Seeing the Trends: Data Visualization and Developing a Local Music Collection

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Outline

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• H-town Sound: The UII Local Music Collection Overview
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Significance of Houston Music
As the state’s largest industrial city, Houston was a destination for many musicians looking for employment during the early 1900s.

Blues musicians migrated from the Mississippi Delta, especially during the Great Depression, and Texas blues was born.

During this time, notable western swing musicians from the Fort Worth area also migrated to Houston in search of better economy. Along with Houston and Beaumont-area musicians, they created a flourishing swing scene that evolved into a thriving dance hall and honky tonk scene.

Looking for work, black Creoles from Louisiana moved to large, industrial east Texas cities such as Houston. Houston’s Frenchtown was important to the development of zydeco, which formed out of the mixing of Louisiana’s acoustic La La music with
urban blues and R&B.

Tejano music was influenced by border music, and along with conjunto music, also had its roots in the early twentieth century and became a part of the fiber of Houston Music.
With ACA and Goldstar/SugarHill recording studios and labels Starday, Duke and Peacock, and D Records, Houston has long been a center for recording in the region.

This image is from an ACA Master Book from early fifties. Hopefully, you can make out Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton’s name in the middle of the page. Although Thornton was born in Alabama, her career took off when she moved to Houston and began recording for Don Robey’s labels Peacock and Duke.

Recorded at ACA in 1952, Big Mama Thornton’s “Hound Dog” spent several weeks at the number 1 positions on the Billboard charts in 1953.
In 1947, Robey became the manager for blues singer Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown. Soon after, Robey and business manager Evelyn Johnson, who is pictured here, established Robey the Buffalo Booking Agency. Brown his first artist on Peacock Records, which he launched two years later.

In the nineteen fifties and sixties, Robey jumpstarted the careers of Johnny Ace, Johnny Otis, Junior Parker, and Bobby Bland. Robey also issued records for gospels acts including Mighty Clouds of Joy, Dixie Hummingbirds, Five Blind Boys of Mississippi, and Swan Silvertones. Robey’s label Back Beat had hits with Roy Head and O. V. Wright.
In the 1950s, Pappy Dailey founded the Houston Star Day label, and in the mid-fifties, he signed George Jones. Although Jones grew up in Vidor in the Beaumont area about an hour and a half outside of Houston, he performed and recorded extensively in Houston before going to Nashville.

Although Daily also worked with major labels to record Jones, he continued releasing artists on Starday and founded other labels including Musicor and D Records.
Bill Quinn opened Quinn Recording his home in 1941, but changed its name to Goldstar in 1950. The studio operated as International Artists for two years in the late sixties recording psychedelic rock artists including the 13th floor elevators, Bubble Puppy, Red Crayola, and the Moving Sidewalks. During the 1970s, the studio changed ownership resumed business as Sugarhill Recording Studios.

A selection of the artists who have recorded there includes Lightning Hopkins, George Jones, Johnny Preston, Clifton Chenier, The Sir Douglas Quintet, Asleep at the Wheel, Freddy Fender, and Destiny’s Child.

Quinn scored his first hit with Harry Choates’s “Jolie Blon.” Often called the unofficial song of Louisiana (You are My Sunshine is the official state song).

Willie Nelson recorded his original version of “Night Life” there but couldn’t find a label to release it. He approached Pappy Daily, who rejected it saying it wasn’t country enough.

Goldstar/SugarHill is the longest continually operating studio in the Southeastern United States.
Lightnin’ Hopkins is especially significant to Houston music, not only for playing the blues, but for playing a significant role in the folk music revival in the 1960s. Hopkins was a major influence to many artists including Townes Van Zandt who came to know and covered many of his songs. Hopkins was known for recording for one label while under contract to another and recorded for many labels including Gold Star Records in Houston (https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fhoab).

Other blues performers who impacted Houston music, and were influenced by it include: Big Mama Thornton, Clarence Gatemouth Brown, Texas Johnny Brown, and Albert Collins.
Although Clifton Chenier, the king of zydeco, spent his early and final years in Louisiana, he lived, performed, and recorded in Houston during a significant part of his career in the 1960s and 70s.

Chenier developed the rub board as an instrument to be worn over the shoulders, and for all intents and purposes, developed the music (Roger Wood, Texas Zydeco).

