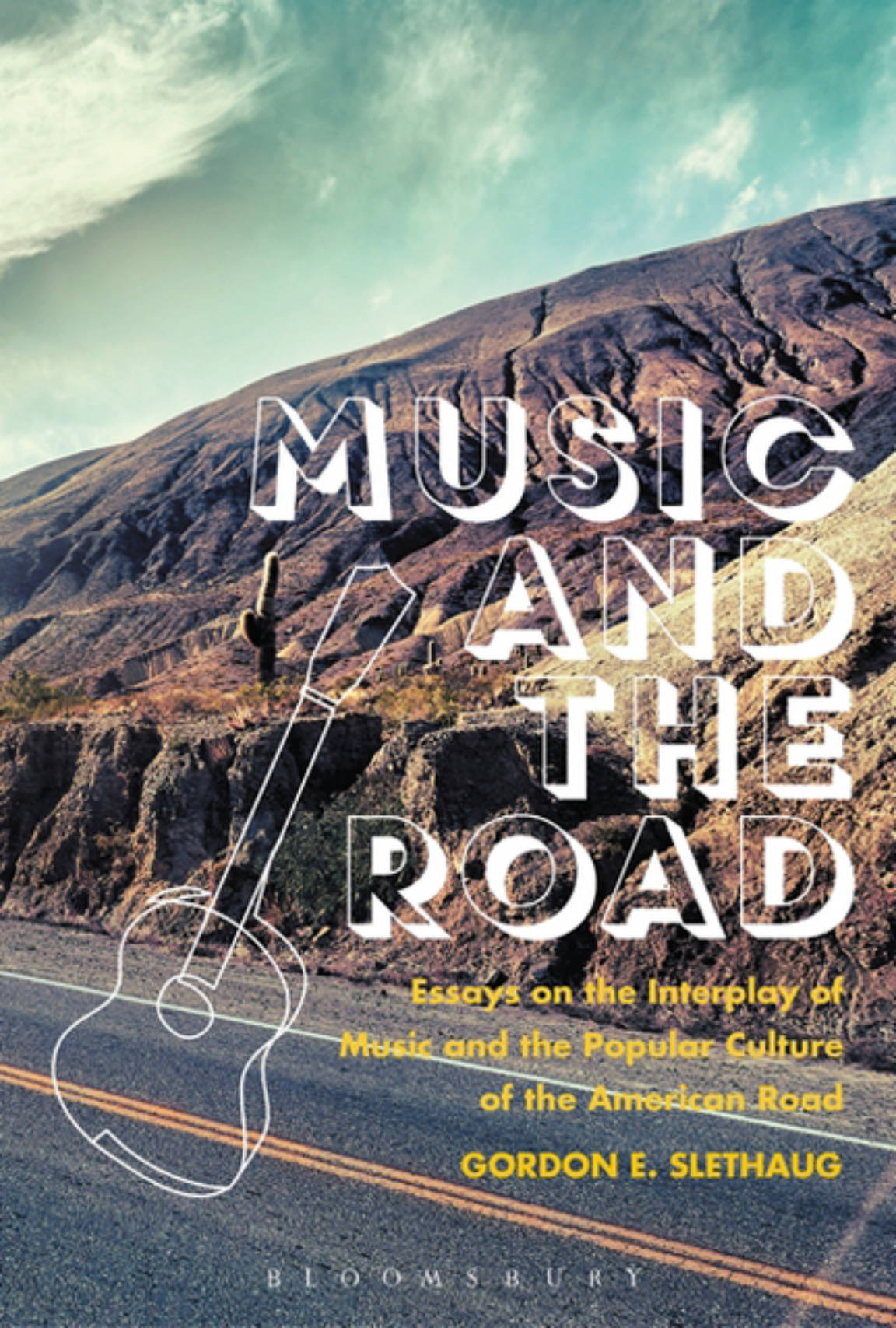
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AND
THE
ROAD
Essays on the Interplay of
Music and the Popular Culture
of the American Road
GORDON E. SLETHAUG
BLOOMSBURY

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1

Introduction

Gordon E. Slethaug

In the past few years, several studies have appeared concerning the road in American culture, history, film, and literature, but none has been written about music and the American road, which is strange because this rich resource informs and colors the perception of the road and the experience of fans at every turn. Early on, before the twentieth century, folk songs celebrated the various modes of travel in America, but these were occasional and applicable to very specific groups of people. With the advent of the mass media in the twentieth century, road songs followed three main avenues—all of them recorded and broadcast to small and large audiences: blues reflected the pain and grief of those on the road; country-western music picked up on the dreams, possibilities, and anxieties of the road through Southern habitats and others with frontier ideologies; and, finally, the emergence and ongoing popularity of rock 'n' roll extolled the speed and thrill of the road but also the heartbreak and despair that sometimes accompanied such travel. Altogether, these varieties of road music and more have been a formative part of the fabric of American society across the spectrum of race, class, gender, age, geography, and technology.

