

OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. - The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Point and Counterpoint: Country Music

By Christopher LaFuria
news editor

On September 12, 2003, America lost more than just a music legend. It lost an entire genre of music, which has plummeted into the world of consumerism and commercialism that was blatantly avoided by the genre's forefathers. As Johnny Cash lay dying on his hospital bed on that unforgettable fall day, the world watched as generations of country musicians bade farewell to the final installment of authentic country music.

Garth Brooks released his debut album in April of 1989. If the C.E.O. of Capitol Records knew anything about the roots and evolution of true country music, he would not have let any copy of the self-titled album hit the shelves. Album after album, Brooks, along with acts such as Alabama and Brooks and Dunn, collectively devolved country music from grass roots, basic country music to a more poppy, consumer friendly pathetic sound.

Shooter Jennings, son of country icon Waylon Jennings, said, "Garth turned country into this big explosion onstage, more about the show than about the music."

What Jennings was describing was the main bacteria that began to spread, consuming every acceptable facet of country music in its path. When artists such as Cash, Jennings, and Hank Williams ran the stage, the genre was dedicated to putting out the type of rugged, shoot from the hip style that was run by guitars, banjos, and, of course, fiddles. Nowadays, artists such as Kenny Chesney (I had to swallow my pride to mention that name) and Rascal Flatts have added 12-year old choir-boy vocals and soft, love-sappy, Backstreet Boys-esque lyrics.

One main aspect that would have Cash and Jennings rolling in their graves is the way Brooks and other country acts today have altered the method of live performances. If you were to take a survey of the demographics of the average Rascal Flatts concert, you would find middle-aged women, teenage chicks, and men who are only there out of being forced by their companion. At the one Rascal Flatts concert I attended (hey, an ex-girlfriend made me go), I was honestly shocked that back-up dancers didn't appear on the set.

To get to the roots of country music, you need to explore a world that has been neglected by modern media, due to its artistic simplicity and basic aestheti-

cism. Country musicians used to cut immediately to the chase instead of singing around it. Furthermore, you will never hear a release by Johnny Cash that has to do with his pickup truck or his redneck lifestyle (thanks Alan Jackson!).

On the contrary, the passion and directness that came from Hank Williams and Cash's lyrics is highly evident. "Soon your sugar-daddies will all be gone/You'll wake up some cold day and find you're alone/You'll call to me but I'm gonna tell you: 'Bye, bye, bye./When I turn around and walk away, you'll cry, cry, cry.'" Johnny Cash really cut to the point.

"Your cheatin' heart will make you weep/You'll cry



By Ashley Bressler
assistant news editor

and cry and try to sleep/But sleep won't come the whole night through/Your cheatin' heart will tell on you." You can feel the pain and anguish in Hank Williams' lyrics.

Now let's compare these original lyrics to modern country lyrics: "I'm gonna stand on a rooftop, climb up a mountaintop/Baby, scream and shout/I wanna sing it on the radio, show it on a video/Baby, leave no doubt." Are you serious? Reading these lyrics, you cannot detect the genre.

"Riding up and down Broadway/On my old stud Leroy/And the girls say/Save a horse, ride a cowboy." This isn't a country music song. It's an anthem dedicated to an unauthentic, disposable form of pop music with a touch of cowboy hat.

For those country music listeners who are into love songs and mindless hits about being a redneck and living in a trailer, pick up

Over the past few decades, country music has evolved from its original twangy, dog-dying lyrics and sound. Today, country music's top performers offer their political, religious and emotional values to fans, which traditionally was unheard of. Artists like Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson and Hank Williams revolutionized country music in the 1960s, and artists like Alan Jackson, Kenny Chesney and Gretchen Wilson are now doing the same by gearing their music to today's generation.

Changes have occurred in all forms of music since the beginning of time; however, many country music fans are not happy with the new sound of their musical genre. Some have expressed feelings towards artists like Rascal Flatts, Brad Paisley and Keith Urban, by saying they are not country; they are simply pop. Being considered "pop" in the country world is possibly one of the biggest insults an artist can endure, but there are signs of pop which have unfortunately made their way into Country Music Television (CMT). As Tim McGraw says in his song, Back When, "I'm reading street slang for dummies 'cause they put pop in my country." However, while many artists are singing pop songs and calling them country, there are just as many real country musicians today who are "ready and a-willin'" to defend the highly criticized art form.

Just because today's country music artists aren't singing in the same style, words and tunes as artists did fifty years ago, that doesn't neces-

sarily mean they should be shunned from country music all together. In today's fast-paced, ever-changing society, what's wrong with a little variety, a little change and a little diversity? In comparison, does the mainstream American culture still listen to the Beatles? No, they are idolizing Kelly Clarkson and the Black Eyed Peas, simply showing that as times change, so does the music we listen to.

I listen to the popular music played on Music Television (MTV) along with country music, and the way I like to describe the difference between the two genres is that "MTV music has the life span of one month, one week a song is good and the next week no one listens to it. Country music is always good and never goes out of style. A song has the lifespan of at least fifty years. The songs sung by Cash and Nelson are still listened to by both young and old country music fans, which can make it difficult for artists to continue recreating these classics. I feel this is how country music becomes eternal, through change and by conquering new boundaries. No one would listen to country music if it all sounded like Cash or Randy Travis; the public would grow tired of it. It is one thing to personally master an individual style and it is a completely different thing to try and mimic the work of someone who has become associated with a certain style.

