



The Festival of Texas Fiddling
A 501(c)(3) Non-profit
Texasfiddle.org

The Texas Fiddle and Dance Symposium
at the
9th Annual Festival of Texas Fiddling
Dec 1-2, 2023

Thanks for coming to the Texas Fiddle and Dance Symposium at the 8th Annual Festival of Texas Fiddling, sponsored by Humanities Texas.

This is a short description of the symposium and an introduction to the styles of fiddling you are hearing today. This brief guide is intended to complement and contextualize the stories you are hearing from the stages and throughout the sessions today.

What is Texas Fiddling?

Texas music is fiddle music. Texas has the most diverse array of fiddle styles of any state in the Union. The Texas Fiddle and Dance Symposium is designed to present a comprehensive sample of the unique styles and traditions of fiddling from across the many regions and ethnic cultures of the state. This event combines scholarly presentations from an interdisciplinary array of humanities scholars of Texas music, dance, and dance halls with showcase concerts and instrument workshops as a means of examining, preserving, and celebrating the diversity and uniqueness of Texas fiddling.

The fiddle has a central role in the history, cultural diversity, and overall richness of Texas music and dance traditions. Only Texas boasts such a diverse array of fiddle styles and tunes, many of which are shared across cultures as they have been adapted to different tastes, such as the way

the Mexican tune “Jesusita en Chihuahua” was transformed into the country standard “Jessie Polka.” Texas also has a wide array of historic dance halls in small towns and rural areas across the state which historically featured music played on the fiddle as the principal instrument. Most of these halls were built by German and Czech immigrants for social gatherings starting in the nineteenth century. There is also a robust tradition of Tejano platforms and dance halls in South Texas. No other state has this extensive network of halls or the diverse dance hall culture that flourished in them.

The fiddle is one of the most common instruments in the wide variety of music played by the many immigrant groups that have come in waves to the state over the history of Texas. Fiddle-based music styles in turn dominated the music played in historic Texas dance halls. Fiddling has long provided the soundtrack of all manner of public events, weddings, and other happenings for diverse groups, and these music styles evolved into commercial genres like country, western swing, and later Red Dirt and other styles. It is the fiddle that still gets people dancing in dance halls every week across Texas.

The fiddle flourishes throughout Texas in both popular and sub-cultural forms, some of which have faded and been sustained by small groups or even individuals who contribute to cultural diversity by ensuring that idiosyncratic traditions do not disappear. We live in a globalized era in which homogeneity and commercialized culture all too often erase cultural distinctions and uniqueness. In helping to preserve unique Texas fiddle styles, Texas musicians are ensuring that the distinctiveness of the state’s music and dance culture persists into the future.

As you will notice with careful listening, the different styles and rhythms of the Texas music you hear today sound very different though they are played on the same instrument. And as our dance workshops on polka, huapango, two-step, waltz, and oberek provide through direct experience, the dance styles are quite different as well. What connects across all of these styles, rhythms, and cultures is the core importance of music, dance, and community.

The fiddle traditions of the state embrace a vast array of styles such as contest fiddling, old time, western swing, Texas-Mexican fiddling, Creole fiddling in East Texas, and Texas-Polish fiddling in Central Texas. Texas also features a stunningly wide array of fiddlers in other hybrid styles which flourish in the state today in unique Texas styles even if they did not originate there. This includes styles of Texas country, blues, bluegrass, jazz, and mariachi fiddling, and increasingly popular but still very little studied styles like Son Huasteco and Huapango Arribeño, which today flourish across Central Texas, played by dozens of groups playing every weekend across the state,

As you can see in the schedule, the 2022 Symposium presents all of these styles of dance-related fiddling in the sessions in the dance hall and on the two tent stages. Take the time to go listen to the music played on all of the stages and to hear the context provided by the scholars and by the musicians.

The Texas Traditions and True Vine Stages

The Texas Traditions and True Vine Stages features sessions which are organized thematically around a core emphasis on the sustainability of the style and culture of Texas fiddling traditions. This means the persistence of styles, technique, and repertoire (tune families) over time, as well as continuities in music which are consciously drawn by living fiddlers to the musicians of the past.

