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Review of *The Light Crust Doughboys Are on the Air: Celebrating Seventy Years of Texas Music* By John Mark Dempsey

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The Light Crust Doughboys Are on the Air: Celebrating Seventy Years of Texas Music. By John Mark Dempsey. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2002. ix + 294 pp. Photographs, appendixes, references, index, compact disc. \$29.95.

During the 1930s and 1940s radio played a huge role in the development and dissemination of American popular music, especially country music. Regular live exposure on the radio was often more important for a country music performer's career than were recording opportunities. And there is no better example of how the interaction of radio with recordings and public appearances helped to sustain a career than that of the Light Crust Doughboys. Of course it helps if you have a long-time sponsor, too.

The Light Crust Doughboys were formed in 1930 by the Burrus Mill and Elevator Company of Fort Worth, Texas, to promote the company's Light Crust Flour on radio. Original members included western swing pioneers Milton Brown and Bob Wills. W. Lee "Pass the Biscuits, Pappy" O'Daniel, general manager of the mill and a future governor of Texas, soon became the on-the-air announcer, and when the program moved to Fort Worth's clear-channel 50,000-watt WBAP, the popularity of the Light Crust Doughboys took off. Later over the Texas Quality Network the Doughboys could be heard not only in Texas but also on radio stations in bordering states and, perhaps most importantly for Midwestern listeners, on KOMA in Oklahoma City and KVOO in Tulsa.

By 1935 Brown, Wills, and O'Daniel had departed, but the Doughboys were flourishing. Marvin "Junior" (and later "Smokey") Montgomery joined up in 1935 and remained a member until his death in 2001. Others who left their mark include Dick "Bashful" Reinhart, Kenneth "Abner" Pitts, William Muryel "Zeke" Campbell, and John "Knocky" Parker. The daily radio show went off the air in 1952, but the Doughboys continued to tour and make personal appearances for Light Crust

Flour well into the 1980s. Since 1993 Art Greenhaw, who signed on as bassist and business manager, has steered the group in new directions: appearing with symphony orchestras and recording a series of Grammy Award-nominated albums with gospel music legend James Blackwood. The future of the Light Crust Doughboys now rests with the marketing acumen of Greenhaw.

To recount the Light Crust Doughboys story, John Mark Dempsey conducted a number of interviews with band members and associates past and present, combining these with additional interviews from the University of North Texas Oral History Collection to weave a narrative presented for the most part in the participants' own words. The author also discusses the Doughboys' recording career (although the 1933-1935 sessions cut for Vocalion are ignored). More detailed information on the band's studio recording history is available in the appendixes, and a "bonus" compact disc allows the listener to sample the Doughboys' varied repertoire (unfortunately no information on recording dates and musicians is provided). For critical perspective on the Doughboys' historical importance, Dempsey regularly turns to comments solicited from Texas music historians Kevin Coffey and John Morthland. The end result is a sprightly, if sometimes lightweight, chronicle that captures a sense of what has made the Light Crust Doughboys one of the longest-lived bands in country music history.

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