



Armadillo World Headquarters: A Memoir

By Eddie Wilson with Jesse Sublett (Austin: TSSI Publishing/University of Texas Press, 2017).

The Armadillo World Headquarters, an enterprise that served as a music venue, art gallery, restaurant, and living space for Austin's counterculture from 1970 to 1980, has been frequently analyzed and documented by writers and academics. Jason Mellard's *Progressive Country: How the 1970s Transformed the Texan in Popular Culture* and Travis D. Stimeling's *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene* both provide overviews of the venue's importance, while Jan Reid's *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* is a journalistic view of a young man experiencing the Armadillo for the first time. Notably absent from the literature surrounding the Armadillo is a well-written, organized firsthand account from the front lines of the venue's operation. *Armadillo World Headquarters*, written by Eddie Wilson with Jesse Sublett, provides just that in a hefty volume complete with illustrations, photographs, and reproductions of music posters.

Armadillo World Headquarters does not aim to be an academic analysis of the countercultural movement that transformed Austin in the 1970s. Instead, it succeeds as a beautifully woven memoir of Eddie Wilson's life with the Armadillo at the center of the tapestry. Wilson shares his perspective as the self-proclaimed ringleader of the Armadillo World Headquarters, often casting himself as the straight-laced businessman in a room full of dreamy artists. The first few chapters detail Wilson's evolution from high school English teacher to owner of a rock club and art collective. As the memoir progresses, Wilson recalls the performances and characters that gave the Armadillo World Headquarters a place in music history. To tell his story, Wilson employs a host of primary accounts and sources, but most of the dialogue is remembered by Wilson himself. While there's no way to verify the accuracy of each account, Wilson's fantastical stories do not rely on guaranteed historical accuracy to remain relevant to researchers hoping to understand the Armadillo's place in twentieth-century Austin.



The memoir wavers between poignant, shocking, and hilarious as Wilson recalls the exploits of the counterculture community that called the Armadillo their home. Sad vignettes, like a description of the senseless murder of poster artist Ken Featherston in the Armadillo parking lot, intertwine with larger-than-life stories of rock stars, local characters, and political figures navigating a rapidly changing city. The 1970s were a defining decade for Austin's modern-day reputation as an artistic hub, and Wilson and Sublett do an excellent job of contextualizing the importance of the Armadillo World Headquarters in a previously straight-laced city. Wilson's focus on his own conservative upbringing, the upbringings of the artists that made up the Armadillo Art Squad, and Austin's conservative community gives the reader a sense of the enormous importance of a countercultural arts laboratory where like-minded people from a variety of backgrounds could congregate.

Those interested in the progressive country movement of the 1970s will find this memoir an interesting source of firsthand stories related to the genre. The Armadillo World Headquarters was undoubtedly an important figure in the development of progressive country; Willie Nelson's 1972 concert at the Armadillo became legendary as the show that catalyzed the popularity of progressive country in Austin. Wilson's take on this famous concert, along with his description of various personalities and events relating to country music, helps paint a picture of Austin's importance to the country music industry's shift toward a more Texas-influenced sound during the first half of the 1970s.

Wilson and Sublett make a special point to give fair due to the Armadillo Art Squad, the organization of poster artists who worked for the Armadillo and were instrumental in establishing a visual brand for Austin music. Wilson makes it clear that the members of the Art Squad were not just poster artists—they were bouncers, bartenders, musicians, and performers who formed the backbone of the Armadillo World Headquarters and helped give the venue its lofty place in Texas music history. An appendix of gig posters from the Armadillo provides a selection of rare artwork that illustrates the varied nature of both the art produced at the Armadillo and the musical artists who performed there. The large variety of artistic styles and musical acts rendered in the posters gives the reader a sense of the sheer volume of artwork and performances the Armadillo churned out during its ten-year run. The high-quality reproductions are a crucial component of Wilson's tale.

As a memoir, *Armadillo World Headquarters* is undeniably entertaining. Wilson's stories of artistic enlightenment, unbridled debauchery, and everyday drudgery provide an intimate portrait of Austin's well-loved seminal rock-and-roll hall. Wilson emphasizes his experience as one of the venue's founding fathers, but it is clear he does not see himself as the sole patron or savior of the Armadillo. *Armadillo World Headquarters* reads as a love story to a venue that should not have survived the first sweltering year, much less become the cornerstone of a city's transformation. Fans who experienced the Armadillo in its glory days will likely enjoy this memoir for its nostalgia and vivid behind-the-scenes descriptions. For all others, stories of countercultural underdogs, musical enlightenment, and artistic revolution make *Armadillo World Headquarters* a must-read.

Kelsey Riddle



Delbert McClinton: One of the Fortunate Few

By Diana Finlay Hendricks (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2017).

Diana Finlay Hendricks's engaging biographical narrative of Delbert McClinton's life and music career is the first biography of the highly acclaimed artist. The book is part of a growing list of literature produced about Texas music, and is the latest installment of the John and Robin Dickson Series in Texas Music, sponsored by the Center for Texas Music History at Texas State University.

From the onset, Hendricks brings the reader into McClinton's real world, one of not only music success, but also one of life's trials and tribulations. The book does not sugarcoat his celebrated career, but blends the career high and low points, antics, lessons learned, and natural talent of a genuine working musician. Delbert McClinton's legendary career has seen him play in roadhouses and renowned music halls around the globe. The story reveals that he was on the front lines of emerging music scenes and his music covers many styles: blues, country, rock and roll, Americana, and others. Moreover, his diversity has allowed him to continue working and growing in the music industry for over sixty years.

The book's structure is generally a chronological narrative of McClinton's life that weaves in the context of American culture and experience. In an interview with Hendricks and McClinton about the book, they compared it to the movie *Forrest Gump*, in that it tells the story of McClinton walking through American history in the midst of pivotal historic moments. The anecdotes are amusing, but the story does not shy away from the darker side of life. Each chapter is a vignette of moments in time that shaped McClinton, from the appearance of the Lubbock Lights, man's early forays into space, the John F. Kennedy assassination, the counterculture of the 1960s and '70s,

and the excess of the 1980s, to the career recognition, awards, and accolades that continue through today. The chapters are relatively short in length, averaging about ten pages. Hendricks begins each chapter with a quote from McClinton that provides a general tone for each section. For this reader, the prose of each chapter is analogous to a 45 rpm single. Within limited space and time, Hendricks immediately hooks you into Delbert's world, presents information in a concise fashion, and leaves you wanting more, but each passage is a quick reread if desired.

Hendricks relies primarily on personal interviews with Delbert McClinton, family members, musicians, music scholars and authors; some secondary materials; and his music. Furthermore, McClinton granted Hendricks access to his personal music archives; however, even with the personal access, the book is not an authorized biography. The book begins in McClinton's birthplace of Lubbock. The chapter provides some family history and presents the obligatory question—why do so many musicians come from Lubbock, Texas?—before moving into several substantive chapters that look at his formative years in Fort Worth, where McClinton founded and developed his musical talent. Hendricks then surveys the difficulties of his recording career, extensive touring, business ventures, and personal relationships.

The book's composition makes for an easy read. The color and black and white photos, some of which are previously unpublished, provide the reader with valuable visual context. There are some errors and editing that need attention, but the author is aware of them and working to rectify for a second printing. In sum, it is a laudable overview of Delbert McClinton's career through the lens of American culture, with just enough about the artist's personal life to provide some insight into the man himself. *Delbert McClinton: One of the Fortunate Few* is an essential addition to anyone's Texas and Americana music book collection.

Curtis Peoples