All of the showcases, workshops, and Tune Travels sessions you will hear today feature tradition-bearing fiddlers varying in age, all of whom have mastered their instruments and their individual styles.

One special feature unique to our program today is the series of Texas Tune Travels sessions we created to present different fiddlers playing within core Texas traditions that help to distinguish the music of the state. Each of these sessions brings together several fiddlers to demonstrate their singular approach to the tunes and style they play.

Tune Travel Sessions:

Texas Tune Travels I: Old Time Fiddling Across Texas Traditions

This is a new session for 2023 which features an exploration of the ways that fiddle tunes traverse traditions and generations in Texas. Music is not limited to culture and is enlivened by cultural contact and exchange, as will be demonstrated by Texas-Polish fiddler Brian Marshall and accordionist Frank Motley. Texas-Polish music is an entirely unique style in the state and a real treasure of Texas music. Brought by string – instrument playing migrants in the nineteenth century and continuing to flourish in Central Texas and Houston through the twentieth century, Texas-Polish music is one of the very few styles that only exists in the state. Though related, Texas-Polish music is quite different in style, repertoire, and sound from other more familiar styles of Polish immigrant music in the Midwest. We feature Texas-Polish fiddler Brian Marshall each year because of his unmatched skill and knowledge of the style and its history and cultural context.

They will be swapping tunes with Texas old time fiddler Howard Rains drawing on his unique knowledge of obscure old time tunes. His partner Tricia Spencer will also contribute tunes and interpretations based on her long deep family roots in Midwestern old time fiddling. This session is moderated by FTF co-Founder Patrick Sparks.

Texas Tune Travels II: Huapangos Across Texas & Across Borders

The Texas-Mexican borderlands have produced some of the richest array of music styles anywhere, with tunes played on the fiddle for dancing on outdoor platforms and in dance halls from the Rio Grande Valley up through the San Antonio area and also throughout the state. Mexican, Mexican-American (Tejano) fiddling and the associated instrument accompaniment styles on bajo sexto and tololoche (a borderlands upright bass) has had a huge influence on other Texas styles, especially conjunto by the 1920s (with the accordion coming to replace the fiddle on many of the same tunes) Western Swing in the 1930s and later on in a variety of music

termed Texas music up through the current era. We also have top conjunto musicians (bajo sexto and drums) Epi Martinez and Diego playing to demonstrate these connections. Recently, influenced by Texas Master Fiddler Belen Escobedo of San Antonio, there has been a revival in popularity of Tejano borderland fiddle styles. This session also features son huasteco music from Trío Huapangueros Elegidos from Dallas and Trio Canto A Mi Tierra de Osiris Caballero from Poza Rica Veracruz. This is a Mexican style now played across Texas in subcultural ways at events called Huapangos which deserves recognition as an emergent style in the state. The Festival has showcased son huasteco every year, and is the only such festival in the state recognizing the ongoing impact of this genre on Texas music and dance. This music comes from the Huasteca region of Mexico and is described in detail below in a guest essay by our symposium scholar, J.A. Strub. This session will be moderated by FTF co-founder and artistic director Dan Margolies

Texas Tune Travels III: Texas Gulf Coast Fiddling Traditions

This brings together the best players of fiddle music from along the Texas communities and cultures of the Texas Gulf coast. Texas has a unique spin on this music, which incorporates elements of African-American Creole music, Mexican-American (Tejano) music and old time music, with an emphasis on music for social dancing. Texas Gulf coast music is related to Cajun music in instrumentation, sound, and utility, but it nevertheless retains a unique set of playing techniques and tunes. Kevin Anthony from Galveston demonstrates a unique approach to this Gulf Coast sound, blending Cajun, country, and other influences in his high powered band G Town. Ed Poullard is one of the last, most sought-after and highly revered traditional Creole fiddlers in Texas and at festivals, dances, and workshops across the United States. Ed learned French music from his father as a child and soon developed as a master fiddler. He plays his family music and also maintains the tradition of legends like Canray Fontenot, with whom he played for years. Ed has gone on to perform with Jesse Legé, Lawrence Ardoin's Tradition Creole band, and his brother Danny Poullard. His fiddling reflects his embrace of tradition and sense of music history in the region.

