**Country Music in the Rock Era**

A restless younger generation *was* ready, however, and they defected in droves to rockabilly and rock & roll, depriving mainstream country music of many great talents and much of its audience and commercial network. The challenge of rock & roll and the overpowering legacy of Hank Williams made a change of direction necessary for country music's survival. In the late-fifties a new "Nashville Sound" emerged, crafted mainly by producers Chet Atkins and Owen Bradley, who dispensed with the traditional trappings of fiddles, steel guitars and country twangs in favor of a more pop-oriented sound sweetened by strings, choirs, pop-style refrains and polished productions. Eddy Arnold, Faron Young, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Marty Robbins, Jim Reeves, Conway Twitty, Patsy Cline and several other country singers managed to cross over into the pop mainstream while retaining a country base, though a notable few, such as George Jones, Lefty Frizzell and Ray Price, stayed true to the honky-tonks and the legacy of Hank Williams (though even George Jones felt obliged to give rockabilly a try).

After H.W. some country artists move to pop influences.

The purist honky-tonk sound of Buck Owens and Merle Haggard made Bakersfield, California, a prominent alternative to Nashville in the 1960's, an era that saw further country inroads into the mainstream, including the pop success of Roger Miller ("King of the Road," "Dang Me") and Johnny Cash and Glen Campbell, who both had broad enough appeal to land their own television shows at the end of the decade. Television also helped keep traditional, hardcore country alive in the 1960's: *The Wilburn Brothers Show*, *The Porter Wagoner Show*, *Hee Haw* and other popular shows mixed great music with cornball humor that resurrected the unfortunate "hillbilly" images from the past and reflected country music's ambivalent attitude toward change. Tammy Wynette's 1968 hit, "Stand By Your Man," captured country's prevailing conservative winds, although her success did nudge the country establishment further along in its grudging acceptance of female artists.

The genre moves in many directions. Lots of changes of TV.

Country music clung to an increasingly romanticized image rooted in a rapidly dying rural culture—in sharp contrast to the blues, which expressed no such nostalgia about the harsh realities of the past. The country audience was at the opposite end of the spectrum from the rock counterculture in the 1960's, when issues like the Vietnam War and the civil rights struggle polarized the country. It was something of a shock, then, when Bob Dylan released an album in 1969 called *Nashville Skyline*, which featured straightforward country stylings and duets with Johnny Cash. Dylan, the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, Poco, Gram Parsons and the Flying Burrito Brothers were at the forefront of rock's incorporation of country styles, which paved the way for the highly successful California "country rock" of Linda Ronstadt, the Eagles and other seventies superstars. Back in the South, the Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Charlie Daniels, the Marshall Tucker Band and others fashioned an updated blend of guitar-based country, blues and boogie, while a group of self-styled country "outlaws"—led by Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Hank Williams, Jr., and Jerry Jeff Walker—turned Austin, Texas into a renegade outpost with a rock-derived sound and lifestyle and singer-songwriter sensibilities that were an open rebellion against the conservative Nashville hierarchy and the stranglehold of Nashville's all-powerful producers and publishers.

Split btwn California country-blues + Texas outlaw-country.

The *Grand Ole Opry* moved from its traditional home in downtown Nashville's Ryman Auditorium to a new "Opryland" theme park outside of town in 1974. The change was an apt metaphor for the direction country music was taking. Kenny Rogers

and Dolly Parton led country's crossover assault on the pop mainstream in the 1970's, with a smooth "countrypolitan" sound and an image bland enough for the seventies mainstream, where pop and watered-down country mingled easily enough for middle-of-the-road entertainers like John Denver, Anne Murray and Olivia Newton-John to be passed off as "country." In reaction, the 1980's saw a revival of traditional country styles that overlapped with the similarly inspired "roots rock" movement. Ricky Scaggs, Dwight Yoakam, George Strait, Clint Black, Randy Travis and other "New Traditionalists" fashioned modern images with retro-country styles, while veterans like George Jones and Johnny Cash found their styles back in fashion and their audience bigger than ever.

The lines between rock, pop and country have been thoroughly blurred, with Garth Brooks outselling Michael Jackson and country earmarks such as fiddles and steel guitars woven into rock songs as naturally as blues licks. (The country-roots sound was popularized by John Mellencamp in the mid-1980's and was widely adopted as a badge of musical honesty in the age of synthesizers and sampling.) Rock fans, especially older ones unable to relate to rap or heavy metal, have embraced country's reassuring emphasis on adult emotions and straightforward singing and songwriting, while country fans matter-of-factly claim rock & roll as their own and don't miss a beat when a country band breaks into "Johnny B. Goode" or "Honky Tonk Women."

Country music and the blues have both moved well beyond their traditional audience: country threatens to be more popular than pop, while upscale white babyboomers seem to be the core audience for blues these days. Nonetheless, both country music and the blues still derive much of their appeal from a sense of tradition and continuity and respect for their proud heritage. The indigenous styles of two "outsider" cultures, blacks and poor southern whites, the blues and country once spoke to and for a specific audience, reflecting the reality of their lives and hopes, dreams and values. As "folk" music in the broadest sense, the honest, direct expression of both styles was a stark contrast to the changing whims and mass-marketed blandness that characterized most popular entertainment.

? bro is anti-white I mean. Insufferable.

Rock & roll rendered meaningless any remaining distinctions between "folk" and "popular" music (just as, a decade later, *Sgt. Pepper* and other lofty achievements blurred the line between "popular" and "fine" art). Rock fought its battles on the pop charts and its success there was its great victory and the requisite foundation for its power as a cultural force. It gained its emotional urgency and sense of communal empowerment, however, from having America's two great folk styles as its spiritual parents, and the blues and country music remain a source of renewal and inspiration to which rock periodically returns to stake its own claim to authenticity.