



Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity

By Richard A. Peterson

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"[Peterson] restores to the music a sense of fun and diversity and possibility that more naive fans (and performers) miss. Like Buck Owens, Peterson knows there is no greater adventure or challenge than to 'act naturally.'"—Ken Emerson, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"A triumphal history and theory of the country music industry between 1920 and 1953."—Robert Crowley, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*

"One of the most important books ever written about a popular music form."—Timothy White, *Billboard Magazine*

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Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

Though it tends to be a bit too pedantic and stilted, this ambitious study offers interesting insights into America's most popular musical form. Peterson (Sociology/Vanderbilt Univ.) coopts postmodernist vocabulary in his study of contemporary country music's "authenticity"--such authenticity is, he claims, a cultural and commercial fabrication based on the observation of previous generations of musicians and what individual performers perceive as longterm trends rather than fads. Most interesting is Peterson's separation of country music into "hard core" and "soft shell" subcategories. Hard-core performers play in a consistent style, write confessional lyrics, and generally live a life that parallels their music. On the other hand, soft-shell musicians, typified by the Grand Ole Opry's style, tended toward musicianship that transcended country, often performing ballads that had been made popular by songwriters and musicians in other formats. For Peterson, the hard-core strain--typified best by the legendary Hank Williams, whose death in 1953 marks the end of the 30-year period that Peterson examines--is perhaps the most "authentic," though his definitions are purposefully slippery, and he certainly means no disrespect to the soft-shell performers (such as Kenny Rogers and Tammy Wynette) to whom he gives attention in his study. Among the most interesting bits of trivia that Peterson offers is that the term "country" displaced the more popular term "folk" largely due to the efforts of Sen. Joseph McCarthy, whose interrogation of early 1950s folkie Pete Seeger slapped folk music with a "red" label that country musicians sought to avoid. With his interesting and perhaps controversial theories, as well as his exhaustive scholarship, Peterson is able to overcome his overly scholarly style and produce an informative study. (illustrations, not seen) -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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