered with an appreciation of raw and vital spontaneity) provides a starting point for further examination of the mythology and popular perceptions so often attached to the study of regional music subcultures.[33] ★

Notes

1 The City of Austin website includes information about the history and marketing strategy behind the title "Live Music Capital of the World," http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/music/default.htm.

2 A number of writers have documented the Armadillo World Headquarters and the 1970s progressive country phenomenon in Texas music. Book-length treatments include Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); and Joe Nick Patoski, *Willie Nelson: An Epic Life* (New York: Little, Brown, 2008). See also Clifford Endres, *Austin City Limits* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); David Lawrence Menconi, "Music, Media, and the Metropolis: The Case of Austin's Armadillo World Headquarters," M. J. Thesis, the University of Texas at Austin, 1981; John Wheat, "Armadillo World Headquarters," in Roy Barkley, ed., *The Handbook of Texas Music*, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), 7; Cory Lock, "Counterculture Cowboys: Progressive Country of the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of Texas Music History* Spring 3:1 (2003): 14-23; Alan Turley, *Music in the City: A History of Austin Music* (Cedar Park: Duckling Press, 2000); Travis D. Stimeling, "¡Viva Terlingua!: Jerry Jeff Walker, Live Recordings, and the Authenticity of Progressive Country Music" *Journal of Texas Music History* 8 (2008): 20-33.

3 I use the terms "hippie" and "redneck" here primarily in the colloquial, contemporary usage of the 1970s. As such, "hippie" denotes members of the largely white, largely middle-class, youth counterculture born of the social upheaval of the 1960s, and "redneck" refers to the politically and socially conservative white working-class of the American South. However, the social differences that this binary purports to describe often break down under closer examination, and the mythic coming together of "hippies" and "rednecks" in Austin actually gestures toward a much more complex tale of class mobility, changing perspectives on race and ethnicity, partisan realignment in the political sphere, and the insistence upon regional distinctions in the nation amidst rapid suburbanization during the 1970s. The new historiography of the American South, as presented by Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), is useful in tracing these changes.

4 The *Texas Music Matters* program on KUT 90.5 FM (Austin's NPR affiliate) is undertaking a major oral history project, which involves interviewing and documenting the experiences of hundreds of musicians, staff, and audience members from the Armadillo World Headquarters. Forthcoming memoirs, including one by Eddie Wilson, promise to bring to light new research and firsthand experiences that will advance our understanding of the period. An early manuscript version of Wilson's work greatly informs this article.

5 Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 16, 75. Shank also equates Willie Nelson's celebrity with the venue as the individual who "could embody and project the meaning of the Armadillo."

6 Burton Wilson with Jack Ortman, *The Austin Music Scene Through the Lens of Burton Wilson, 1965-1994* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2001) and Larry Willoughby, *Texas Rhythm, Texas Rhyme: A Pictorial History of Texas Music* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1984) both provide especially good photographic documentation of the 1970s music scene in Austin and at the Armadillo.

7 The place of memory in Texas historiography and identity has been addressed cogently in the introductory essay to *Lone Star Pasts: Memory and History in Texas*, Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner, eds., (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2007), 1-14. For more on the fluid dynamics of public memory and musical culture, see Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Aaron A. Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*, (Duke University Press, 2004); and Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

8 Early on, Wilson split the ownership of the Armadillo World Headquarters among eight individuals: himself, Genie Wilson, Mike Tolleson, Jim Franklin, Bobby Hedderman, Hank Alrich, Carlotta Pankratz, and Mike Harr. Tolleson recalls that the day-to-day decisions in this early period were made primarily by Wilson, Hedderman, and himself, with contributions by Jim Franklin and Spencer Perskin. Eddie Wilson, "Armadillo World Headquarters: A Good Time in Austin, Texas" (unpublished manuscript, 2003), 33, 41.

9 Jennifer Lynn Richmond, "Iconographic Analysis of the Armadillo and Cosmic Imagery within Art Associated with the Armadillo World Headquarters," M.A. Thesis, University of North Texas, 2006.

