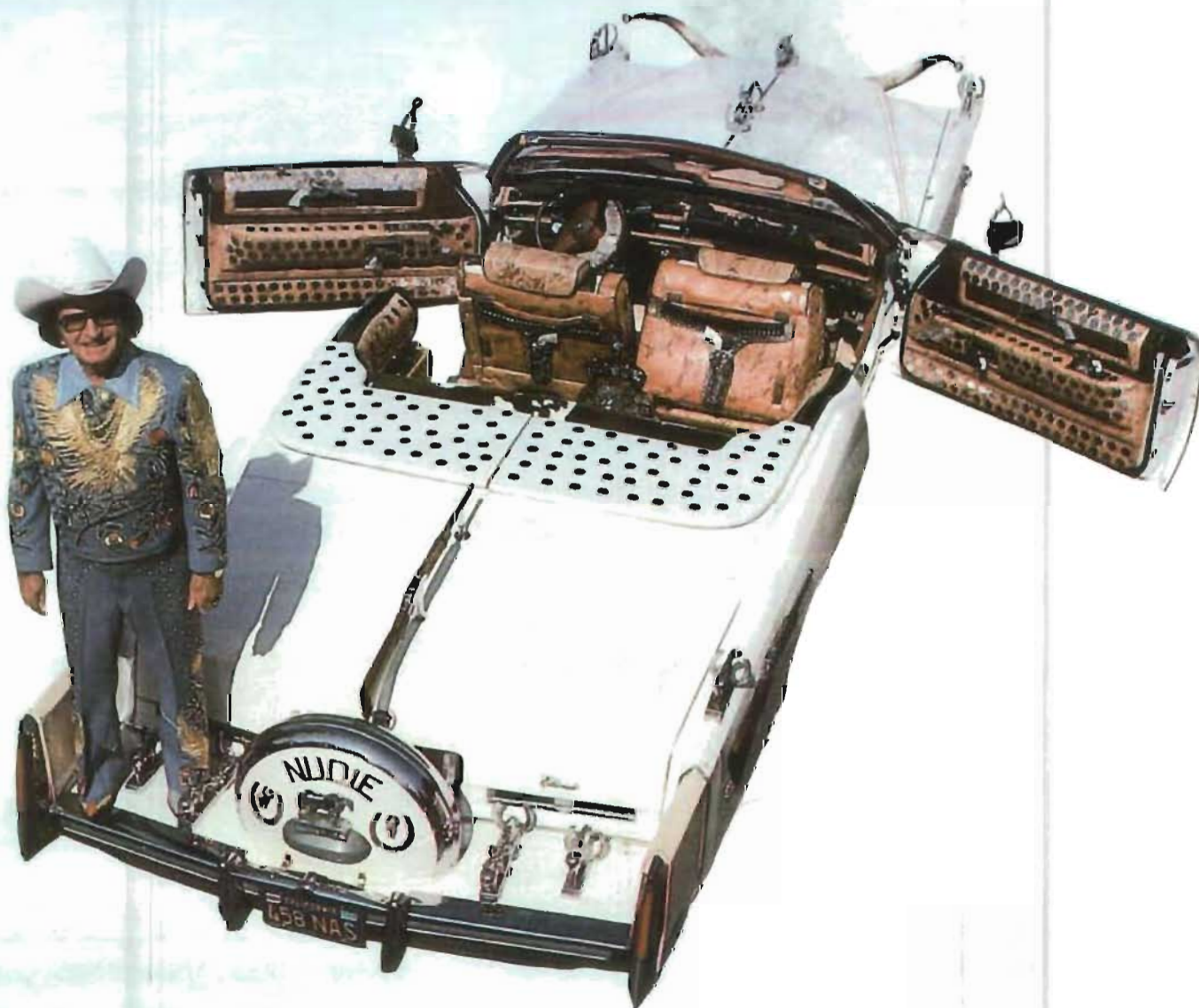


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COVER. Nudie and his car. Los Angeles country music tailor Nudie Cohn in eagle-patterned rhinestone outfit standing on a silver dollar-adorned Cadillac stylized by his tailor shop, early 1970s. Photographic print. Photograph by Trina Mitchum. Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles. In honor of Irving Jacobs.

All That Glitters

Country Music, Taste, and the Politics of the Rhinestone “Nudie” Suit

Peter La Chapelle

As a self-described “devoted teenage country music lover” in the 1950s, Shirley Desy tried not to miss a single concert at the Long Beach Municipal Auditorium. Even before she was old enough to drive, she finagled her father into driving her to see the auditorium’s regular series of “package” shows featuring the genre’s top acts. Desy particularly enjoyed listening to a small group of strong women vocalists who were beginning to make progress as solo performers, as well as a larger group of handsome boot-wearing Casanovas who sang about the honky-tonk life. What thrilled Desy most were the outfits the performers wore. Brightly colored and adorned with rhinestones, embroidery, piping and fringe, they reflected the stage lighting and seemed to beam luminosity. “In those days, every entertainer I ever saw, at any concert

I ever saw, was dressed up,” Desy remembered. “If you got up on the stage, you were special, and if you put on one of those suits, that reinforced that specialness. They looked like they were stars.”¹

The image of the rhinestone-studded country music star, however, has not weathered so well in the recent past. Rhinestone outfits are “gaudy,” journalistic critics argue. Other commentators contend they signify a lack of taste.² Some country performers have even made an effort to distance themselves from country music’s rhinestone past. “No big hair, no gaudy outfits, no rhinestone flash,” argued the *Toronto Star* in a 1996 article about performer Martina McBride’s efforts to denude the country music industry of its trademark ostentation and glitz.³

Underlying this negative media coverage is a hierarchical notion about taste and a set of assumptions about class.⁴ Country musicians, especially during the rhinestone outfit’s heyday, have overwhelmingly tended to come from working-class backgrounds.⁵ Commentators and journalists, on the other hand, regularly stem from an educated middle class that has tended to look down on forms of apparel and music that have had resonance with lower income groups.⁶ Perhaps for these reasons the rhinestone outfit has failed until very recently to be taken seriously by cultural historians and scholars of American dress.⁷

Rhinestone country music apparel, however, did play an important role in thousands of people’s lives to which stories of Desy and other fans attest.