With the invention of the railroad in the nineteenth century and the automobile in the twentieth and their associated industries, new kinds of road experiences and music emerged with bands traveling by train, bus, van, car, and truck, and with passengers sitting privately or in groups listening to the radio, that wonderful 1930s invention of Motorola. Early performers of road music during the first half of the century included legendary blues singers such as Robert Johnson of the Mississippi delta, Blind Lemon Jefferson of

Texas, and Buddy Moss of the Piedmont area. Some of their experiences and gigs were decidedly rural, but others were urban. This tradition continues into the present with many contemporary male and female African American blues artists. At the same time, mainly white country-western singers were taking the folk-song tradition and turning out some wonderful road songs. Later white rock 'n' roll bands and singers as well as others with people of color in the second half of the century took their music from small country towns to big cities and even to foreign destinations, writing memorable road songs that included Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" and "No Particular Place to Go"; The Beach Boys' "Little Deuce Coupe," "Long Promised Road," and "California Dreamin'"; Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild"; the Byrds' "Wasn't Born to Follow"; Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," "Like a Rolling Stone," and "On the Road Again"; Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A," "Born to Run," and "Thunder Road"; and Paul Simon's "America," "Papa Hobo," "Hearts and Bones," and "Graceland."

There were, of course, films that focused on singers and bands themselves, including such documentaries as Scorsese's *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* that lays out the trajectory of Dylan's myth-making move from northern Minnesota to New York City and onto the road circuit. Then there are fictional films about singers and bands such as that of Clint Eastwood who "played a country singer in the sentimental Depression-era film *Honkytonk Man* as well as the impresario of a traveling show in *Bronco Billy*" (Cohan and Hark, 10). Early on, there were the various "Road To . . ." films that featured popular actor Bob Hope and singer Bing Crosby and fabricated romances of travel on the road. Then, too, there were later fictional films memorializing the lives of countercultural heroes and gangsters alike such as *Bonnie and Clyde* whose exploits were accompanied by tunes and lyrics that stayed with the audiences long after the big and small screens went dark. Various travelers, singers, bands, and listeners/viewers are as much tied to the road and vehicles as they are to the music, and this study will look at the semiotics of the road in American culture, the implications of the music of the road itself, and the experience of taking it on the road—in short: the interaction of the road, travelers, and music. As Kurt Jacobsen notes of road music and film, road music "either one, invokes the road as explicit theme, or two, is encountered while passing through strange regions, or three, heightens the road experience, whatever the origin of the song or subject of its lyrics" (Chapter 12). This road music, then, has something special to do with freedom, independence, rebellion, and mobility that are part and parcel of the experience and cultural understanding of the road, but it encompasses many other aspects of self and culture.

Scholarship of music and the road

Although there is growing scholarship available concerning the road, only limited research currently exists on the link between music and the road or even road music and road films. In Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark's *The Road Movie Book*, of the 17 chapters in the book, music is alluded to in only two, and the only chapter that deals centrally with music and the road is Corey K. Creekmur's "On the Run and on the Road: Fame and the Outlaw Couple in American Cinema." This chapter, however, doesn't address the music of films but follows Creekmur's contention that the outlaw road film follows the structural and stylistic features of musicals (91). Creekmur does note that "the contemporary road film seems especially suited to the now dominant mode of constructing and marketing film soundtracks through a selection of semi-autonomous, nostalgic hits or newly recorded pop songs" (101). In exploring *Easy Rider* in the chapter called "The Road to Dystopia: Landscaping the Nation in *Easy Rider*," Barbara Klinger briefly alludes to the road music of Steppenwolf and the Byrds that is paired with and assists in the celebration of "panoramic point-of-view shots" of magnificent Southwestern wilderness landscape scenes that Wyatt and Billy travel through in the early part of *Easy Rider* compared to the use of Jimi Hendrix's "nihilistic 'If Six Was Nine'" paired with the road montage of the threatening culture of the Deep South that eventually destroys the two riders at the end of the film (in Cohan and Hark, 188, 192).

Similarly, in *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie,* David Laderman only once refers to "popular music" as an integral part of road films, though he does bring in rock 'n' roll several times. As he notes, "the distinctive emergence of the road movie in the late 1960s is culturally interwoven with the advent of rock and popular music and the genre usually deploys the former as another aesthetic expression of the visceral and sensual thrill of driving, of moving at high speed" connected with "youth rebellion drive" (16, 19). He repeats such a comment in considering three American films and one German: the "mood-mixing, controversial banjo music" of *Bonnie and Clyde,* that conveys "the thrill of road travel for the counterculture" (69); the use of rock music to unleash "spiritual energy through a politicized driving" in *Easy Rider* (70); the "peripatetic mobility" of the countercultural figures and lifestyle suggested by Jimi Hendrix's "Are You Experienced" and "Break on through to the Other Side" in *Two-Lane Blacktop* (96); and the "visionary, rebellious energy," "fiery feminist perspective," and "rebellion" of the later German film *Bandits* (271).

Gordon E. Slethaug and Stacilee Ford's *Hit the Road, Jack: Essays on the Culture of the American Road* does only slightly better in exploring music and

the road. Two chapters focus exclusively on road music: Susan Kuyper's "The Road in American Vernacular Music" goes into detail on road music's early origins in folk music, and Paul Attinello's "Assassin in a Three-Piece Suit: *Slow Fire*, Minimalism, and the Eighties" looks at the road as represented in Paul Dresher's contemporary opera. Otherwise, the chapters do not reference the music that is talked about in road literature or that accompanies various road films.