According to music historian Roger Wood, a term for this new genre of music had yet to be established until the mid 60s when Chenier recorded his seminal album Zydeco Son Pas Sale at Goldstar studio in Houston. The word Zydeco is based on the French word for beans: les haricot. And zydeco is a sort of bastardization of the French. So “zydeco son pas sale” essentially means “the beans are not salty.”

When releasing the album, Arhoolie label owner Chris Strachwitz chose to use a spelling that Houston music historian Mack McCormick coined in 1959 to describe the music: “Zydeco.”

Zydeco is a dance music that is still popular in Houston, played at clubs and at
Catholic Church dances. The Zydeco Dots and Step Rideau are a long time favorite and new comers like Houstonian Paul Moreno play regularly in Houston and tour the country.
Pictured here is Lionel Hampton and Arnett Cobb in 1946. *This work is from the William P. Gottlieb collection at the Library of Congress. According to the library, there are no known copyright restrictions on the use of this work.* In accordance with the wishes of William Gottlieb, the photographs in this collection entered into the public domain on February 16, 2010.

Houstonian and Jazz tenor saxophonist Arnett Cobb, became a founding member of the Milton Larkin Orchestra in 1936. Cobb, Larkin, and many band members, including Eddie Vinson, Cedric Haywood, and Illinois Jacquet were also Houstonians. The band became a regular at venues including the Apollo Theatre in Harlem and boxer Joe Louis's Rhumboogie Club in Chicago.
Lydia Mendoza, known as "la alondra de la frontera "or" the lark of the border" was a guitarist and singer who performed Tejano, conjunto and traditional Mexican American music. Tejano is lacking in our early research and will be a focus of future research.
In the 1930s Western Swing bandleader Milton Brown convinced Ted Daffan to start performing. Soon after he scored his first success as a songwriter with "Truck Drivers' Blues," one of Country's first truck-driving songs. Cliff Bruner was also linked to Milton Brown who drafted him for his Musical Brownies. In 1936, Bruner moved back to Houston and formed The Texas Wanderers. Houston honky tonk greats include Mickey Gilley (of Gilley’s Bar where John Travolta’s The Urban Cowboy was filmed) and Johnny Bush (who wrote the “Whiskey River,” the song Willie Nelson made famous)
The Love Street Light Circus Feel Good Machine opened in 1967. What you are seeing here was called the “Zonk-Out” area, a section of the club where patrons layed on the floor feet with their feet just behind the head cushion in front of them. There is also a light show, band, and go-go dancers.

Houston psychedelic band Red Crayola (later Red Krayola) regularly performed there along with other Texas musicians from surrounding regions including Johnny Winter, Thirteenth Floor Elevators, and Bubble Puppy.
Billy Gibbons and his Houston band The Moving Sidewalks regularly performed at Love Street. Later, American Blues, featuring Gibbons and future bandmates Dusty Hill and Frank Beard, also played at Love Street. ZZ Top’s first show there was in 1969.

Billy Gibbon’s is second from the left in this Moving Sidewalks publicity picture.
Townes Van Zandt launched his musical career at the Jester Lounge in Houston, where he met
- Lightnin’ Hopkins
- Guy Clark
- Jerry Jeff Walker
- Doc Watson

Mickey Newbury also hails from Houston.
Punk arrived in Houston in the late 1970s and found a home in a dive bar first called Paradise Island—then Rock Island—and finally just the Island. This poster documents the legendary pairing of the local group the Mydolls and the touring psychobilly band The Cramps.

The experimental band Culturcide also got its start at the Island. However, while they were a part of the early Houston punk scene, their music was decidedly experimental. The visual artist Mark Flood (then, Perry Webb) sang for the band and composed many of their songs.

Houston experimental groups include the Pain Teens, Jandek, and Charalambides.
Hip Hop and the Screwed Up Click

- Houston is the hip hop capital of Texas
- Known for chopped and screwed rap music
  - DJ Screw and the Screwed Up Click
- Other significant acts include UGK and the Geto Boys

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Hip hop took hold in the 1980s, and Houston has become the hip hop capital of Texas, known for its chopped and screwed rap music, popularized by DJ Screw and the Screwed Up Click.

Other significant Houston area hip hops act include UGK and the Geto Boys.
The numerous Houston artists who currently perform in the city and all over the world are too many to include here today, however, I would be remiss if I did not mention at least a few.