10 For more on the cultural politics of 1960s Austin, see Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) and Daryl Janes, ed., *No Apologies: Texas Radicals Celebrate the '60s* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1992).

11 Powell St. John, interview by author, September 11, 2008. St. John also participated in the Threadgill's folk music scene of the early to mid-1960s, in which folk, country, and blues musicians gathered at Kenneth Threadgill's bar in North Austin to socialize and play together. As part

of St. John's band, The Waller Creek Boys, Janis Joplin made some of her first public appearances at Threadgill's. For more on this, see Alice Echols, *Scars of Sweet Paradise: The Life and Times of Janis Joplin* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1999) and Gary Hartman, *The History of Texas Music* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 209-212. Since the Threadgill's scene pre-dated both the Vulcan Gas Company and the Armadillo by several years, it could be argued that the rhetoric of a "hippie-redneck cultural confluence" actually began well before these two venues were established. For example, Roger Leinert's article "Celebration for Western Musician Becomes Fun-Filled Minifestival," *Daily Texan*, July 16, 1970, p. 12a, mentions that the audience at a birthday celebration for Kenneth Threadgill just weeks before the Armadillo opened was a "blend of longhairs and rednecks, cowboys and businessmen."

12 Wilson, "Armadillo World Headquarters," 32. Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 59-62.

13 Leea Mechling of the South Austin Popular Culture Center (and formerly of the Armadillo World Headquarters) has been invaluable in tracking down much of this documentation, as has the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. See especially the "Armadillo World Headquarters Archive, 1971-1980," housed at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

14 The days of the week in which the Armadillo World Headquarters staged performances changed over the years. At first, the venue held concerts mainly on Fridays and Saturdays, but this expanded to an occasional six-day-a-week schedule by the mid-1970s.

15 The margin of error owes to the vagaries of the venue's advertising budget, cancellation of planned concerts, gaps in the archival record, and clerical errors in the dating of photographs, the execution of artist contracts, etc. Taken together, these may prevent these numbers from being exact, but it is not likely that they will change the overall patterns observed.

16 Michael Allen discusses the "cosmic cowboy" confluence in the San Francisco Bay scene in "'I Just Wanna Be a Cosmic Cowboy': Hippies, Cowboy Code, and the Culture of the Counterculture," *The Western Historical Quarterly* Autumn 2005, http://www.historycooperative.org/cgi-bin/justtop.cgi?act=justtop&url=http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/whq/36.3/allen.html (accessed April 4, 2008). Southern rock needs further scholarly examination, but Mike Butler's "'Luther Was a Good Ole Boy': The Southern Rock Movement and White Male Identity in the Post-Civil Rights South," *Popular Music and Society* 23 (1999): 41-61, and Barbara Ching's "Where Has the Free Bird Flown? Lynyrd Skynyrd and White Southern Manhood," in Trent Watts, ed., *White Masculinity in the Recent South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2008) provide a solid beginning. British journalist Peter Doggett has also explored these musical connections in his *Are You Ready for the Country? Elvis, Dylan, Parsons, and the Roots of Country Rock* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

17 Wilson, "Armadillo World Headquarters," 173-174.

18 Of the various labels critics applied to the music contemporaneously, KOKE-FM's formatting of "progressive country" seems most prevalent throughout the scholarship. The terms "redneck rock" and "cosmic cowboy" remain associated most with their authors (Jan Reid and Michael Martin Murphey, respectively), though both men have disavowed the applicability of the terms to a wider field of music. The proponents of "outlaw" elaborate on the label in Michael Bane, *The Outlaws: Revolution in Country Music* (New York: Doubleday, 1978) and Chet Flippo, "Outlaws Willie and Waylon" in *Everybody Was Kung-Fu Dancing: Chronicles of the Lionizzed and Notorious* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). For a discussion of the significant differences between the progressive country and outlaw country labels, see Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 174.