Created in immigrant tailor shops in Southern California’s San Fernando Valley and reflecting the whims of performers who migrated from the impoverished Dust Bowl states, the outfits were associated with blue-collar leisure in Southern California and throughout the South and industrial Midwest. Worn mostly by men, such outfits not only presented a way to attract fan attention and display a novel honky-tonk masculinity, but in their earliest incarnations served as a kind of symbolic protest against the homogenization of American men’s work dress. They also presented a canvas upon which audiences could vicariously engage in forms of cultural and gendered cross-dressing. Performers, in particular, used these hybrid identities to subvert middle-class social norms.⁸

The history of the rhinestone country music suit is inextricably linked to “honky tonk,” a form of country music that dominated airwaves, stages and recording studios at the time that the first simulated gem outfits appeared. The origin of the term honky-tonk is uncertain, although various strains of thought connect the term with indecent male-oriented entertainment, including burlesque shows as well as the musical fare at African American taverns in the Southern Plains and Border South.⁹ The term did not become closely associated with country music until 1936 when Al Dexter, a white Texan who frequently performed with black musicians, recorded “Honky Tonk Blues,” a song that spoke woefully of one man’s love life amid the

This article is based on research conducted through a Stella Blum Grant. The Costume Society of America awards the Stella Blum Research Grant in memory of Stella Blum, curator, educator, writer, scholar and founding member of the Society. The purpose of the grant is to support original student research on North American dress.

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“honky tonks,” small taverns that served working-class clientele.¹⁰ A spate of more fatalistic honky-tonk hits followed, and by the 1950s a definitive honky-tonk style emerged. Playing loudly in order to be heard over the din and poor audio dynamics of the small clubs, honky-tonk performers sang the praises of barroom culture while expressing remorse about brawls, drunkenness, ill-fated romances and other perceived consequences of the honky-tonk life.¹¹

Honky-tonk music traveled west during the 1930s and 1940s with the thousands of Texans, Oklahomans, and Arkansans who resettled in California. Fleeing economic failures and the ecological disaster of the Dust Bowl, many had come to Southern California for work in the region’s petroleum, shipbuilding, automobile and aircraft industries.¹² As one writer put it, “[t]he smokestacks of Bethlehem Steel and GM South Gate represented the happy ending to the *Grapes of Wrath*.”¹³ During World War II, performers reached out to these migrant audiences by mixing honky tonk with the jazz-influenced “western swing” music that swept area dancehalls. In the 1950s, however, the dance fad waned, encouraging performers to attract audiences with even more candid portraits of boozing, adultery and barroom life.¹⁴

By the mid-1950s, Los Angeles had developed into a formidable center for honky-tonk music. Johnny Bond, a transplant from Oklahoma who appeared on the local “Town Hall Party” television barn dance, made a splash with remorseful hard-drinking numbers such as “Sick, Sober and Sorry,” while Johnny Horton, the Los Angeles-born son of East Texas farm workers who started out his career on the rival “Hometown Jamboree” barn dance, climbed *Billboard*’s country music charts in 1956 with the celebratory cheating-and-boozing hit “Honky Tonk Man.”¹⁵ By the latter part of the decade, Southern California had become a noted enough outpost for the musical style that Lefty Frizzell, a Texas honky-tonker who had gained national appeal, made the San Fernando Valley his home.¹⁶ Even Texas-based artist Hank Thompson, one of the biggest performers in the

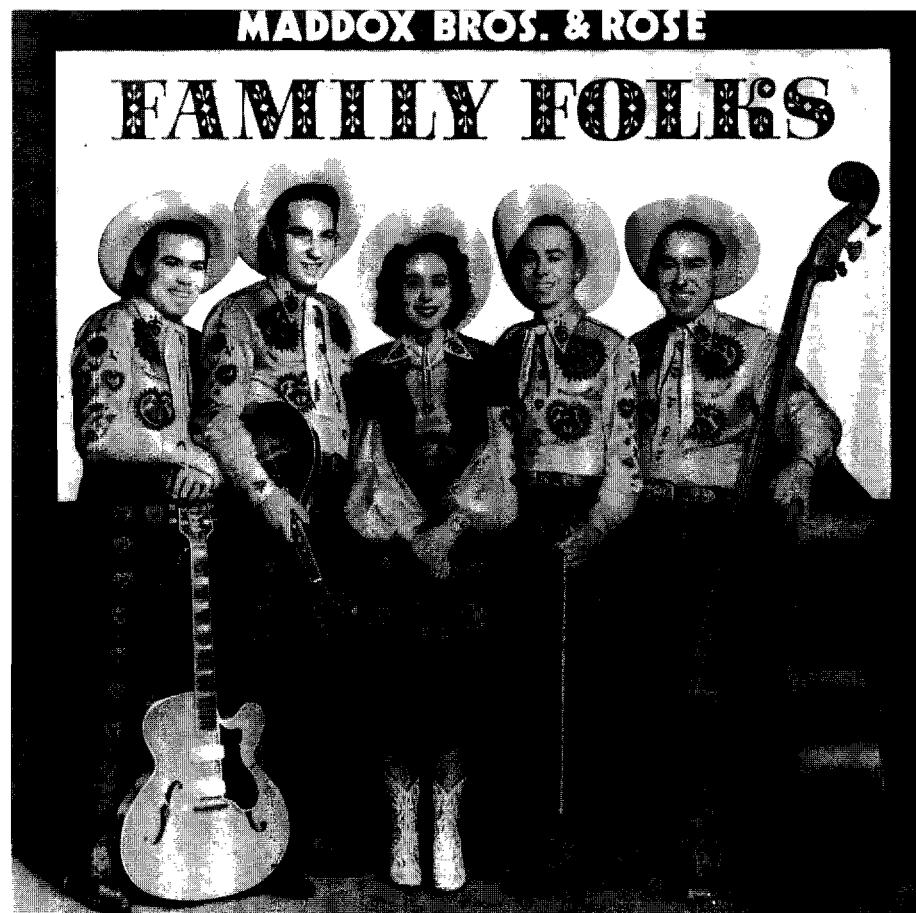


FIGURE 1. *The Maddox Brothers and Rose wearing Nathan Turk designs, ca. 1948. Photographic print. Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles. Donated by California State University, Northridge—Music Department.*

genre, began calling his appearances in Los Angeles the “bread and butter” of his regular performance circuit along Route 66.¹⁷

