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1-1-2008

Review of *Fire in the Water, Earth in the Air: Legends of West Texas Music* By Christopher J. Oglesby

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Blaser, Kent, "Review of *Fire in the Water, Earth in the Air: Legends of West Texas Music* By Christopher J. Oglesby" (2008). *Great Plains Quarterly.* Paper 1381.
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Fire in the Water, Earth in the Air: Legends of West Texas Music. By Christopher J. Oglesby. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. xiii + 287 pp. Maps, photographs, appendixes, index. $55.00 cloth, $22.95 paper.

From Bob Wills, Buddy Holly, and Waylon Jennings to Stevie Ray Vaughn, Joe Ely, and Natalie Maines of The Dixie Chicks, Lubbock and its greater West Texas environs have been home to an unusually eclectic and creative musical community. Defining precisely what constitutes West Texas music is difficult, and diversity and variety often overshadow common features, but a West Texas "sound," blending elements of country, western, blues,

early rock and roll, and folk and roots traditions into an identifiable if multifaceted genre, is widely accepted. The list of music "legends" associated with this region is indeed long and impressive and includes many famous names who later moved on to other locations.

Fire in the Water is primarily a book for aficionados. It consists of a somewhat haphazard collection of interviews, taken between 1998 and 2005, of twenty-seven individuals involved in various capacities with the Lubbock music scene from the 1950s through the 1990s. A few of the big names are here, including Mac Davis and Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and Butch Hancock from the legendary if short-lived Flatlanders group, but most of the interviews are with lesser-known "locals," including, in addition to the musicians, writers and artists associated with them, often as spouses or partners, and the people who owned or managed the bars and other venues for live music. Not surprisingly, the length and quality of the interviews vary considerably. Brief introductions provide background and context, and lyrics, discography, and photographs are provided on a selective basis.

While this certainly doesn't amount to a comprehensive or systematic study, it does create an entertaining, up-close-and-personal picture of the unique and dynamic musical community of Lubbock and West Texas. Oglesby probes for environmental or cultural features of Lubbock and the southern Great Plains that might explain this concentration of musical creativity. A few of his subjects take the bait, mostly focusing on rebellion against the strongly religious and politically conservative aspects of the mainstream culture, or on the stark Plains environment (a kind of "there's nothing else to do" response to rural isolation theory), but many others are skeptical of any overarching explanation beyond chance and coincidence.

Fire in the Water is not the first, and shouldn't be the last, word on West Texas music. Lack of continuity and gaps in the story can be frustrating. But for fans it will provide welcome insider information and detail, and for those in the process of becoming fans it makes a fun and accessible introduction to a significant Great Plains musical phenomenon.

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