19 For reflections on Nelson's central place in the scene's imagined coherence, see Larry L. King, "The Great Willie Nelson Commando Hoo-Ha and Texas Brain Fry," *Playboy* (November 1976): 100-102, 108, 206-210, and William Martin, "Growing Old at Willie Nelson's Picnic," *Texas Monthly* (October 1974). For a look at Waylon Jennings as a central performative figure, see Nicholas Spitzer, "'Bob Wills Is Still the King': Romantic Regionalism and Convergent Culture in Central Texas," *John Edwards Memorial Quarterly* 11:40 (1975): 191-196.

20 I use the term "hard" country to describe this honky-tonk style and its Southern, working-class themes along the lines developed by Peterson in *Creating Country Music:* 138, 144-150, as well as Barbara Ching in *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-21, and Fox in *Real Country:*. In Ching's estimation, the 1970s was a key decade in the articulation of the hard country aesthetic, and, indeed, the outlaw country movement's Austin connections suggest a higher proportion of such performances on the Armadillo stage. By 1976, however, the Armadillo had diversified its offerings far beyond the country field, and the artists who packaged themselves as outlaws tended to take the stage at the nearby Opry House, rather than at the Armadillo.

21 Patoski, *Willie Nelson*, 269.

22 Ibid, 283, 310-311. Willie Nelson and Tim O'Connor later became even more invested in the Texas Opry House, taking control and renaming it the Austin Opry House in 1975.

23 From 1974 to early 1979, Soap Creek Saloon was located just west of Zilker Park off of Bee Cave Road. From 1979 to 1981, it relocated to far North Lamar Boulevard, and from 1982 to 1985 was located on South Congress Avenue.

24 See the "Soap Creek Saloon Archives, 1966-1985" at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. The Soap Creek Saloon poster collection is missing items from a period of about one year (summer 1983 to summer 1984). Furthermore, the Soap Creek material has not yet been cross-referenced with business records, concert reviews, and photographs to the extent that the Armadillo records have.

25 As with the Armadillo, I have consolidated artists who fronted several bands. For example, Marcia Ball's tally incorporates her performances with Freda and the Firedogs and the Bronco Brothers. Likewise, both Doug Sahm and Augie Meyers are credited with most of the Sir Douglas Quintet bookings. On the other hand, Stevie Ray Vaughan is credited here for his later work as front man or co-front man (Triple Threat, Double Trouble), but not necessarily for all of the earlier bands with which he appeared.

26 Eddie Wilson says size was the determining factor, since the Armadillo needed to consistently fill a much larger space in order to sustain itself, and national touring acts proved the most viable means of doing so.

27 Again, these represent tendencies, not an absolute set of distinctions. It is worth noting that two movies that packaged the Austin scene for national audiences, *Outlaw Blues* and *Roadie*, included scenes that were filmed at Soap Creek.

28 My initial attempts to build a similar record of performances at the Vulcan Gas Company during its tenure from 1967 to 1970 suggest that Shiva's Headband played a prominent role there similar to the stature of Greezy Wheels at the Armadillo or the Cobras at Soap Creek, with their 88 performances equaling more than twice that of the act that followed them, Conqueroo, with only around 40 appearances. Through an examination of posters and handbills from the Vulcan, it appears that the only other acts to play over 20 times were New Atlantis, Bubble Puppy, and Johnny Winter. Aside from the blues artists, only a handful of non-Texan national touring acts of stature played the Vulcan, including the Fugs, Moby Grape, Canned Heat, Poco, and the Velvet Underground.

29 Joe Nick Patoski and Bill Crawford, *Stevie Ray Vaughan: Caught in the Crossfire* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 91-99.

30 For a focused profile of an artist that also serves as an introduction to the vibrant and multiform jazz scenes of the 1970s, see Steven Pond, *Head Hunters: The Making of Jazz's First Platinum Album* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

31 Hank Alrich, e-mail correspondence with author, May 13, 2010.

32 Reid, *Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 118. This reflected a common line of thinking in the period. See also A. R. Gunter, "Musical 'Boundaries' Disappearing," *Daily Texan*, December 7, 1972, p. 14, and A. R. Gunter, "Country-Rock Stirs Social Mix," *Daily Texan*, December 8, 1972, p. 15.