While honky-tonk music was attracting blue-collar fans in Los Angeles, the costumes worn by honky-tonk performers stemmed from a separate working-class tradition brought to Southern California by European and Mexican couturiers. Two immigrant Jewish tailors played particularly important roles in designing and producing the outfits worn by honky-tonk performers. Nathan Turk, whose real surname was Tieg, learned the tailoring trade in Warsaw and in 1923 established a western clothing store in Sherman Oaks, then a small outpost in the San Fernando Valley.¹⁸ Nudie “The Rodeo Tailor” Cohn—born Nutya

Kotlyrenko—emigrated from his native Ukraine to New York, but eventually set up shop in North Hollywood, another Valley neighborhood, in the late 1940s.¹⁹ Turk and Cohn’s *entré* into the country music apparel business reflected the prominence of Eastern European Jews as both workers and managers in the Los Angeles garment industry, a factor that stemmed partly from the discriminatory practices these immigrants faced in the old country. In Turk’s native Poland, for instance, tailoring was one of the few trades that Jews were allowed to practice in the nineteenth century, and hence a number of the earliest garment-making institutions in Southern California—including prominent firms such as Norton Bros. & Morris—were run by Polish immigrants who continued to practice

their ancestors' trade. At the turn of the century, Los Angeles's balmy weather encouraged more to move West, especially immigrant New York garment workers who sought a cure for the tuberculosis they contracted while working in that city's sweatshops.²⁰ Turk left New York partly because of his bronchitis.²¹ Although Cohn did not travel to the Golden State for health reasons, his migration west was part of an effort to achieve the "American Dream" of a more prosperous and comfortable life.²²

To some degree, Turk and Cohn's western wear businesses paralleled other immigrants' artistic re-adaptions of frontier motifs—especially those popularized nationally in the late nineteenth century by institutions such as vaudeville and Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Shows—as a way of assimilating into American life. Turk, who was seminal in sparking the western country music clothing trend in Los Angeles, borrowed elements of Cody's costumes to produce dazzling fringe-and-embroidery outfits for motion picture stars Tom Mix and Gene Autry. By the late 1940s, Turk's shop sold tailored bright fuchsia-, aqua- and chartreuse-colored western suits adorned with symbolic embroidery, such as roses on Rose Maddox's stage wear (Figure 1) and black appliquéd card spades on the costumes of the band lead by Spade Cooley (Figure 2).²³ Cohn, who immigrated to Brooklyn from Kiev at the age of eleven and lived in dire poverty, drew upon skills taught by his boot-maker father to land a job sewing G-strings and stage costumes for burlesque dancers and vaudeville performers in New York. Spending some time on the road as a boxer, Cohn eventually opened his North Hollywood shop in 1947.²⁴ Realizing the demand for Turk's innovations, Cohn added more bangles and institutionalized Turk's practice of personalized pictography by creating W-shaped pockets for Los Angeles western swing band leader Tex Williams and a jacket adorned with embroidered huskies and dog sleds for honky-tonker Ferlin Husky (Figure 3).²⁵

Having worked with rhinestones and feathers on burlesque dancers'



FIGURE 2. *Spade Cooley in musical note outfit (left) and band member with "spade"-adorned shirt yoke, Los Angeles, ca. 1946. Photograph. Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, P 477.*

costumes, Cohn is believed to be the first to have added the shiny imitation jewels to country music outfits in the early 1950s. One account suggests that honky-tonker Lefty Frizzell was the first to wear Cohn's rhinestone designs in 1951 by wearing the faux-gem initials "L" and "F" on the front of his Cohn-made shirt yoke. Although Turk

never adopted the rhinestone practice to the extent Cohn did, he too was producing a few rhinestone suits by the mid-1950s.²⁶

As Cohn's reputation spread, so did that of his chief designer, Manuel Cuevas. Born in Coalcomán in rural Michoacan, Mexico, Cuevas began working for Cohn in the mid-1950s