Texas Tune Travels IV: T is For Texas, T is for Tennessee

Another new session bringing together the finest in fiddlers from the Texas Style contest and Tennessee style contest worlds to swap tunes and stories about the differences and similarities in the music. Texas and Tennessee also boast deep old time traditions which the fiddlers will demonstrate and discuss what exactly makes the tunes tick. This session includes state champion Jason Andrew and grandmaster champions in Texas style and old time Ridge Roberts and Austin Derryberry. As a comparison, this year we are featuring a prize winning contest old time fiddler (Austin Derryberry) in the segment we are calling “T is for Texas/T is for Tennessee” after the famous line from Jimmie Rodgers to demonstrate the differences in contest fiddling between states. This session will be moderated by FTF co-founder and artistic director Dan Margolies.

Texas Tune Travels V: Texas Style and Texas Contest Style Fiddling—

This session brings together the incredible musicians of this style of fiddling which is so common to the state that it is often simply termed “Texas Style.” We are fortunate to have the

best fiddlers and grand champions of the style all on stage at once from established champions like Wes Westmoreland, established giants like Luke Bulla, Keenan Fletcher, and Heidi Labensart. All of these fiddlers demonstrate their skills and to talk about their trajectory in the music. Contest fiddlers in Texas largely, though not exclusively, come from Anglo Texas culture. These Texas Style fiddlers reimagine the tradition of old time tunes brought to the state since the time of earliest settlement to play fast, exciting music in a creative style built on virtuosity, finesse, showmanship, improvisation, and embrace of competition. And, because this is Texas, they play for dancers as well, as many dancers will attest to our featured Texas Style fiddlers over the years like Master Fiddler Jesse Mears. Texas contest fiddling is the style first enshrined when American fiddling was first recorded on 78 rpm records by giants like Eck Robertson. Texas style players compete with tunes like breakdowns and waltzes accompanied by six string guitars and four string tenor guitars playing complex chord progressions. Texas style is the dominant style of contest fiddling in American today, a modern iteration of the contests which have taken place consistently in the Americas since the colonial era.

We appreciate the generous support of Humanities Texas and our other sponsors for the FTF in bringing this Symposium into being. This program was made possible in part with a grant from Humanities Texas, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication, program, and website do not necessarily represent those of Humanities Texas or the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Notes by Dan Margolies, Artistic Director
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SCHEDULE

DANCE HALL

11-11:30 Trio Canto A Mi Tierra de Osiris Caballero (Son Huasteco)

11:45-12:15 Felipe Perez y Sus Polkeros featuring Brian O'Donnell (conjunto)

12:30-1:50 Two Step/Waltz/Schottische/Polka Dance Workshop

2:00-2:40 Kevin Anthony & G Town (Gulf Coast)

2:55-3:30 Huapango dance lesson with Trio Huapangueros Elegidos (huapango)

3:40-4:20 The Modern Mountaineers (Swing/trad jazz)

4:35-5:15 Brian Marshall (Texas-Polish)

5:30-6:15 Belen Escobedo y Panfilo's Güera (Tejano)

7:00-7:45 Ed Poullard (Creole)

8:00-11:00 JODY NIX (Western Swing)

Dance Workshops (in Dance Hall)

12:30-1:50 Two Step/Waltz/Schottische/Polka Dance Workshop

2:55-3:30 Huapango dance lesson

TRUE VINE STAGE

11-2pm: The True Vine of Rising Texas Style Fiddle, featuring Hyatt Hopkins on guitar

11:00-11:20 Clara Mitchell

11:30-11:50 Ella Broussard

12:00-12:20 Luke Moody

12:30-12:50 McKenna Peterson

1:00-1:20 Mason Ludiker

1:30-1:50 Keenan Fletcher and Agape Haus Studio and Garden, LLC

The True Vine Musicians Showcase

2:00-2:20 Steward Family Band

2:30-3:00 Heidi Labensart

3:15-3:45 Jason Andrew (with Ridge Roberts)

4:00-4:20 Santiago Jimenez, Jr. with Epi Martinez

4:35-5:05 Wes Westmoreland

5:20-6:10 Spencer Rains Family Band

6:20-7:05 Trio Canto A Mi Tierra de Osiris Caballero

TEXAS TRADITIONS STAGE

11:00-11:20 Special Presentation of Nicole Cherry and the UTSA String Band Ensemble

11:30-12:00 Epi y Cruz Martinez (Conjunto/Country)

12:15-12:45 Ridge Roberts and Matthew Mefford, with Jason Andrew

1:00-1:45 *Texas Tune Travels I: Old Time Fiddling Across Texas Traditions*

Musicians: Brian Marshall and guests, Frank Motley, Howard Rains, Tricia Spencer.