There is, then, little in the way of criticism that explores the relationship between music of or about the road and various kinds and examples of literature and film. Of course, those in the popular music scene know that these links between song and literature and film are intrinsic but have never subjected them to critical analysis as indicated by the numerous sites where interesting road music is identified by the number of tunes without commentary, such as the Ultimate Classic Rock's "Top 10 Road Songs," Playlist's "20 Essential Songs for Your Road-Trip," Buzzfeed's "The Only 39 Road Trip Songs You'll Ever Need," and Timeout's "The 50 best road trip songs of all time." These sites quantify and promote but do not analyze. That is the task of this book.

This compilation of essays, then, creates a unique and valuable collection that addresses a fundamental lack in the scholarship of the intersection of the road and popular music from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the present time.

The theoretical and narrative framework of this study

In "The Semiotics of the Road," Gordon Slethaug points out that the notion of the road in the United States is inextricably tied to the changing developments of American economics, politics, culture, and technology, so that, while key ideas of freedom, independence, and mobility may be relatively constant in the construction of the road over time, other factors such as individualism, identity, and rebellion are dependent on specific historical circumstances and social movements. Undergirding these historical changes are those in technology, such as development of the automobile, the availability of electricity and telephones at the end of the nineteenth century, and the rise of media and communications at the beginning of the twentieth century. Consequently, the music of the road that marks the focus of this volume depends on codes of the American road that developed in certain periods during that time. These include the development of "individual and national

freedom, independence, and mobility; democratic space in a simultaneously present and vanished frontier; self-reliance and liberal individualism; diversity in ethnicity, race, class, gender, and culture; communal and personal transformation; [and] rebellious countercultural challenges to a complacent and conservative society . . ." (Slethaug and Ford, "Introduction," 4). Consequently, this volume brings into focus the modern period in which technological developments radically changed modes of travel and networks of roads. It does not intend to represent all of the many forms of road music in the contemporary era because that would be a separate volume in itself, but this volume will explore the classic forms of recorded road music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries while also exploring contemporary forms in movies as well as those of an LGBT singer.

Transitions: The disappearing frontier and rise of transportation and the media

When in 1893 Frederick Jackson Turner announced that the American frontier had closed, he also identified the traits that had been necessary to settle the United States and which in his mind accounted for the characterization of present-day Americans as well. Key traits included:

> That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are the traits of the frontier. (227–28)

Susan Kuyper's "The Road in American Vernacular Music" paid close attention to these traits as evidenced in the American frontier itself and in the subset of road songs in folk vernacular music that was produced before the twentieth century, noting that they "resonate with the weariness of travel, tell stories of terrible challenges, but also never lose hope" in work, play, love, and worship (55). This was not a small subset, Kuyper notes, comprising roughly one-third of the 317 folk songs collected in Alan Lomax's *Folk Songs of North America*; so mobility, travel, and the road in all its forms has been an enduring part of American history and culture (57).

This present study of *music and the American road* begins where Kuyper's leaves off, marked by the transition from anonymous folk songs to those

written, played, sung, and increasingly copyrighted by particular artists and groups. In "Easy Riders and Hard Roads in the Early Recorded Blues," Steve Knepper and Jim Tuten write about the early country-blues tradition that had such a profound influence on American popular music, including later blues and rock 'n' roll. As they note, country blues first flourished in three seminal areas of the South—the Mississippi delta, Texas, and the Piedmont area of the East Coast (the Carolinas and Georgia) and was spearheaded by Robert Johnson (the rural Delta), Blind Lemon Jefferson (urban Texas), and Buddy Moss (Atlanta and surroundings) whose music helped to consolidate the blues as an art form and to shape the myth of road mobility. Theirs was African and American music to the core, the rhythms and patterns reflecting early roots in Africa as well as American folk songs, and the themes expressing their aspirations, values, and challenges in an American racialized South at the first half of the twentieth century.

In the Mississippi delta, Robert Johnson traveled in almost every conceivable way: he walked on dirt roads and highways; he sat on a pile of corn in a wagon pulled by a tractor; he rode freight trains and buses; he hitchhiked rides in pickup trucks—all to perform on street corners or in front of barbershops and restaurants in adjoining towns (Guralnick 20) An old-fashioned traveling minstrel, Johnson and his blues songs truly represented the rural Southern delta.

While Johnson traveled the dirt roads of the rural delta, blues musicians Texas bluesman Blind Lemon Jefferson and Atlanta blues singer Buddy Moss traveled in the urbanizing areas of Texas and the Georgia Piedmont. In these locations the automobile gave musicians access to more commercial possibilities in both urban and out-of-the-way places of the South and, increasingly with the Great Migration, the North. Indeed, in Texas and the Piedmont the automobile came to be seen as a palpable object of desire—a sign of sexual possibility and potency, achievable luxury, and even conspicuous consumption for fortunate black musicians. Incarnated in the automobile, the road emerged in blues music as a promise of freedom, adventure, agency, and financial reward but also conveyed nostalgia for places and people left behind as well as anxiety about the perils of driving under the vigilant eyes and oppressive Jim Crow laws of Southern white communities. The earliest country blues, then, embrace contrary extremes of possibility, hope, and frustration and often position the musicians and their listeners on a knife's edge of hope and existential despair.