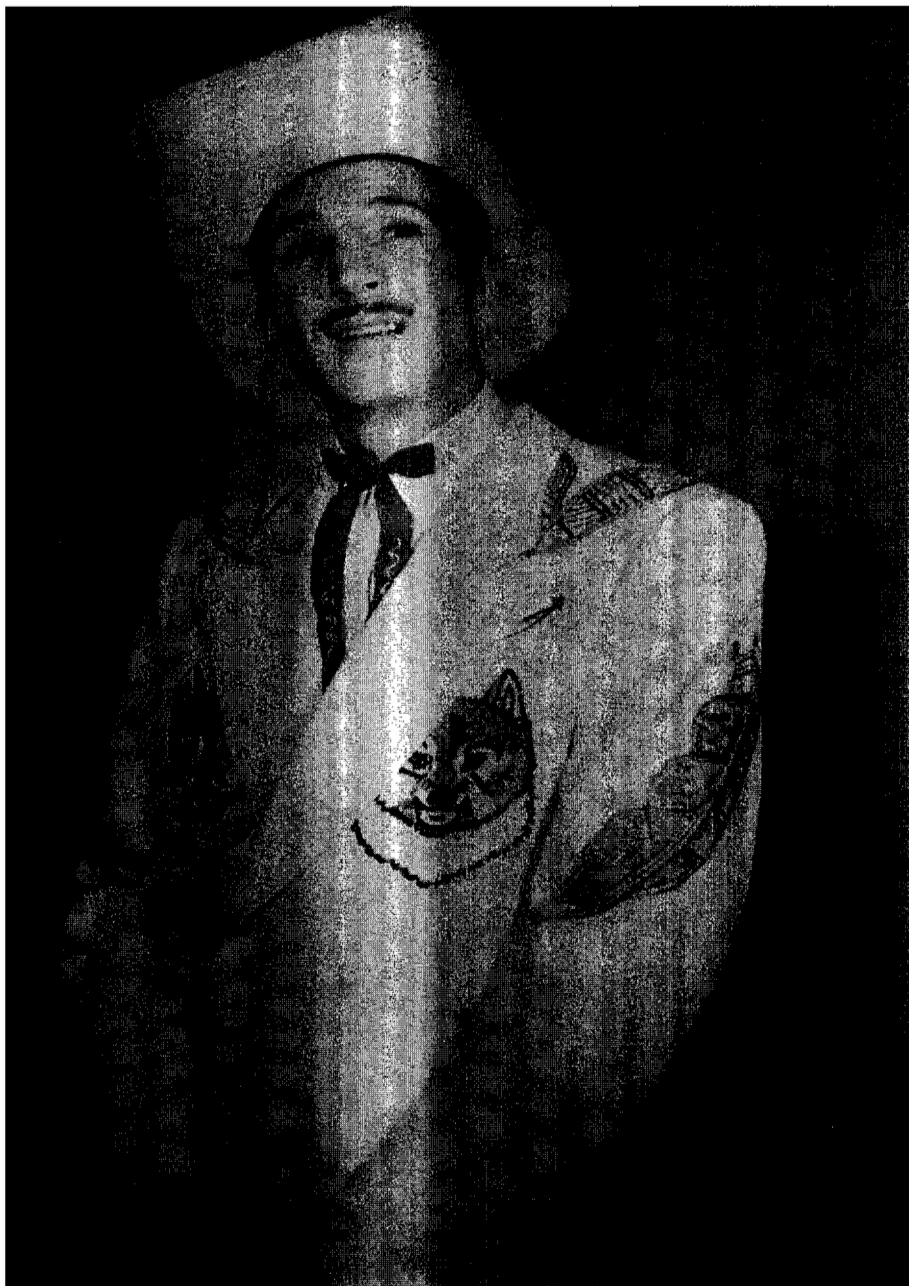


FIGURE 3. *Ferlin Husky in embroidered husky and dogsled jacket, early 1950s. Publicity photograph. Thomas Sims Archive, San Diego, California.*

and eventually opened his own shop (Figure 4). Trained in garment making in Mexico, Cuevas spearheaded the Cohn shop's later move to market the rhinestone outfits to rock stars such as Ricky Nelson, John Lennon, Gram Parsons, Elton John and the Grateful Dead.²⁷ Seamstresses Viola Grae, originally from Minnesota, and Rose Clemens, of England, added Swiss and chain stitches to the embroidery that often embellished the suits during the 1950s and 1960s.²⁸

Although Turk's arrow pockets and the Cohn's thunderbird insignia

borrowed from the western and Native American imagery of Cody and Hollywood's "Gower Gulch" westerns, the costumes also drew from the ethnic tailoring traditions of their makers. Turk's suits often featured floral folk patterns that reflected the peasant traditions of western Europe and his native Poland.²⁹ Although Turk began introducing Mexican and Native American elements in his designs in the 1930s, Cuevas began adding patterns and flourishes to his work that resembled the textile design and folk furniture painting of indigenous

peoples of central Mexico. "Some of these things I must have subconsciously absorbed," Cuevas said in a 2000 interview.³⁰ The *bricolage* of embroidery, appliqué, rhinestone, leather fringe and other materials used in the outfits corresponded to the mosaics often found in folk art created by the Dust Bowlers. Makeshift structures in one Los Angeles migrant encampment during the Depression were, for instance, decorated by "bits of colored glass," reported the *Los Angeles Times* in 1938.³¹ Cuevas, in particular, frequently consulted with performers and allowed them to personalize their designs, calling himself a happenstance psychologist in later interviews.³²

Rhinestone suits did more, however, than reflect the cultural backgrounds of their working-class creators and wearers. They also served as a site for both coping with and rebelling against the pressures that were beginning to shape life in suburban Southern California. Custom-tailored in bright colors and featuring designs that combined European folk art with southwestern chic, country music suits such as Porter Wagoner's cacti- and wagon wheel-adorned outfit (Figure 5) proved the perfect antithesis of the conservative gray flannel suit, the nearly universal form of men's office apparel of the 1950s and early 1960s.³³

Although the lifeblood of honky-tonk music remained among blue-collar fans, especially those who identified with song characters who could not keep up with the Jones, the music began developing a following among suburban professionals who wore such suits. Jim Halsey, Hank Thompson's manager during the 1950s, remembered that bankers, restaurant owners, and even doctors and lawyers were beginning to attend Thompson and his Brazos Valley Boys' Southern California appearances.³⁴ *Broadcasting* reported in 1963 that KFOX-AM-FM, the area's largest country station, made an effort to cater to "the tastes of an audience that is mostly middle-class augmented by the more recent college and coffee shop set."³⁵ As a result of the G.I. Bill's academic assistance programs, many country

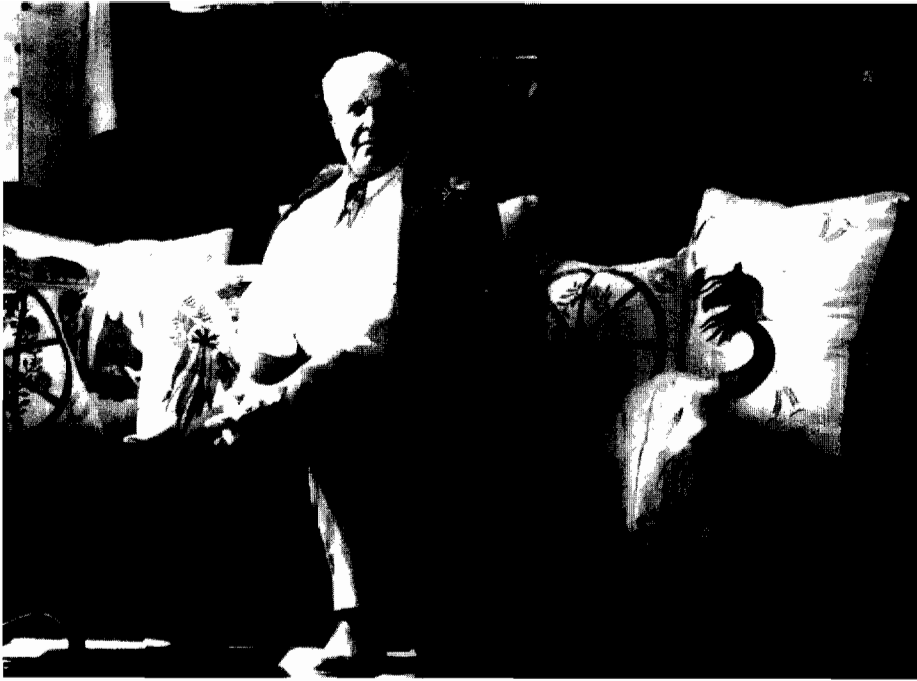


FIGURE 4. Recent photograph of Manuel Cuevas in his Nashville shop. Courtesy of Manuel Exclusive Clothier, Nashville, Tennessee.