Today's country music artists are as passionate as ever, bringing real world issues to their lyrics. Toby Keith and the Dixie Chicks have been in the media spotlight recently, due to the controversial topics expressed in their music, and this is just an example of how country music artists are now thinking. They are taking their real lives and opinions and making them public; just as Elvis was once criticized for shaking his hips, these artists should be thought of as progressionists, paving the way for all future country music artists and fans. In retrospect, if the World Trade Center has just been attacked, should we really be hearing songs about the good old days with John Deer Tractors, mama's home-fried chicken and trashy ex-wives? No, I don't think so. I'm not in anyway condoning the Toby Keith lyrics, "We'll put a boot in their ass. It's the American way." But, I do think worldly topics have the right to appear in country music, as this is a "free country." Country music has come a long way from its original roots of the country-western singers, so maybe a new term should be applied to today's songs. Just as country-western songs will always have a special place in country music history, contemporary country music has a lot to offer to country music lovers of all generations. At the end of the day, I will still put on my cowboy boots and tip my hat to whatever urban cowboy or western outlaw decides to take the stage, speak their minds and sing from their hearts.

The Behrend Beacon

Published weekly by the students of Penn State Behrend



THE BEHREND
Beacon

- | | |
|--|--|
| Jennifer Haight, Editor in Chief | |
| Patrick Webster, Managing Editor | |
| Lindsay Snyder, Advertising Manager | |
| Michelle Vera Surovic, Public Relations Manager | |
| Kim Young, Adviser | |
| News Editor Christopher LaFuria | Student Life Editor Sean Mihlo |
| Assistant News Editor Ashley Bressler | Calendar Page Editor Jerry Pohl |
| Sports Editors Daniel Mitchell Nick Underhill | Head Copy Editor Rachael Conway |
| Opinion Editor Kate Kelecseny | Copy Editors Jordan Gilmore - Sports Miranda Krause - News Janet Niedenberger - Student Life |
| Humor Editor Ben Raymond | Photography Editor Mike Sharkey |

Penn State Erie,
The Behrend College
First Floor, The J. Elmer Reed Union Building
Station Road, Erie, PA 16563
Contact the Beacon at:
Telephone: (814) 898-6488
Fax: (814) 898-6019

Gretchen Wilson's cd. I'm sure you'll get a good three hours out of it before another disposable country-pop act will surface. For those of you who have not forgotten the origin of genuine music, fire up your record needles and throw on "Live at Folsom Country Prison," and enjoy authenticity.

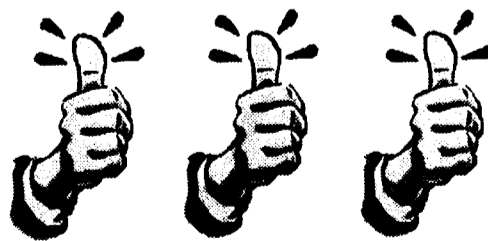
Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

During the past few weeks there have been tragic school shootings in Lancaster County, Colorado, and Montreal. All of the shootings involved students being killed. These events were still fresh in my mind while I was reading the *Beacon* last Friday. I read the "KAOS" article and felt that it was inappropriate. I understand that "KAOS" is just a game, but I did not see the value in constantly referring to killing. Many other words could have been used instead of killing for the article. I hope that in the future, the *Beacon* will use more discretion.

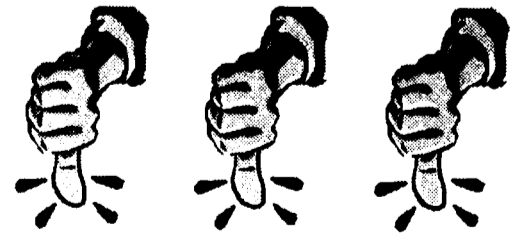
Sincerely,
John Lowrey

Beacon Thumbs Up



- No class on Friday!
- Homemade cookies
- Argyle sweaters
- Fall foliage
- Jack Black and LEB's *Nacho Libre*

Beacon Thumbs Down



- People who talk on cell phones in the library
- People who loudly play games on library computers
- No Coke products on campus
- The phrase "chillaxin'"

Have a "Thumbs Up" or "Thumbs Down"?

Send suggestions to
klk5005@psu.edu

Submission Guidelines

The *Beacon* welcomes readers to share their views on this page. Letters and commentary pieces can be submitted by email to dgml47@psu.edu or directly to the *Beacon* office, located in the Reed Building.

Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries should be limited to 700 words. The more concise the submission, the less we will be forced to edit it for space concerns and the more likely we are to run the submission.

All submissions must include the writer's year in school, major and name as *The Beacon* does not publish anonymous letters. Deadline for any submission is 5 p.m. Tuesday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue. All submissions are considered, but because of space limitations, some may not be published.

The *Behrend Beacon* reserves the right to edit any submissions prior to publication.