As Knepper and Tuten note, however, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Robert Johnson, and Buddy Moss were not the only ones singing and recording blues during the first half of the twentieth century, but are representative of many of their compatriots and followers. Jefferson himself influenced

Texas musicians Leadbelly, Lightnin' Hopkins, and T-Bone Walker as well as leading blues artists from outside Texas, including such Delta blues luminaries as Chester Arthur Bennett (Howlin' Wolf), McKinley Morganfield (Muddy Waters), and Son House, while Buddy Moss influenced those such as Blind Blake. The influence does not stop there, however. As Knepper and Tuten note, musical techniques and themes in "Adia Victoria's 2016 album *Beyond the Bloodhounds*" contain "a pervading Johnson-esque Gothicism" (Chapter 3).

In the explicitly racialized culture and politics of the South and indirectly of the North, the whites dominated the blacks, but whites also were divided by geography, economics, gender, and class. Virginia Shay's study of early and late American country music, "Easy Street on Mud Tires: The 'Heartland' and the Frontier of the Road in Country Music," notes the way in which road music has been shaped by, and responded to, the simple rural, white, blue-collar life of the South with real links to the Midwest heartland and more imagined links to manifest destiny and the Western frontier. While country music had roots in early folk music and the 1920s "hillbilly" Appalachia, and still waxes nostalgic about its common people and villages, these towns and their inhabitants have generally become more imaginary and mythic than real in connecting with the larger population across the country in their interrogation of urban corporate ways. "As Scherman remarks, 'Country music was born of the trauma of rural people's adjustment to industrial society. . . . Severed from its working-class origins, country music is becoming a refuge for culturally homeless Americans everywhere'" (Scherman qtd. in Peterson, *Creating Country Music,* 222). This country-western road music is marked as white, and culturally and politically conservative both in its inception and in the recent Nashville iterations. What black blues and white country-western musical traditions share is a common disdain for exploitative urban environments as well as a hope for personal, financial, and musical independence. This country music and the implied rural life have helped to mold and sustain a belief in an exceptionalist America and the American Dream that inform its sounds, cadences, and lyrics from origins in old-timey music to the slick pop-based sounds that emerged from Nashville in the 1960s, including those of female artists Dixie Chicks, Jo Dee Messina, and Miranda Lambert.

Though country music originated in the pre-Depression South and was somewhat limited to the banjo, fiddle, and autoharp, it spread throughout the United States as a staple of popular culture and more complex sounds (including accordion, bass, various kinds of guitars, and drums) by marrying images of cowboys and cowgirls not only to rural country dirt roads and small towns, but also to pickup trucks, fast cars, and interstate travel.

Narratives of modernity and mobility

As highways became better, cars more plentiful and faster, and young people had the money and time to travel independently or in groups, the road became evermore associated with freedom, liberation, and independence—from former selves, family, and society in general. Jack Kerouac's 1957 landmark novel *On the Road* illustrated these qualities in the main characters' lifestyles and speech but also in the book's deliberate departure from styles and methods of earlier fiction, instead embracing a peripatetic style meant to reflect bebop jazz and the lives of the hipsters who could race back and forth across the broad expanse of the United States, seemingly without stopping.

Musicians, however, often chose to undertake such journeys using tour buses as their vehicle of choice. Anaia Shaw's "The Tour Bus and the Road" and Warren Leming's "Band on the Ruins: Meditations on Music and Motion" shift the focus from the binaries of black versus white musical traditions, city versus rural, the South versus the North, and the automobile versus the truck as the ideological, geographic, vehicular, and musical focus to the importance of the bus as a means of inexpensive travel for everyone.

For many musicians, the tour bus enabled a sense of adventure, established identity, created camaraderie and community, reinforced the idea of the musician as a perpetual traveler, and above all shared their music at various gigs and concerts across the country. While the bus has not entered the musical road repertoire as strongly as songs about the car or the train, R. L. Burnside's "Greyhound Bus Station," The Hollies' "Bus Stop," Jeffrey Lewis's "Roll Bus Roll," and The Guess Who's "Bus Rider," for example, all indicate the impact of the bus on road travel and music.

While Warren Leming in "Band on the Ruins: Meditations on Music and Motion" does not describe his own experiences on road tours with the Wilderness Road Band group as overwhelmingly easy, positive, and worthy of songs, the trips themselves spoke to his wanderlust, satisfied a yearning for freedom from the shackles of narrow-minded Midwestern values, and promised moments of glory. He narrows the focus of the tour bus and accompanying vehicles to his own nearly three-decade story built on his frustration with growing up in the socially conservative culture of Chicago of the '50s; his intellectual liberation in reading Kerouac's *On the Road* in the late '50s; his inspiration from the Beatnik and hippie revolutions of the '60s; his learning to play the banjo at a time when folk music resurfaced with the Kingston Trio; and his exit from Chicago on the road trip with the Wilderness Road Band in the late '60s and '70s in cars and an ancient, "creaky cranky" VW van while also listening to rock, bluegrass, blues, R and B, and jazz.

Part of the joy of Leming's tour lay in rolling down highways such as Route 66 made famous by other roadies, visiting those places iconized in song lyrics or books, staying at the hotel on Denver's Larimer Street that housed Dean Moriarty in Kerouac's *On the Road*, spending time on the Santa Monica beaches made famous by The Beach Boys, or smoking a little pot at a bar on the Strip in L.A. A related part of the joy was being able to stay with friends and acquaintances along the way for companionship and to defray expenses.