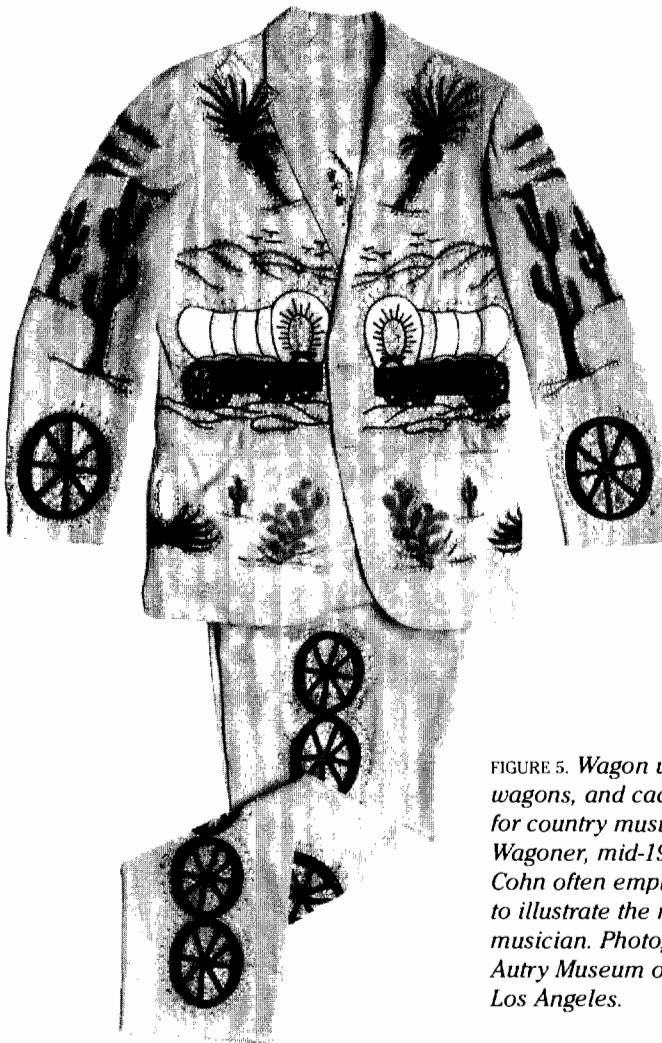


FIGURE 5. Wagon wheels, Conestoga wagons, and cacti adorn this suit made for country music performer Porter Wagoner, mid-1960s. Tailors such as Cohn often employed whimsical devices to illustrate the name of a singer or musician. Photographic print. Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles.

music-listening working-class migrants were also attending college and entering the white collar work force. Southern California experienced such a demand for higher education, in fact, that California State University, Los Angeles, separated from its parent institution, Los Angeles City College, and relocated to a new \$11 million campus in 1954.³⁶

Some gray flannel-wearing fans no doubt listened to honky-tonk as a form of conjectural slumming or because they had come from Southern Plains backgrounds, but many urban professionals, especially those who did not measure up to the new consumerist middle-class norm, identified closely with the sub-genre's emphasis on financial straits. Overextended credit among home-buying middle-class professionals became such a problem in the suburban San Fernando Valley that some residents nicknamed it "The Valley of the Shadow of Debt."³⁷

In contrast to the gray flannel suit, the rhinestone "Nudie" suit offered a radically different form of expression. In Sloan Wilson's best-selling 1955 novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, the businessmen's attire served as a symbol of conformity, anonymity, and social climbing—of surreptitiously bending one's values to fit the whims of a demanding employer or the requirements of an unfulfilling junior executive job. "I really don't know what I was looking for when I got back from the war," complained the novel's protagonist, "but it seemed as though all I could see was a lot of bright young men in gray flannel suits rushing around New York in a frantic parade to nowhere. They seemed to be pursuing neither ideals nor happiness—they were pursuing routine."³⁸ Scholars of the era identified a similar ennui among young white-collar workers. Sociologist William H. Whyte, for instance, in his aptly-titled 1956 study *The Organization Man*, argued that American business had come to expect collaboration and technical proficiency rather than individuality, creativity and healthy forms of dissent. Corporations, he found, had even begun to employ controversial and intrusive methods of stamping out dissent such as the testing of potential workers' personalities and psychological make-ups.³⁹



FIGURE 6. Nudie Cohn and Elvis Presley in gold lamé suit made at Cohn's North Hollywood shop, 1955. Photographic print. Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles. Donated by the Family of Gene Bear.

Turk, Cohn, and Cuevas's outfits ultimately symbolized a rejection of this homogenization and bureaucratization of American work life. If the man in the gray flannel suit represented conformity, the man in rhinestone and gabardine represented a sort of working man's antihero, a blue-collar renegade who was bold enough to challenge the reigning orthodoxy, and who, although Anglo and white, boldly wore clothing based on the Mexican charro and emblazoned with luminous representations of Sioux headdresses.⁴⁰ Cohn himself cut the image of a fashion rebel by wearing expensive boots of mismatched colors as a way of reminding himself of his impoverished youth. As a teenager,

he had been forced to wear rags and mismatched shoes to shield his feet from the cold New York winters. His earliest costumes for honky-tonk performers such as Hank Thompson incorporated signs and signifiers of rebellion by engaging in racial cross-dressing. At a time when body-fitting suits were the accepted style for country performers, Cohn produced drape suits based partly on the oversized zoot suit that had become the rage among black and Latino youth in Los Angeles. His later rhinestone-studded Ivy League-styled suits even defied the homogenizing forces of mechanical reproduction, for Cohn refused to cut more than one suit exactly alike.⁴¹ Cuevas, who later adopted the same practice, also presented himself as something of an outlaw by frequenting country and rock music clubs, and establishing a place for himself within the social circles of elite musicians.⁴²