Beyonce hails from Houston, and she and her band Destiny's Child recorded at SugarHill Studios. Texas singer songwriters with Houston ties include Lyle Lovett, Robert Earl King, Robert Ellis, and Hayes Carl. Hip hop performers Paul Wall, Bun B, and Chamillionaire are also currently performing in Houston and around the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contemporary Artists</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Beyonce and Destiny's Child</td>
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<td>– Recorded at SugarHill Studios</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Singer songwriters: Lyle Lovett, Robert Earl King, Robert Ellis, and Hayes Carl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hip hop performers: Paul Wall, Bun B, and Chamillionaire</td>
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The Suffers, who are pictured here describe the music they perform as Gulf Coast Soul. They are currently touring worldwide and appearing on late night shows.

The local music scene continues to evolve, reflecting the diversity of the Houston area, which has been described as the most diverse metroplex in the US (Kinder Institute for Urban Research, 2012).
The UH Libraries Local Music Collection features sound recordings of important historical and contemporary musicians and acts in the Houston area.
The Houston area included generally extends to 50 miles outside Houston. However, it occasionally includes musicians from just outside this area if the musicians made an impact on Houston music or Houston was influential to their careers.

Recordings that complement UH Special Collections archival collections are given special consideration in purchasing. Our purchasing criteria takes in account ranking as well as whether UH Special Collections holds a related collection.
The Collection consists of 3 parts:

• A non-circulating copy housed in UH Special Collections
• A circulating collection housed in the Music Library
• An interactive website with data visualizations

Having a copy in the special collections reading room related to our archival holdings will be useful to researchers wanting to hear the music referred to in the archival records.

The second copy also serves a preservation purpose. In the event that the circulating copy in the music library copy is missing or no longer working, and the recording is no longer available to purchase, the second copy in Special Collections can be used to create a preservation copy.

The interactive website with visualizations will allow the users to discover and learn more about performers and determine which recordings we hold. The visualizations that we are developing now will be adapted in a way to best serve listeners and researchers.
We also hope to be able to offer links to other resources, such as oral histories with local musicians.
Data Collection & Artist Significance Ranking
Data Collection

• Considerable amount of data gathered and analyzed
  – Currently over 725 entries and growing
• Gathered from resources on Houston music

• Resources:
  • Down in Houston, Roger Wood
  • History of Texas Music, Gary Hartman
  • Houston Press Music Awards
  • Handbook of Texas Music, TX State Historical Assoc.
  • Texas Zydeco, Roger Wood
  • Subject Specialists included: Dan Workman- President of Sugarhill Records and member of local band Culturcide, Roger Wood- Music historian and author, Norie Guthrie- Archivist of Houston Folk Music Archive at Rice University, and Julie Grob- Archivist of Houston Hip-Hop Collection at University of Houston Libraries

• Why we chose these resources?
• Easily accessible
  • Handbook of Texas Music available online through Texas State Historical Association so research has already been done for us, easily searchable
  • Some resources already owned by UH Libraries
  • Dates and/or genres covered filled a gap
### II-Town Sound:
**UH Local Music Collection Data**

- Performer and/or Group Name
- Birth/Death dates
- Born In (Location)
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Based in (location)
- Years active in Houston area
- Instrument(s)
- Genre and Sub-genre
- Significance
- Awards
- Related Archival Collection
- Sources
- Performer Website URL
- Significance ranking
Data Ranking

- Performers/Acts ranked by significance in surveys sent to local historians and genre specialists
- 600 entries sorted into major genres
  - Smaller genres combined

- At the time of survey creation we had 600 entries. Input from subject experts bumped us up to where we are now 725.

- 600 entries sorted into major genres
• Prioritizing performers/groups based on significance to Houston music and/or rarity of items and difficulty in acquiring items
• Exploring relationships between genres, gender, active performing years, etc.
• Determining whether an item is available in holdings or tied to existing UH special collection
Data Visualization
• We were spending so much time collecting vast amounts of data and research that we wanted to more with it than let it languish in a spreadsheet
• There is a big push in scholarly activity towards digital humanities in music
• Unique aspect of our collection that will set us apart
• Analyze the scope of the collection being developed
  • Recognize trends in genres, decades, and artists being captured by gathered data
• Aid staff in contextualizing data about the collection
• Experiment with multiple visualization techniques, assess pros/cons of each

Visualization goals

• Analyze the scope of the collection being developed
• Aid in contextualizing data about the collection
• Experiment with multiple visualization techniques, assess pros/cons of each
You can also download Tableau Reader for desktop