Those who went on the road with a group and a radio usually had favorite bands and songs to match the mood, and Leming listened to songs of the most popular American singers and bands: Ricky Nelson; Eddie Cochran; The Beach Boys; Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young; Elvis Presley; Little Richard; The Kingston Trio; Woody Guthrie; Bob Dylan; and Larry Williams. But they also included such British bands as Peter Townsend, The Beatles, The Kinks, and The Rolling Stones.

Such joys came at a price: discovering the American cultural and urban wasteland of the '50s and '60s in the rust-belt cities of Illinois, Tennessee, and Iowa where young people seemed to be trapped by their surroundings; being on crowded highways around the large Midwestern cities or on the lonesome, empty highways that stretched from Chicago to the beaches of Santa Monica; and having to sleep in tawdry motels and eat in greasy spoons for lack of being able to afford anything else. Often, too, they were deprived of sleep because they had to travel all night instead of being able to stop anywhere. Still another part of the price Warren and his band paid for being on the road was the mechanical breakdown of their vehicles.

These deprivations and inconveniences made musical groups aware of the real-life perils of such trips, as remembered in the tragic deaths of musicians Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper, Richie Valens, Eddie Cochran, and many others. Leming's account, then, is simultaneously a celebration of the great music of traveling singers and bands and a lament for some of the musicians' untimely deaths—both real and musical, reminding readers that, even as the road gives joy, it can extract death.

From innocence to social consciousness—The Beach Boys, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, and Paul Simon

The '60s launched the careers of four of the all-time greatest rock 'n' roll bands and artists of the United States: The Beach Boys, Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, and Bruce Springsteen. The careers of The Beach Boys and Bob Dylan were both launched in 1961, the former in Hawthorne, California and the latter in New York City. These were followed shortly by that of Paul Simon in 1964 in

New Jersey when he and Art Garfunkel signed on with Columbia Records for an album, though they had been playing together since they were eleven, in grade school. Springsteen did not begin recording until 1972 but began entertaining audiences in 1964 at a trailer park in New Jersey when just fifteen years old.

The early '60s music for these performers/bands was inflected by an innocence and enthusiasm that became more musically sophisticated and politically edgy as the decade moved on and as the country became more divided about culture, race, politics, and war. In "'All That Road Going': Brian Wilson, Van Dyke Parks, and The Beach Boys' *Smile,*" Dale Carter notes that, during their most commercially successful period from 1963 to 1966 with albums like the car-themed *Little Deuce Coupe* (1964), The Beach Boys became famous for their upbeat rock 'n' roll songs about the road, teenage romance, and California surfing in which the automobile itself is an icon of youth, fun, adventure, freedom, and masculinity. However, in the slightly later albums *The Beach Boys Today* (1965) and *Pet Sounds* (1966), Brian Wilson and his new lyricist Van Dyke Parks began to explore new musical sounds and emotional states and to query American cultural and political ideology, especially related to environmentalism and civil rights. These new sounds and ideas were meant to culminate in their new album *Smile* in 1967, which would detail a physical and spiritual trip from Plymouth Rock Westward across the continent to Hawaii, interrogate the positive and negative historical developments in America, and imagine a process of rehabilitation or redemption. Things fell apart with the band, however, and a much-reduced collection *Smiley Smile* was produced in the place of *Smile*. Given this abridged version, there was a feeling that the innocence, promise, and momentum of The Beach Boys and their national, cultural, and musical project had been diminished if not altogether lost, but Brian Wilson, the lead musician of The Beach Boys, did complete a version of *Smile* in 2004, almost 40 years later. This new version was updated from the original and marketed as *Brian Wilson Presents Smile,* though Van Dyke Parks's contribution as lyricist was also everywhere in it. Dale Carter finds this version to be the definitive version of what *Smile* was intended to be and bases his discussion on this version. (In 2011, Wilson produced *The Smile Sessions* that was intended to recreate the original *Smile* as closely as possible but went further than was intended by *Brian Wilson Presents Smile*.) It is significant that the launching point for *Brian Wilson Presents Smile* is a section called "Heroes and Villains," a recognition of cultural doubleness/duplicity—national heroic ventures that descend into misadventures, but still create the possibility of redemption as compensation for loss of direction and purpose, the divisiveness of the Vietnam War and the cultural wars that marked the second half of the twentieth century. That the album succeeded in its critique of America, mobility, and

music was recognized by its wide acceptance: the American public was very much behind *Brian Wilson Presents Smile* and *The Smile Sessions* when they appeared, and their winning of several awards, so perhaps the wait was worth it with a much more diverse public in 2004 and 2011 than in 1967 and one that could accept a critique of American history and culture and simultaneously celebrate its musical legacy and cultural transformation. Truly, for The Beach Boys the road had transformed from a more-or-less innocent view of youthful coming of age in a California car to a more substantive overview of personal and collective American responsibilities, even though the band itself did not endure for a long time.

Another product of the '60s who would continue to be embraced by the public well into the twenty-first century, Bob Dylan, shares Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks's complex linking of the road, mobility, special causes, and music. Because Dylan continued to sing, record, and tour from the time he moved to New York at 20 years of age, his is a longer trajectory than The Beach Boys, with numerous and ever-changing road songs along the way. Also, although Dylan is widely credited for his civil rights activism and support for the underclass in America, he has added a much stronger personal, mythical, and spiritual vision than did Wilson and Parks, replacing Parks and Wilson's redemptive American cultural and musical history with his own personal, musical, and spiritual anxieties and redemption.