Fans were particularly fond of the new attire whether they themselves wore gray flannel, a cotton waitress uniform or a factory jumpsuit to work. Tex Williams reportedly drew an audience of 2,500 rather than his usual 300 when word got around that he started wearing glitzy pre-rhinestone Cohn drape suits in 1947.⁴³ "After a show when a fan comes up I figure he's gonna brag on my guitar pickin'," complained noted singer-guitarist Merle Travis in a letter to Cohn, "Instead the fool starts braggin' on my beautiful Nudie suits!"⁴⁴ To many fans, wearing a rhinestone outfit became a sign that performers appreciated their audiences. Shirley Desy felt the rhinestone suits symbolized a form of respect the performers had for their audiences. Wearing one showed that the performers had taken that extra step to improve their appearance and were not complacent about the adulation of fans, she said.⁴⁵

Marketed largely to white male country performers, the rhinestone suits ultimately made an impact on the notions of masculine identity among musicians and fans during the decade. On one hand, their bright colors blurred gender boundaries by allowing male honky-tonkers a space to express

themselves in fashions and colors that had once been restricted to women's dresses or the sparse fabric canvases provided by men's ties. Rose Maddox, a female singer based in California, in fact was the first performer to startle Nashville's Grand Ole Opry by wearing Turk's outrageous designs on stage in 1949.⁴⁶ Years later Cohn told an academic interviewer that his men's suit designs were patterned after "flashy looking women" and that "every man has an aspect of woman in his personality that longs to be expressed."⁴⁷ With their extensive floral embroidering along the sleeves, his men's suits designs appear to be especially influenced by the dense satin-stitched embroidery present on the festive blouses and waistcoats, or *Keptáree*, that Ukrainian brides traditionally wore on their wedding days.⁴⁸

Such gestures indicated that alternative configurations of blue-collar masculinity existed within country music culture. After seeing the outfits on several performers, Lloyd R. Sims, a meat cutter from Oklahoma, began wearing brightly-colored western shirts with the occasional floral embroidery.⁴⁹ Lyrically, this was particularly evident in honky-tonk songs such as Thompson's "Cryin' in the Deep Blue Sea" and Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," which speak candidly about a man's willingness to break masculine social taboos by crying in public.⁵⁰ On the other hand, this gender bending was carefully managed during the 1950s and 1960s to the point that few fans were consciously aware of its presence.⁵¹

The multiethnic origins of the suits' design and production were similarly concealed in journalistic accounts of the era, which instead focused on the "westernness" of the outfits. Cohn shed elements of the "ethnic" identity his Ukrainian roots and Judaism might have suggested by converting to Christianity, placing pictures of Jesus on the walls of his business, and using only his first name, Nudie, in his interviews and advertising practices.⁵² The Mexican backgrounds of shop tailors such as Cuevas were virtually ignored by the

country music press during the 1950s. Often cited by later observers as the driving creative talent of the operation, Cuevas got little publicity until he finally broke with Cohn and set up his own shop.⁵³

The tailors themselves often touted their suits as symbols of a conventional masculinity that embraced the toughness and mythos of a violent frontier West. Cohn, a consummate salesman who promoted his suits on television and welcomed the coming of color broadcasting as a medium for showing off his multicolored creations, frequently employed a western-flavored masculinity to sell his suits (see cover). "You take the average pedestrian (man on the street)," he told one reporter, "He'd like to dress Western but he hasn't got the nerve."⁵⁴ Although Cohn continued to sell more affordable western wear to local customers, the incredible \$2,000 to \$5,000 prices he often placed on performers' products reshaped the blue-collar beginnings of the costume and gave their buyers an aura of status and upward mobility.⁵⁵ A letter from Robert Taylor, an action star known for his portrayal of *Ivanhoe*, also suggests that a rampant homophobia often belied tensions about wearing the costumes even though fans so adored them. Filming in Spain, Taylor chided his friend Cohn about the "‘fag’ colors" the couturier used in his boots. Capitalizing on the double *entendre* inherent in his name, Nudie displayed another form of objectification by placing a drawing of a bare-breasted cowgirl on the designer label attached to all of his early suits.⁵⁶

Cohn and Cuevas ultimately made their biggest splash outside of the traditional honky-tonk fold with the \$10,000 gold lamé suit their shop produced for Elvis Presley in 1955 (Figure 6).⁵⁷ Pioneered by working-class tailors for working-class performers, rhinestones had transmogrified from a folk-like art into the ultimate symbol of conspicuous consumption.⁵⁸ Country and rock stars continued to wear Cohn outfits until he died in 1984. Turk closed his shop and retired in 1977. He died in 1988. Cuevas, who goes simply by his first name Manuel, continues

to create outfits for rock stars and country performers in his shop in Tennessee.⁵⁹

The study of rhinestone country music costume ultimately sheds a great deal of light on the periodization of taste in twentieth-century American fashion. Writing at the turn of the last century, sociologist Georg Simmel theorized that fashion trends originated among the social elite, then filtered down to lower ranks as commoners sought to acquire status through conspicuous consumption.⁶⁰ Since Simmel's seminal 1904 study, a number of researchers studying youth and countercultures have identified the 1960s as the period when dress tastes transitioned from this old model to one in which fashions moved from the bottom up.⁶¹ Ultimately, study of the rhinestone country music suit suggests that in at least one musical subculture, this transformation of tastes from "top down" to "bottom up" occurred a decade earlier than was previously thought. As a manifestation of working-class preference, the rhinestone outfit had become adopted by the pop music mainstream by the late 1950s, a circumstance symbolized by wealthy rock stars' purchases of the outfits. The transformation of tastes, however, was ultimately a fragile one that would dissipate as new fads came to replace rhinestones. By the mid-1970s, the outfits came to be viewed by culture leaders as obsolete and hence became re-associated with lower status identity.