Moderator: Patrick Sparks

2:00-2:45 *Texas Tune Travels II: Huapangos Across Texas & Across Borders*

Musicians: Belen Escobedo & Ramon Gutierrez, Marcos Acosta, Osiris Caballero, Epi Martinez.

Moderator: Dan Margolies

3:00-3:45 *Texas Tune Travels III: Texas Gulf Coast Fiddling Traditions*

Musicians: Ed Poullard, Brian Marshall, Kevin Anthony, Felipe Perez & Hunter Chavez, Brian

O'Donnell. Moderator: Patrick Sparks

4:00-4:30 Luke Bulla (Country & Bluegrass)

4:45-5:45 *Texas Tune Travels IV: T is For Texas, T is for Tennessee*

Musicians: Jason Andrew, Ridge Roberts, Austin Derryberry, Matthew Mefford, Moderator:

Derek Larimer

6:00-7:00 Texas Tune Travels V: Texas Style and Texas Contest Style

Musicians: Wes Westmoreland, Luke Bulla, Keenan Fletcher, Heidi Labensart, Hyatt Hopkins.
Moderator: Wes Westmoreland

INSTRUMENT WORKSHOPS (Workshop Tent)

12:00-12:45 Tricia Spencer - "Grandma's Cheats" old time fiddle workshop

1:00-1:45 Epi Martinez - bajo workshop, sponsored by H. Jimenez

2:30-3:15 Keenan Fletcher - Texas Ragtime Fiddle Workshop

4:15-5:00 Brian O'Donnell & Hunter Chavez - El Ciego Melquiades Fiddle- Bajo Sexto Workshop

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Special section on Ragtime inspiration
by Keenan Fletcher

“If you play like me, who is gonna play like you?” -Johnny Gimble

There aren't many of us...the diehard Ragtime Lovers. Ragtime prides itself on being one of the few musical styles embraced by both the Jazz and Classical world. A bridge between the concert halls and the back rooms of prohibition was formed. Ragtime is a musical form full of joyful energy and intricate patterns. I equate playing Ragtime with a train barreling down the tracks that could derail at any moment...then magically, the song ends and nobody gets hurt. It simply is impossible to be in a bad mood while listening or playing Ragtime.

My first taste of playing musical styles, other than Classical, was under the baton of Gunther Scheuller with the UT Jazz Orchestra. I learned real quick that some players could swing and others could not. I also learned that getting off the written page is the single most important thing when playing Jazz or Ragtime.

I've been extremely fortunate to have had many unique influences pour into me. My violin professor, Leonard Posner, taught me about his experiences performing with Frank Sinatra and the Tommy Dorsey band. I was definitely encouraged to find my own creative path in music. I performed professionally with the Texas Chamber Orchestra in Dallas, but never felt truly filled. It wasn't until moving to the Hill Country that I sought other styles to play. I bounced through Irish, Texas Fiddle, and Jazz to finally find my own true musical love...Ragtime. My partner-in-musical crime, Ragtime pianist Richard Golladay, taught me just about everything I know about Ragtime, and the 80/20 rule on early traditional jazz improvisation. (Workshop plug...more info to be taught on the 80/20 rule in class!)

My influences in other styles include Johnny Gimble and Dick Gimble, who taught me “how to think” and truly love Western Swing. My influences with Texas Fiddle are Marty Elmore, Wes Westmoreland and Jesse Mears, taught me “how to learn” the old school way...“knee-to-knee”. No paper, just a musical tradition handed down from generation to generation. My influences in Jazz are David Jellema and Jim Cullum, cornet, and Ron Hardcastle, clarinet. All three players have mentored me tirelessly through performances and recordings of great Dixieland and Traditional Jazz. Learning different styles helps the musical mind learn new ways to process sound, patterns, chord structure and bow techniques. Although I am not a “master” at any of the various styles, I apply all my experiences into Ragtime, and have found my own voice.