As Susan Kuyper reminds us in "'Happiness Is the Road': Bob Dylan," Dylan, by his own account, tried desperately to run away from his family home and community norms in Hibbing, Minnesota and achieved his dream of freedom and special purpose when, in 1961, he moved to Manhattan's Greenwich Village, changing his name and taking advantage of the rise in popularity of folk music. He began his professional tours in 1964, embracing the civil rights movement and taking his band to black colleges in the South and universities in Denver and Berkeley. In early 1965 he took a band, The Hawks, on tour to the UK, notoriously switching to electronic music from his acoustic/folk music style to the instant dismay of British and American audiences. Then in quick succession he married, had children, and dropped out of entertainment for eight years until he went on the musical road again in 1974 with his very successful Tour of America. With the exception of 1977, 1982–1983, and 1985, he has since toured every year for the past 41 years, the most recent 15 being part of what he calls "The Never Ending Tour." Throughout this time, real and imagined roads and their travelers and emotions have been a significant part of his repertoire.

In signaling the road throughout his lyrics, Dylan refers to very specific roads and destinations that have had an important effect on him, such as the iconic Highway 51 that brought black culture and music from New Orleans

to Madison, Wisconsin, and Highway 61 that took this culture even further to Duluth, but he also dreams up imaginary roads and locations where his personae act out their lives, sometimes under the cloud of nuclear extinction. In some of these lyrics, he references predecessors such as Woody Guthrie and his journeys on the road, but he also invents other adventurers who succeed in finding something of value on the road and still others like the hobos, gamblers, and wild men who are destroyed by its challenges.

It is, however, the longing for love expressed in road metaphors that occupies many of Dylan's songs and marks the work of many other singers of the road as well. The early songs often depict unrequited love, but some convey the anxiety and confusion of separation. Still others—particularly those from the late '60s to the mid-'70s when Dylan was the happiest with his wife Sara and children—communicate deep love and happiness. Those from 1975 refocus on separation, not just physical but often frighteningly emotional and sometimes deeply spiritual.

As with Dylan's, Paul Simon's songs about the road are a combination of critical portraits of those he knew who were negatively affected by the road and many contemplative ones that are positive about it. As Alexander Hollenberg notes in "'But People Are Strangers': Paul Simon, Lyric Narratives, and the Road," some of these songs about the road describe wasted lives, for instance of a young Detroit schoolboy who would like to leave the city's pollution behind but probably cannot. A certain number of these lyric narratives cluster around accounts of masculine freedom on the road often with a wistful quality. In "Cars Are Cars" from the 1983 album, *Hearts and Bones*, the singer thinks of his favorite car as a home, noting that if his real homes had the qualities of that car, he would not have needed to go on the road.

That wistful side was present even in his early 1968 song "America," which became one of the most celebrated of Simon and Garfunkel's songs. In this song, the narrator on board a Greyhound bus begs his girlfriend to "Let us be lovers" as they "come to look for America." In looking for America out of the windows of the bus, they resemble others in private cars on the highway, but on the bus the couple finds a shared dialogic space of mutual affection, stories, cigarettes, and shared food, reinforcing the idea that buses are more likely to be associated with community than independence. In other early songs, such as "Duncan" and "Papa Hobo," as well as such later ones as "Another Galaxy" and "Graceland," the road offers a physical and emotional comfort zone, and Simon's music slows down the discursive pace and journey, forcing the listener into a contemplative communal mode.

This wistfulness associated with the road does not entirely prepare the listener for the ruckus that Simon's 1987 album, *Graceland*, caused when he included South African black singers and songs on his musical road,

creating very new sounds for North American audiences. For some, Simon's arrangement with the black musicians was exploitative. For others, it granted the repellant apartheid South African culture legitimacy. For yet others, *Graceland*'s collaborative enfolding of township *umbaqanga* or "township jive" and American rock 'n' roll signaled an act of cultural and political resistance to the white apartheid government's power and control and celebrated racial and musical diversity. Indeed, in the title song "Graceland," the narrative of a father and his nine-year-old child traveling from the North on a highway beside the Mississippi River into the Southern heartland of the black music tradition and of enslavement and looking for the absent mother draws an implicit analogy with the American singer's journey to South Africa to record with black musicians, discover something about his own musical foundations, look for musical hybridity or syncretism, and raise questions about enslavement. The song does not conclude with the singer actually arriving in Graceland, so by implication the international, interracial, and mixed musical and political journey to South Africa may be unfinished work as well. Nevertheless, fans were not altogether happy about Simon's political missteps in confusing musical and racial harmony with predatory nation-states.

Of these four quintessential modern singers of the road, it is Springsteen who has been the most controversially outspoken in critiquing vulture capitalism, the failed American Dream, and the Vietnam War (Springsteen interview). Many of Springsteen's well-known songs about the American road appeared early in his career, especially in the 1975 *Born to Run* album that contained, among many others, the title song "Born to Run," and "Thunder Road," both holding out the promise of deliverance from repressive cultural, economic, and military forces in the United States through the freedom of the road but, as other songs in the album indicate, was unable to fulfill that promise. This frustrated desire for deliverance in albums such as *Nebraska* (1982) and *The Ghost of Tom Joad* (1995) became explicitly centered on the Vietnam War: though the war ended in 1975, the country suffered economically because of it, and veterans who returned from the war frequently endured poverty, physical and emotional abuse, dysfunctionality, lack of help from the Veterans Administration, and even suicide, as evidenced in even in the early "Lost in the Flood" (1973).

