

n'est pas questionné comme construction, même si l'étude des communautés roumaines en émigration en propose tacitement un dépassement, à la fois dans la perspective transnationale de la migration et dans la quasi-absence de référence à l'État-Nation. On peut enfin regretter l'absence d'études couvrant les régions asiatiques et océaniques, sachant combien les politiques patrimoniales du Japon et de la Corée du Sud (par exemple) ont influencé les réflexions de l'Unesco sur le patrimoine culturel immatériel.

Pour résumer donc, voici un ouvrage dynamique et porteur, enraciné dans des expériences de terrain solides, dont on aurait pour certaines apprécié un plus grand approfondissement conceptuel, mais qui laisse présumer du meilleur pour ces jeunes chercheurs qui viennent indéniablement enrichir le champ des études sur le patrimoine. 🍁

## RÉFÉRENCES

- Amselle, Jean-Loup. 2001. *Branchements. Anthropologie de l'universalité des cultures*. Paris : Flammarion.
- Friedman, Jonathan. 1994. *Cultural Identity and Global Process*. Londres : Sage.

### **Austin City Limits: A History.**

2014. Tracey E. W. Laird. New York: Oxford University Press. 224 pp.

GILLIANTURNBULL  
Ryerson University

*Austin City Limits* is, by any standard definition, an institution. The television show began broadcasting in 1974 as a local program supporting the progressive country scene of Austin. Over its 40-year history, *Austin City Limits* has dominated public broadcasting in the US, at times redefining PBS's programming practices and drawing in new audiences, while maintaining its musical eclecticism and independent spirit. Its influence is perhaps far beyond what could be expected of a live music broadcast: spin-off festivals like South by Southwest and *ACL's* own are only two examples of its long-ranging effect. But it is unlikely *ACL* could have been produced anywhere else: it captured the essence of the emerging Austin musical ethos, decidedly non-commercial and resistant to homogenization. Now elevated to legendary status, the city has a mythical reputation among listeners and musicians alike, due in no small part to the television program.

Critics and scholars have examined the city and its music in multiple ways, highlighting, for example, its function as a starting point for new artists in the alt-country and Americana genres, or a retreat for musicians chewed up by the new country machine of Nashville (Hinton 2003). Others such as Ching (2001) and Hill (2002) have explored the movement of progressive forms of country to the city, and how this music manifested not unproblematic expressions of a dom-

ineering masculinity (Ching and Fox 2008). Still other authors, like Amanda Petrusich (2008), have investigated the discourse around genres labelled as roots, and how they tie to a manufactured identity offered up by places like Austin. But since the full-length concert format of *ACL* is unusual, there are few texts that explore this type of broadcast and the long-term effect it has had on Austin.

In *Austin City Limits: A History*, Tracey Laird documents the show's history, development, and contribution to American music; what began as a show focusing on roots and country music expanded over the years to include a wide genre spectrum. Her task is a difficult one: as a show that bridged audiences and shifted contemporary perceptions about the role of public broadcasting, *ACL* could be the jumping-off point for a variety of discussions. The music is certainly not the least of these: since the program embraced independent artists and genre diversity, it brought to national attention many musicians who might have otherwise remained under the radar. Moreover, *ACL* was not hampered by its southern locale; rather than programming exclusively non-Nashville country acts (a sort of identifier, if not rallying cry, for Austin-based musicians), it expanded its reach to include contemporary pop, rock, soul, and blues artists, particularly those revered for strong songwriting or an unconventional approach.

Laird explores this trajectory of *ACL*'s music programming, alongside a number of other factors that guided the show's development throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. *Austin City Limits: A History* is therefore organized by theme rather than chronologically, highlighting the various

disciplines that ground it. Combining archival research with ethnography, Laird explores the program's creation, development, reception, and expansion through a variety of perspectives.

The book weaves present-day scenes from tapings of *ACL* into a historically-based narrative that focuses on the principal characters and musicians that made it happen. Of critical importance is Bill Arhos, the show's creator, and Terry Lickona, producer, with whom Laird spoke extensively. Laird also uses archival material from her informants, which includes source documents detailing the fight for ongoing funding, appeals to viewers and national program directors, and press releases outlining the show's goals and programming plans.

A notable strength of *Austin City Limits: A History* is the focus on the media landscape in which *ACL* has operated. Laird problematizes the expectations that existed around viewership, advertising, and regionalism in *ACL*'s early days, noting that "the show . . . wrestled with the hard-to-shake conventional wisdom that media require clear definitions to succeed . . . Viewers, then, should be less interested in keeping tabs on Austin's live music scene than in seeing a program that fit their preconceived expectations" (71). Laird works backwards from *ACL*'s recent branding efforts to demonstrate that this kind of program cannot rely solely on viewership to generate the needed income to continue its production—its status among musicians and the expectations of the audience demand it retain the sophisticated quality of its counterparts even if it continues to generate a sense of community between artist and listeners. In other words, *ACL*, like any other mainstream music broad-

cast, depends on corporate sponsorship and high-level production, but as she notes with the counter-example of *Sessions at West 54<sup>th</sup>*, has survived by avoiding the overly glossy, fast-paced nature of these programs.