- Free to use
- Well-known/popular
- User-friendly
- Works with various types of data sources, like Microsoft Excel, CSV files, SPSS, Google Sheets, etc.
- Fully Hosted
  - Public profile makes it easy to share visualizations without having to host on your own server
Visualization process

1. Data clean up
   - Only included records of artists with genre, decade, gender, and ranking
   - Standardize genres (e.g. Rap -> Hip Hop)
2. Input data into Tableau software
3. Using Tableau, create tooltips and filters to allow data exploration

- Created CSV worksheet
- Minimal fields required for visualization: Performer Name, Gender, Decades Active in Houston Area, Genre, and Ranking Numbers
• Tooltips are also helpful since artist names can’t always fit inside the circles/squares.
• Important details that can’t be visualized are still presented in the tooltips.
• Will also show additional data that was available for acts, such as sub-genres, notes on significance, uh holdings and related archival collections, and associated acts or bands
BUBBLE

- Each genre was assigned an arbitrary color, such as blue for Blues, dark green for Country, red for Hip-Hop, or orange for Rock
- Bubbles are grouped alphabetically by genre first, then by decade within the genres- closer to the center is older
- Show how filters work
- Mention that gender filter is binary right now due to limitations of gathered data, however we will be including all gender identities, when the information is credibly available

- Pros
  - Easy to see which artists are more significant
  - Easy to see which genres are more prominent in
collection

• Cons
  • No way to filter by decade
  • Sometimes difficult to compare size of genres
    • This is where the filters are really important in this type of visualization

TREE
• In each genre “square,” the earlier artists are in the top left corner, while later artists are in the bottom right corner.
• This is much much easier to understand than the bubble chart’s way of organizing artists by decade.

• Pros
  • Much easier to compare larger groups of genres
  • Less negative space makes for easier scanning
  • Easier to view artists by decade

• Cons
  • More difficult to compare significance of artists
  • No way to filter by decade
Observations & Next Steps
The visualizations reflect only 167 of the total of 725 performer and band names we have captured—and does not necessarily capture the genre breakdown of the data in the spreadsheet.

And, on the other hand, the data collected to date, only reflects an early stage of data collection and the resources we have used thus far. The data collected shows:

• Strong results for blues and zydeco
• Good results for jazz, R&B, and country
• But is lacking in other genres, especially pop and electronic—there is still a lot to do to populate these genres

Data for bands not used in visualizations
• Although we captured information on musical acts/groups, we did not use this information in our visualizations.
Next Steps

- Continue research and complete missing data
- Build and promote collection
- Improve discoverability of information on artists/acts
- Decide which information is most important to visualize
- Develop website
- Strengthen relationships with music historians and individuals with ties to the music industry

Research artists and bands and grow and improve spreadsheet

- add entries/performers and acts to spreadsheet
- refine and enrich existing entries
- solicit rankings and names of missing musicians/acts music historians

Build the collection

- Purchase new items and obtaining 2\textsuperscript{nd} copy of existing holdings
- Goal of acquiring 50 unique recordings first year
- Identify and apply for grants to support future acquisitions and upkeep of
collection

Improve discoverability of information on artists as well as acts

• Determine how to visualize data on musical acts or bands
• Different information is collected for bands than performers—will bands or groups need to be visualized separately from single performers?
• Can we link performers to bands using visualizations—or will we need a different tool?

Decide which information is most important to visualize

• Explore visualizing by decade, specific artist, ethnicity, etc.
• Determine whether Tableau is the appropriate software for project
• Determine whether visualization is the best method for discovery—in all cases

Develop website

• How will we employ visualizations?
• Bibliographies and links to other resources?
• Oral histories? Videos?

Promote the collection

• On and off campus
• With the Houston media.

Develop stronger partnerships with music historians and individuals with ties to the music industry
• The ranking process has been essential to our project to date. It helps in ranking as well as helping us seeing our research holes and adding to our list of performers.
• Although we were incredibly successful in soliciting assistance from our local music historians this round, we are just beginning to build our spreadsheet of acts and performers.
• Will these music historians be more likely to continue to assist us in building this resource if they are part of an advisory board?
• It seems likely that individuals with ties to the music industry will be helpful in helping us to secure funds through sponsorships.

We have a lot of work ahead of us but are extremely excited about the road ahead!
Questions?
Comments?
Suggestions?
Contact Information

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