Texas Ragtime is the precursor to the fiddle rags heard in the Texas Contest World and Western Swing. Rags such as Black and White Rag, and the Dill Pickles Rag, and have crossed over style lines, and have become fiddle favorites. Mississippi Rag, known as the very first Rag, pushes hip harmonies that truly encouraged an entirely new genre.

I'm extremely excited to present a workshop on Texas Ragtime. I'm looking forward to meeting each and every one of you, to help you find your own musical voice.

Keenan Fletcher

History of the Steward Family Band Eb Steward



The Steward Family String Band is a singing and fiddling family from Wichita Falls, TX who trace their family heritage back to the early days of pioneers who made their own music and sang their own songs. When their ancestor William Brumbly Brent came to Texas in 1836 to join Sam Houston's army, there were no online streaming services, no radios, no records to listen to at home, and likely not much commercial music to hear when you rode into the settlements. During the long quiet days, folks would whistle tunes and sing songs as they worked. These weren't songs they'd heard on the radio from far away, instead they were learned from family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers--songs that were passed down from generation to generation and from neighbor to neighbor.

Fiddles were the perfect instrument to travel with when our ancestors migrated from the British Isles. They're small, light, loud, can play all the fiddle tunes from the old country, and can even be cross tuned to play bagpipe tunes. You can think of them as the portable bluetooth speakers of previous centuries.

Luthier Eb Steward, the father in the band, is originally from Wise County Texas, home of many great fiddlers like Ocie Stockard, the Solomons, and the Morris's. "My mom sings, and my dad fiddles," Eb says. "As far back as I can remember, when there was any kind of get together, there were fiddles and guitars playing. I first learned guitar from my grandfather who'd first learned from trappers staying on his family's place during the dust bowl. My dad learned fiddle as a kid from the family members of his parents and grandparents generation, who'd been playing at dances and contests across north Texas. Fiddlers Calvin Buckner, G.R. Buckner, and Bill "Pappy" Wiley played tunes they'd learned from fiddlers before them, some native to TX, others adapted from much older tunes, handed down through the generations. Even though I grew up around this music, I didn't dive into it until my children started playing the fiddle in 2019, and when we found ourselves at home a lot in 2020, we started playing music together for our own fun and entertainment. Learning all these old tunes has been like finding your grandmother's cookbook of all the family's favorite recipes. My kids have been able to learn tunes from their grandfather, that he learned from their great great grandparent's generation. There's a reason these tunes were played so much and passed around for so long."

Although there are 5 children, the oldest two do most of the performing for now. Sister and brother duo, Jude and John Steward, have been fiddling for four years and found that it only gets more fun the longer you play. Mostly taught in the traditional "knee to knee" method, they're able to play by ear which frees them to improvise and pick up new tunes in real time. Most of their instruction has been from Marty Elmore and Joey McKenzie, but they also attend Elmore Fiddle Camp every year, where they've been able to learn from Texas fiddlers, Randy Elmore, Valerie Ryals, Wes Westmoreland and Roberta Rast-Smith. John and Jude play lots of the old dance and contest tunes plus many of the early Texas folk songs they've learned on their own in the John Lomax books. Aside from playing at home, they regularly play concerts, fiddle contests, and jams.



A Primer on Música Huasteca
by J.A. Strub
University of Texas-Austin

When I first experienced *música huasteca* performed live, I was stunned its inexorable intensity. A punchy yet lyrical fiddle passage propels the listener into the groove: an unrelenting triple-meter rhythm played on two long-lost cousins of the six-string guitar. Verses about love, nature, and the mystery of one's own destiny, parried back and forth between performers, are delivered in full-throated bursts sprinkled with breaks into soaring falsetto. The sheer power of this music belies the fact that there are typically only three instrumentalists. Yet it would be disingenuous to claim that only three people are responsible for creating such a sound, for multitudes of dancers – with their percussive *zapateado* – are as much a part of the performance as the musicians. *Huapangos* - the events at which this music is performed, are best characterized not as concerts, but as community gatherings. Food, drink, and togetherness play as central a role as the music and dance in a true *huapango*.