Laird's ethnography is rounded out by her time spent on set, allowing her to document in detail the planning, recording, producing, mixing, and broadcasting practices of the technical staff. Augmenting this material with interview quotes and photographs, she makes a case for the rare place *ACL* occupies in contemporary television, in particular with its attention to sound design and post-production mixing (56-58). But this was not limited to the show's broadcast: *ACL* hired photographers who became well known for their work on the show (60-65), and furthered the *ACL*'s multimedia presence by offering single songs for viewing online (115-17).

Of principal concern is the music. From Willie Nelson to the Dixie Chicks; the Dave Matthews Band to Gretchen Wilson; as wide-ranging as Ray Charles, K'Naan, Mos Def, The Decemberists, and Tom Waits, *ACL* doesn't have an overtly apparent mandate in its programming. It battled with terms like "roots" and "Americana," both of which enabled the show's directors to showcase otherwise unrelated acts. Such terms ended up sticking long after *ACL* used slogans like "Where Music Lives" to signify a move away from traditional genres, resulting in a further entrenchment of the roots identity on the city. While she does not offer in-depth musical analysis of the acts discussed, preferring instead to focus on the programming dilemmas her consultants faced, Laird does

offer genre categories for the artists under investigation that align with the groupings used in each era of the show's broadcast. For example, the show's early years were dominated by regional, "progressive" country acts like Larry Gatlin, Townes van Zandt, and Doug Sahm, but later years expanded the programming to include any act that might be deemed as artistically sound, whether for strong songwriting, an independent ethos, or being stylistically innovative. Indeed, innovation seems to play a key role in programming decisions: Laird frames the show's location as being the meeting place of traditional country and innovative musical experimentation (37), with the diverse cultural atmosphere of the southwestern US engendering exchange. Although mainstream country acts like the Dixie Chicks and Gretchen Wilson are part of the *ACL* lineup, the combination of the show's filming locale and its presence on PBS shifted programming towards lesser-known artists at times, or those who offered musical fusion, political commentary, or a return to older forms of country, blues, and folk. Perhaps the ultimate achievement of the book is her ability to position Austin as an entity in itself, not only encompassing the eclecticism of the music and the viewers represented by *ACL*, but operating as a symbol or fixed set of beliefs about non-commercial music.

Underpinning the discussion is Laird's clear admiration for the programming decisions made for *ACL* as well as her clear preference for the genres favoured by the show. Generally, this is a beneficial perspective, as it lends her authority on the music covered; however, at times, it can detract from what could potentially

be a more objective lens on particular issues. Laird seems to celebrate *ACL*'s decision to avoid less commercial acts in favour of independent ones; while such a decision no doubt anchors the city's musical identity, it assumes the division of new and alternative forms of country lies only in the minds of non-Nashvillians. Though the Austin scene sprang up largely in response to the increasing commercial orientation of music created in Nashville, Nashville's output of late signals the existence of a much more diverse scene. Laird does bring into question Austin's unabashed development of an entertainment district and venues or events that draw some of the biggest commercial acts in contemporary music, framing her discussion with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, which allows for contradictory understandings of the role art might play in the city.

Of equal concern is the positioning of *ACL* as a fresh injection into public broadcasting, which unproblematically suggests the "elitist," dull educational programming practices of PBS no longer have a role in contemporary television. This leaves out the possibility that *ACL* functions as a new form of elitism, wherein noncommercial musics are seen as the preference of a middle-aged, educated, white, middle-class viewer and not for the consumption of mainstream television audiences.

Nevertheless, Laird focuses her exploration primarily on the factors that led to the show's maturity and success, all of which are important in discussing any modern production such as this. Competition for public funding is at a premium, and a show like *ACL* must maintain exceptional programming and a certain

cultural cachet in order to receive any, whether government- or donor-derived. Laird's text comes at a time when we are questioning the relevance of the full-length concert on television, as media preferences and consumption patterns shift. At the same time, subscription services like Netflix are offering extensive listings of music documentaries, while high-quality concert films are available on YouTube. Yet it is exactly this focused, lengthy, and sophisticated production that seems to draw viewers in, making *Austin City Limits* a space where the exchange of musical exceptionalism, grassroots support, and cultural capital seems both normal and everyday. 🍀

#### REFERENCES

- Ching, Barbara. 2001. *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Ching, Barbara and Pamela Fox, eds. 2008. *Old Routes, New Routes: The Cultural Politics of Alt. Country Music*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Hill, Trent. 2002. Why Isn't Country Music "Youth" Culture? in *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*, 161-90. Ed. Roger Beebe, Denise Fullbrook, and Ben Saunders. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hinton, Brian. 2003. *South By Southwest: A Guide to Alternative Country Music*. London: Sanctuary.
- Petrusich, Amanda. 2008. *It Still Moves: Lost Songs, Lost Highways, and the Search for the Next American Music*. New York: Faber and Faber.