It is this sense of great injustice about the Vietnam War and its aftermath that continues to pit Springsteen against the political-military-economic establishment. As Chad Wriglesworth points out in "'Apology and Forgiveness Got no Place Here at All': On the Road to Washington D.C. with Bruce Springsteen," Springsteen sang an anti-draft song "Fortunate Son" and Vietnam protest song "Born in the U.S.A" at the November 11, 2014 Concert for Valor in Washington D.C. designed to honor some 2.6 million veterans

who had volunteered to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. This free Veterans Day concert held at the National Mall was intended to present a vision of hope, patriotism, progress, and new beginnings, but Springsteen's performance interrogated national healing and renewal by foregrounding the sacrifices of some 650,000 draftees who went "on the road" to the Vietnam War, most unwillingly. While the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have not been popular, they have been viewed by most as necessary in ways far removed from that of Vietnam, which was protested while it was being fought and has never gained favor or public legitimacy. For Springsteen all such wars are problematic, and rock 'n' roll and the metaphor of the road are deeply embedded in the necessity of protest against such unjust causes.

From engagement to the metafictive play of the postmodern road

While the music of The Beach Boys, Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, and Bruce Springsteen has endured for over fifty years and remains among the most recognizable for American and international audiences alike, the culture and music of the road has evolved. In "Knowing the Score: Road Movie Soundtracks and Cinematic Verities," Kurt Jacobsen appraises the contribution of music in some of the most relevant and important road movies from the '60s on—precisely in tandem with the period of time that The Beach Boys, Dylan, Simon, and Springsteen began their careers and brought them to maturation and then into the twilight years. In this same fifty year period the American public had the money, leisure, and interest in going on the road so that changes in music and the road have been linked in the public's mind.

The '60s not only marked the onset of the careers of The Beach Boys, Dylan, and Simon but also coincided with the release of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Graduate* (1967), and *Easy Rider* (1969), movies that are singularly remembered for changing the face of Hollywood, introducing remarkable musical scores, and altering conceptions of the American road. All of these films were premised on revealing the weaknesses in middle-class American society. Arthur Penn's Depression-based *Bonnie and Clyde* celebrated Bonnie and Clyde's heroic if deadly resistance against their bleak small-town lives and a banking system that impoverished Americans. This film was accompanied by an old-time instrumental banjo and fiddle piece "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" by Grand Ole Opry icons Flatt & Scruggs that was played along with the couple's many escapes. Mike Nichols' *The Graduate* with its superb score by Simon and Garfunkel also played to young people's disillusionment with a society where middle-class affluence was reinforced by hypocrisy. Dennis

Hopper's cult film *Easy Rider* depicted Wyatt and Billie's thrilling motorcycle ride through the American Southwest from California to Louisiana and their horrifying execution-style murder on the highway en route to Florida. This film was accompanied by the Byrds' "The Ballad of Easy Rider," Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild" and "The Pusher," a psychedelic "Kyrie Eleison," and Jimi Hendrix's "If Six Was Nine."

Only slightly later Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid* (1973), Hal Ashby's *Bound for Glory* (1976), and Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas* (1984) reinforced the relationship between folk songs, the road, and social critique. *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid* described the sell-out of the freedom of the Old West to land speculators and lawyers. Bob Dylan's role in this film is quite extraordinary for he not only wrote several songs for it, produced an album (including the now-famous "Knockin' on Heaven's Door"), but also acted the part of Alias in the film, reinforcing his socially conscious stance. *Bound for Glory* was a loose adaptation of Woody Guthrie's Depression-era travels from the Dust Bowl to California and his anger against vicious employers of the migrant Okie workers. Although David Carradine got mixed reviews for the way he sang Guthrie's songs, Jacobsen thinks that "This Land Is Your Land" strikes a national chord in its condemnation of the one percent. While Ina Rae Hark observed that road films with social critiques generally fell out of fashion during the Reagan presidency in the 1980s (204–205), Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas* (1984) was an exception to that rule, sharing a similar bleakness to *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Bound for Glory* in its depictions of the south Texas desert and even urban Los Angeles and Houston. The music, too, based on Blind Willie Johnson's melancholy gospel blues firmly links the road, music, and social critique. Each of these films links the lives and travels of counter-cultural heroes to the authenticity of folk instruments and music.

Something else was afoot during this period as well, for until the stock market collapse in 1987 the United States was beginning to forget about its disastrous Vietnam War and attendant financial problems. That meant that it wanted to forget about gritty buddy road films that would give an unfavorable view of America. That did not happen, however, with Ridley Scott's cult classic *Thelma and Louise* (1991), the story of two women rebelling against an unjust and patriarchal world, traveling across the Midwest in their Thunderbird in pursuit of freedom, and finally hurtling into the Grand Canyon in a final act of death-accepting defiance. In this film, the electric guitar, banjo strings, songs of Glenn Frey, Martha Reeve, Marianne Faithful, Chris Whiteley, and B. B. King assist the pace, celebration, and angst of these women and reinforce the links between folk songs and social/political resistance.