Musically, the typical *trío huasteco* consists of 1) a fiddle, 2) a small, five-stringed lute called a *jarana*, and 3) a larger, eight-stringed bass guitar called a *quinta huapanguera*. Most *sones* and *huapangos* begin with a powerful *declaration* that marks the work being played and sets the tempo. Between verses, which can be traded between any of the musicians, the fiddler embellishes the melody with *vuelatas*, lively figures that animate dancers and allow for the musicians' virtuosity to shine. Sometimes, the *quinta* player will break the standard strumming pattern to respond to the fiddler with plucked figures of their own, a technique known as *pespunteo*. While staged performances of *sones* and *huapangos* typically contain a handful of lyrical exchanges, chains of improvised verse in intimate jam sessions called *palomazos* can last much longer. Indeed, many *huapangueros* draw a tight distinction between the community-oriented style of playing in *palomazos* and local *huapangos* and the formalized performances in festivals and dance competitions.

Música huasteca is not just party music. In some parts of the Huasteca, trios play special *sones* to accompany ritual celebrations such as Carnival, Xantolo (Day of the Dead), and the corn harvest festivals of September, as well as for weddings, wakes, and feast days. The better-known secular repertory is subdivided into *sones* - which allow for the invocation of any number of historical or improvised verses - and *huapangos* – which are compositions by a known author with set lyrics. Nowadays, *tríos huastecos* are often expected to play a wide range of musical styles, including *rancheras*, *corridos*, *cumbias*, *polkas*, *boleros*, *canciones*, and *sones* from other regions. This tendency reflects the historical dialogue between traditional Huasteco musicians and the wider Mexican music and film industries, as well as the Huasteca's geographical adjacency to the Mexican northeast and its musical styles.

The Huasteca is a geo-cultural region comprising parts of six states in central-eastern Mexico. Many of the region's distinguishing characteristics are reflected in its music. Instruments are made from endemic hardwoods by local artisans, and verses frequently celebrate the splendor of the area's natural and manmade landscapes. Like many traditional music styles, rural performers of this music have historically worked as farmers, ranchers, and local professionals, and have not considered themselves to be professional musicians. It is an oral tradition that many assert is best learned through listening and observation. Nonetheless, as the

region has urbanized over the past several decades, many groups have inevitably professionalized, developed devoted followings, and toured domestically and internationally.

While the region is agriculturally fertile, rich in mineral deposits, and anchored by the international port of Tampico, it is nonetheless plagued by a profound lack of economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Shifts in the national and global economies, as well as challenges posed by the ongoing domestic conflict between organized crime syndicates, have destabilized the lives of many residents. As such, significant numbers of Huastecos have migrated to the United States in search of work and security, with sizeable communities based in Texas, North Carolina, and Georgia. In cities such as Houston, Raleigh, and Augusta, live performances of *música huasteca* are frequent and feature both local and touring groups, although they are typically ticketed events (labeled as *huapangueadas*) rather than community-oriented *huapangos*. In keeping with the tradition, many US-based performers work day jobs as migrant laborers and perform as a secondary job or as a service to their community.

While *son huasteco* and *huapango* are “traditional” music styles, they are far from falling into obscurity. Today, an active scene of multigenerational performers, poets, scholars, and documentarians continues to breathe new life into the *huapango* tradition. Over the past few decades, the idea of what it means to be a *huapanguero* has expanded and transformed. It is now quite common to see and hear teenage performers, all-women tríos, and lyrical improvisation in indigenous languages such as Nahuatl and Teenek at major festivals in the region. Young performers are increasingly employing the age-old poetic formulas of coplas and decimas to discuss the realities of life in 21st century Mexico, ranging from the drug war and gender-based violence to social media use and internet culture. A robust digital infrastructure promoting and celebrating the music and dance of the Huasteca has also emerged in recent years, allowing aficionados in far-flung locales to engage with the tradition.