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- ¹ Shirley Desy, interview by author, tape recording, Long Beach, Calif., 7 August 2001; Shirley Desy, personal email correspondence with author, Long Beach, Calif., 29 July 2001.
- ² See, for instance, the Associated Press's summation of Hank Snow's dress in the performer's obituary: "Country Music's Snow Dies," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 21 December 1999, features sect., late sports final ed., 51.
- ³ Ira Band, "Back-to-Basics Country: Martina McBride," *Toronto Star*, 12 February 1996, entertainment sect., B8.
- ⁴ For a classic academic treatment on class and the hierarchy of taste, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
- ⁵ Although many early country musicians stemmed from middle-class backgrounds, the post-World War II country music industry produced an overwhelming number of artists from working-class backgrounds. An examination I conducted of some twenty-three prominent wartime and post-war country performers in the Los

- Angeles area demonstrated that twenty came from farming or blue-collar families or were employed at some point as industrial workers themselves. For further detail on changes in the class backgrounds of performers in the post-war era, see Richard A. Peterson and Paul J. DiMaggio, "The Early Opry: Its Hillbilly Image in Fancy and Fact," *Journal of Country Music* 4 (1973): 42–43.
- ⁶ On the class backgrounds of the journalists, see Ben H. Bagdikian, "Shaping Media Content: Professional Personnel and Organizational Structure," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 37, no. 4. (winter, 1973–1974): 571.
 - ⁷ The recent revival of interest in rockabilly, western swing and "roots" music has, however, produced renewed study of the outfits, including two books: Debby Bull, *Hillbilly Hollywood: The Origins of Country and Western Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000); and Holly George-Warren and Michelle Freedman, *How the West Was Worn* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001).
 - ⁸ The literature on "hybrid identities" and "hybridity" is an expansive one, stemming from Mikhail Bakhtin's pre-World War II writings to more recent works by scholars of postcolonialism and Latino, African-American and Asian studies. Particularly influential in today's academic world is Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
 - ⁹ Nick Tosches, "'Honky-Tonkin': Ernest Tubb, Hank Williams, and the Bartender's Muse," in *Country Music: The Music and the Musicians*, ed. Paul Kingsbury and Alan Axelrod (Revised edition, New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 152–55; "The City" and "Attachment Papers for the Fanny Hill Hippodrome," *The Daily Ardmoreite* (Oklahoma), 27 February 1894, 1; "The Ardmoreite has a better opinion," editorial, *The Daily Ardmoreite*, 26 February 1894, 2; "Origins of 'Honkie,'" *LINGUIST List*, 21 January 1992, <<http://www.linguistlist.org/issues/3/3-53.html>> (10 November 2001).
 - ¹⁰ "Poindexter, Clarence Albert," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, University of Texas, Austin, 23 July 2001, <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/PP/fpo38.html>> (13 February 2002); Chester Rosson, "Texas Music Source: Al Dexter," *Texas Monthly Online*, May 1997 <<http://www.texasmonthly.com/ranchsource/86379445627770/86379446427770.php>> (13 February 2002).
 - ¹¹ Bill C. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 154.
 - ¹² James Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36–77, 222–48.
 - ¹³ Mike Davis, "The L.A. Inferno," *Socialist Review* 22, no. 1 (January–March 1992): 61.
 - ¹⁴ On the hybrid nature of western swing, see chapter 3, "Swinging the Devil's Dream: Urbanization and the Western Swing Subculture," in author's dissertation manuscript: "'That Mean Ol' Oakie Boogie': Country Music, Migration, and the Construction of Whiteness in Southern California, 1936–1969," (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2001).
 - ¹⁵ Johnny Bond, "Autobiography," typed manuscript in the Johnny Bond Artist File no. NF286, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter SFC); Johnny Bond, "Sick, Sober, and Sorry," *Hall of Fame 1999*, audiocassette, King Special KSC–3822; "Johnny Horton: That 'One Woman Man,'" *Country Song Roundup* 4, no. 48 (February 1957), 11.
 - ¹⁶ Daniel Cooper, *Lefty Frizzell: The Honky-Tonk Life of Country Music's Greatest Singer* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1995), 85–86.
 - ¹⁷ Hank Thompson, interview by author, tape recording, Red River, Texas, 3 August 2001.
 - ¹⁸ George-Warren and Freedman, *How the West Was Worn*, 58–59.
 - ¹⁹ "An Interview with Nudie, the Rodeo Tailor," typed manuscript written by unidentified student of contemporary art at the University of California, Irvine, 4–5, in box 1, clippings and correspondence, Nudie's Rodeo Tailors and Western Equipment archive (hereafter NRT). Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles, Calif.
 - ²⁰ Pauline Hirsch, ed., "Two Pair Pants Come with This Coat—A Perfect Fit: History of Jews in the Southern California Apparel Business," *Legacy: Journal of the Southern California Jewish Historical Society* (Los Angeles) 1, no. 2, special apparel-oriented edition (spring 1988): 5–15, 19–22, 65.
 - ²¹ George-Warren and Freedman, *How the West Was Worn*, 58–59.
 - ²² "An Interview with Nudie," NRT archive.
 - ²³ See Turk outfits in the collections of the Country Music Hall of Fame (hereafter CMHF), the Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage, and private San Diego collector Thomas Sims. Also see photos of Cooley and Maddox in the photo collection of the SFC. Holly George-Warren, "Nathan Turk," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music: The Ultimate Guide to the Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 551.
 - ²⁴ Mae Axton, "Nudie: Country Music's Tailor," *Country Song Roundup* 18, no. 93 (April 1966): 28; Nudie billing files, NRT archive; "An Interview with Nudie," NRT archive. Compare Turk and Cohn outfits in the CMHF and Thomas Sims collections.
 - ²⁵ See various newspaper clippings from box 1, clippings and correspondence, NRT archive: Dave Lipman, "Nudie, Cowboy's Clothier," n.d., typed manuscript; and Al Martinez, "All That Glitters," *Los Angeles Times*, news clipping, n.d. Also see "Resplendent Rex Allen Has 'New Gimmick,'" *The Leaksville News* (Leaksville, N.C.), 17 June 1954, n.p., in Nudie name file, CMHF; and photographs of Williams and Husky in Sims archives, as well as Tyler Beard, *100 Years of Western Wear* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1993), 32, 72; and Bull, *Hillbilly Hollywood*, 120.
 - ²⁶ Cooper, *Lefty Frizzell*, 129–30. Although Cohn's wife, Bobbie, and authors such as Cooper insist that Cohn started the rhinestone trend,