Thelma and Louise was an exception to the general disappearance of films about the road as a vehicle for social protest, and road films would morph

into more romantic postmodern forms for the next 20 years, in the process becoming more diverse in cast and music, less tied to youth and traditional masculinity, and less dependent on the automobile as such. Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump* (1994) would take Forrest on the road in several buses (school bus, military bus, and commercial bus) and use a collection of old tunes by The Byrds, The Doors, The Mamas & the Papas, Joan Baez, and The Supremes to create a feel-good patriotic and sentimental film affirming both the humanity of and possibilities for the disabled.

One of the most romantic and metafictive of the new postmodern films is Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown* (2005) that departs completely from the buddy road film in favor of an old-fashioned heterosexual relationship with a happy ending and a plot that breaks the unwritten geography rule that the action must proceed from East to West. In this case the main male character Drew first flies from Oregon to Kentucky and only at the end drives from Kentucky to Oregon partly along Route 66, making the trip a self-conscious evocation of past road journeys. Even the playing of the songs that the film is known for, including those by Tom Petty, Fleetwood Mac, Lindsey Buckingham, My Morning Jacket, and Elton John, gives the impression that the film is self-consciously fulfilling the expectation that there must be road music associated with the plot.

Two Native American films also break down typical barriers in the choice of plot, cast, vehicle, and music, though they are not so self-conscious about doing that. Jonathan Wacks's *Powwow Highway* (1989) concerns Buddy and Philbert's road trip in an old beat-up jalopy from the Cheyenne reservation in Montana to Santa Fe, New Mexico to take care of Philbert's sister's children and try to get her out of prison. This plot concerning Native Americans and acted by them is accompanied by tom-toms and flutes, and the music is performed by Creedence Clearwater Revival, Joe Ely, and Robbie Robertson. Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (1998) tells a story about family and social healing on an Intermountain bus when two young Native American youths go from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho to Phoenix, Arizona to retrieve the ashes of one's father and in the process find reconciliation. This film, too, is quite singular in its use of Native American musicians Jim Boyd, John Sirois, Andre Picara Jr., and the female trio Ulali to provide excellent, almost haunting sound and lyrics. Both of these Native American road narratives are focused on family divides and a healing process.

Finally, two movies that intentionally violate the ideal of the young buddy road relationship are David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999) and Alexander Payne's *About Schmidt* (2002). Both of these are about old men who go on the road individually to solve a family problem. In the case of *The Straight Story*, Alvin Straight has had to surrender his driver's license because he

suffers from bad health (mainly diabetes) and so drives a lawn tractor on the side-roads from Laurens, Iowa to Mt. Zion, Wisconsin to make peace with his brother who has suffered a heart attack. This journey through the cornfields of the Midwest is accompanied by the simple relaxing country tunes of Angelo Badalamenti. In *About Schmidt,* the newly widowed Warren sets out in his oversized Winnebago Adventurer RV to drive from Omaha, Nebraska to Denver, Colorado to stop his daughter's wedding, but repents of this action and helps to celebrate her marriage before returning home. As Warren makes this drive, he revisits some of the themes and sites of exploration along the way, self-consciously reminding the reader of various related historical road journeys. The music to this film by the film-score composer Rolfe Kent (who also did the score for Alexander Payne's 2005 buddy road film *Sideways*) is suitably pleasant without being edgy, underscoring the process of reconciliation he goes through.

The films and narratives of this postmodern period, then, self-consciously revisit many of the previous sites and conventions of road travel because by this time the road has been firmly established in the American narrative of self and country. Mobility, adventure, and freedom continue to be important characteristics of the travelers on this late road—by whatever vehicle might come in handy, but the emphasis in the past 20 to 30 years has been on the strengthening of family ties and the development of community, even in the instance of solo journeys. The travelers, still mainly white men, but not exclusively so, are certainly concerned about their identities but don't feel they must rise up against their families, the bankers, the politicians, and even the military in order to accomplish their goals. Nor do they seem to have to start out afresh in a new location, whether East or West, in order to find themselves. Conventionally, they tend to go West and especially by car, but buses, vans, RVs, tractors, boats, planes, even walking all fill the bill going in any direction and playing or listening to many different kinds of music.

2

The semiotics of the road

Gordon E. Slethaug

For thousands of years, human beings have been traveling to find new sources of food, populate new areas, spread or take up religions and other cultural concepts, and go to war. What began as bare necessity and restricted transportation with narrow paths and limited waterways developed into substantial sea and air routes and overland highways spanning localities, countries, and continents. Nayan Chanda makes the case that, taken together, the various pursuits, routes, modes of travel, journeys, and increasing technological sophistication established interconnected communities that have led to the far-reaching travel we enjoy today—and which we call "the road." However,

> Only well into the nineteenth century did men and women go on the road to work or relax, be alone or enjoy companionship, satisfy curiosity or follow dreams, and explore all those things that we now identify with the road. From that time "the road" became an increasingly complex image, metaphor, and icon—or trope—for nation-based exploration and exploitation, the journeys of families in pursuit of better living conditions and of individuals who hoped to discover more about their identities, and, in the process, overcome difficulties and limitations in transforming themselves. (Slethaug, "Mapping," 13)

The "road" denotatively is a certain kind of pathway over which human beings travel but connotatively it has a wealth of associations of pathways, modes of travel, the travelers themselves and their pursuits, as well as the fiction, film, music, and art associated with it. All of these aspects of what we call the road