- Cohn's creation of rhinestone men's western wear is also evident when dating the Turk and Cohn outfits in the CMHF and Thomas Sims collections.
- ²⁷ Manuel Cuevas, interview by author, tape recording, Nashville, Tennessee, 5 September 2000.
 - ²⁸ Ibid. See Grae designs in Sims archives. Grae produced her own line of outfits during the 1950s.
 - ²⁹ Bull, *Hillbilly Hollywood*, 120.
 - ³⁰ Cuevas, interview by author. Compare, for instance, Cuevas's embroidery designs with the patterns in Donald and Dorothy Cordry, *Mexican Indian Costumes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 145.
 - ³¹ "Hobo Village Burned," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 July 1938, 12.
 - ³² Cuevas, interview by author; Beard, *100 Years*, 50.
 - ³³ On the gray flannel suit's prominence during the 1950s, see William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 308–09. For a more recent analysis, see Richard Martin and Harold Koda, *Jocks and Nerds: Men's Style in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 154–55.
 - ³⁴ Jim Halsey, interview by author, tape recording, Los Angeles, California, 23 July 2001.
 - ³⁵ "A Big New Sound Blows Out of Nashville," *Broadcasting*, 28 January 1963, 74.
 - ³⁶ Patricia Carr Bowie, "The Cultural History of Los Angeles, 1850–1967: From Rural Backwash to World Center" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1980), 345–46. Several top honky-tonk performers themselves were products of higher education. While in the Navy, Thompson studied electrical engineering at Southern Methodist University and the University of Texas and even took a class taught by Albert Einstein at Princeton. See Thompson, interview by author, and Texas Jim Cooper, "Country Music's Hank Thompson," *Country Music Life* (August 1966): 19.
 - ³⁷ Donald J. Waldie, interview by author, Lakewood, California, 12 July 2001. Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994), 42.
 - ³⁸ Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Cambridge, Mass.: Robert Bentley, 1955), 202, 262, 300.
 - ³⁹ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 6, 63–68, 172–75.
 - ⁴⁰ On the charro influence, see Cuevas, interview by author. On the Sioux headdresses, see "Resplendent Rex Allen," Nudie name file, CMHF.
 - ⁴¹ "An Interview with Nudie," NRT archive. Cohn's use of the zoot suit as model was in itself daring because Los Angeles was the site of the "Zoot-Suit Riots" in 1943, when locally stationed white servicemen attacked zoot suit-wearing Mexican-American and African-American youths. The local media accused the zoot-suit subculture of fomenting crime and unpatriotically disregarding calls to conserve fabric. On the zoot suit's history, see Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984).
 - ⁴² "In Style," *People* (25 October 1976), newsclipping in Nudie Cohn name file, CMHF.
 - ⁴³ "An Interview with Nudie," NRT archive; Dave Lipman, "Nudie, Cowboy's Clothier," clippings and correspondence, box 1, NRT archive.
 - ⁴⁴ Merle Travis, letter to Nudie (Cohn), 29 April 1966, clippings and correspondence, box 1, NRT archive.
 - ⁴⁵ Shirley Desy, interview by author. Such gestures were similar to other ways in which honky-tonk artists attempted to show audiences how important they were to them. In one California appearance, Lefty Frizzell not only sang some of his previously unreleased songs to the audience, but also stood on a chair during his entire set so that everyone could see him. "When he told us that was the first time he'd ever done those songs in public," remembered one fan, "I felt like I was being included in country music history in some way. It was a feeling I've never forgotten" (Merle Haggard with Peggy Russell, *Sing Me Back Home: My Story* [New York: Times Books, 1981], 38).
 - Thompson, similarly, demonstrated his devotion to fans by playing solid four-hour sets, believing that short-changing audiences diminished album sales and attendance at future appearances (Jim Halsey, interview by author).
 - ⁴⁶ Maddox outfit on display in CMHF; Maddox Brothers and Rose, "Track 8: Grand Ole Opry-WSM Nashville Tenn., February 19, 1949 (electronically transcribed by KTRB Modesto)," *Maddox Brothers and Rose on the Air: First Time on Records KFBK 1940 and KGDM 1945; Their First Recorded Radio Broadcasts*, Arhoolie 447, Ralph Rinzler Archive, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
 - ⁴⁷ "An Interview with Nudie," NRT archive.
 - ⁴⁸ Compare the Ukrainian blouses and waistcoats in Natalia Kalashnikova and Galina Pluzhnikova, *National Costumes of the Soviet Peoples* (Moscow: Planeta Publishers, 1990), plate 33, 56–59, 207, with outfits in the CMHF and the Thomas Sims collections.
 - ⁴⁹ Lloyd R. Sims, interview by author, tape recording, San Bernardino, California, 29 April 2001.
 - ⁵⁰ Hank Thompson, "Cryin' in the Deep Blue Sea," *Vintage Collections*, compact disc, Capitol 7246-8-36901-2-1; Hank Williams, "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," *24 of Hank Williams' Greatest Hits*, compact disc, Polygram 823293-2.
 - ⁵¹ My assessment of gender bending in country music culture is based on interviews of fans from the era and readings of the national *Country Song Roundup* from 1940 to 1962, as well as local fan magazines such as *Western and Country Music*, *Country Music Review* and *Country Music Life*.
 - ⁵² "An Interview with Nudie," NRT archive; "Nudie and Roy Rogers" photograph and caption, *Western and Country Music* 1, no. 6 (December 1951), n.p.; Bull, *Hillbilly Hollywood*, 123.
 - ⁵³ Cuevas, interview by author.
 - ⁵⁴ On Cohn's use of television, see *Town Hall Party*, videocassette recording of television program, 29 November 1959, program 61, reel

- 2, CMHF; and "Tailor to Cowboys Likes Color TV," January 1959, UPI news clipping, clippings and correspondence, box 1, NRT archive. On Cohn's use of masculine language, see Stephen Fox, "'Nudie' Tailors Styles of Stars," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 27 April 1976, in box 1, clippings and correspondence, NRT; Nudie billing files, NRT.
- ⁵⁵ "CMR Special of the Month," advertisement, *Country Music Review* (May 1964): 9.
- ⁵⁶ Robert Taylor, letter to Nudie, October 30 (no year), Spain, box 1, clippings and correspondence, NRT archive; Bull, *Hillbilly Hollywood*, 123.
- ⁵⁷ Dave Lipman, "Nudie, Cowboys' Clothier," box 1, clippings and correspondence, NRT archive. The gold lamé outfit is on display at Presley's Graceland mansion in Memphis, Tennessee.
- ⁵⁸ The classic definition of conspicuous consumption stems from Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; reprint, Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 1998).
- ⁵⁹ Cuevas, interview by author; Katy K. (Kattelman), interview by author, tape recording, Nashville, Tennessee, 4 September 2000.
- ⁶⁰ Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *International Quarterly* 10 (October 1904): 130–50.
- ⁶¹ Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 14–15.
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