

当今美国热门话题丛书之二

文化震撼

Rocking Culture

西安交通大学出版社

内容简介

本书是“当今美国热门话题丛书”的第二本，书中的41篇文章涉及到许多当今西方文化的深层问题，诸如摇滚文化、电脑文化，以及体育、电影、绘画、科学、企业等许多方面。尽管有些文化现象引出的观念看上去很深奥、很专业化，有些还很偏激，但每篇文章都阐述清晰、趣味洋溢。尤为可贵的是，即使谈计算机工业或后印象派绘画，谈摇滚歌星自杀或物理学的发展这类话题，也总能给人一些人生观和价值观的启示。

阅读求知，这不正是我们要读的文章吗？

大学生和有中等英语水平读者会发现，本书中的这些文章不仅能帮助您提高阅读能力，更会直接丰富和深化您的知识层次。

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当今美国热门话题丛书之二

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Rocking Culture

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法国画家保罗·高更与荷兰画家凡高一样,是最伟大、最感人的后印象派画家。年过不惑,高更才突然开始对绘画产生热情,而且在一种神秘的力量驱使下,放弃了在巴黎的中产阶级生活,抛弃了家庭和子女,来到太平洋上那个充满蛊惑他色彩的小岛塔希堤,并最终病死在岛上。

本文作者以毛姆的经历为线索,述及了有关高更的塔希堤女人和儿子的经历。



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应当说,不知道英国的甲壳虫乐队,就不完全了解 60 年代的西方文化。这个激动人心的乐队不仅至今影响着流行音乐的发展,也是对全世界流行文化影响最巨大的艺术团体。我们所选资料将分三部分,展示该乐队的艺术道路、经典作品和个人遭遇。



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斯蒂夫·焦伯斯曾是 80 年代计算机领域的风云人物,他创造过苹果公司辉煌的历史,也有过失败的教训。然而他在计算机领域中依然是举足轻重的人物,在新闻媒介中依然是引人注目的焦点。

分成两部分的这篇访谈录将给我们一个机会,对日新月异、神秘莫测的计算机工业发展高瞻远瞩。除了技术评论和商战经验之外,焦伯斯许多个性化的东西,如生活方式、价值观等,也通过访谈流露出来。



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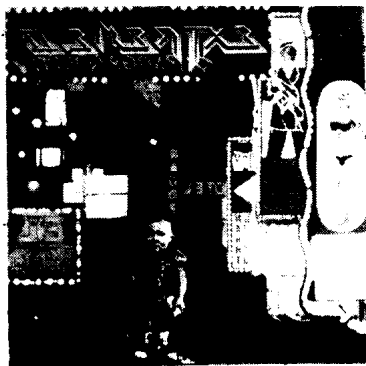
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语言这东西的确有意思,我们称之为“黄色”的电影,英语中却叫做“蓝色电影”。许多游客到了异地之后都有一种放纵和猎奇的心理,那么请您也随本文的作者一起到红灯区的黑暗中,看看那里真正上演的是——一出什么戏。



1

Country Rocks The Boomers

Priscilla Painton

乡村音乐震撼中年美国人

进入 90 年代,美国乡村音乐忽然呈现出空前的繁荣,其流行来势迅猛,引起了许多评论家的关注。流行音乐流行,从来不仅仅是音乐,乡村音乐流行所包含的意义就更多。本文就是以乡村音乐为话题,探讨了与其相关的文化背景,内容广博而深刻。



Baby boomers have gone through a strange musical journey. For a time, rock music was their essential cultural touch-stone, a vein of deep feeling that seemed to flow through nearly every one of them. If the oldest boomers grew up on early Stones and the youngest arrived just in time to catch Van Halen, at least they possessed a lingua franca.

Then along came advances in studio technology and radio-station niche marketing. Leading-edge music is now subdivided into such abstruse and sharply segregated categories as Christian Rap. Acid Jazz and Grunge Rock, and it can be created, almost untouched by human hands, with something called a Musical Instrument Digital Interface. The two major currents of pop today have much to do with attitude and little to do with musicality: heavy metal speaks to priapic barbarism, and rap is so belligerent that for some it verges on antimusic.

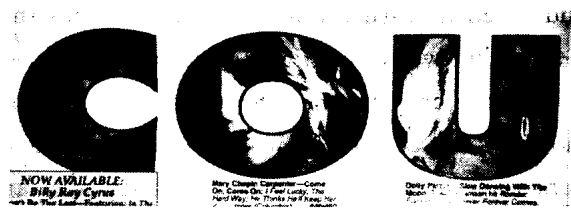
By their sheer demographic weight, the nation's 76 million baby boomers continue to determine America's musical preferences. And what America currently prefers is country. Brooks now outsells Michael Jackson and Guns'N Roses, country radio is trumping out new stars so fast that Randy Travis's six years in the limelight qualify him as an elder statesman.

Significantly, country has achieved its new luster without abandoning its heritage: a heritage so stubbornly rooted in storytelling and simple melody. The new wave of country singers is dominated by artists who have succeeded largely on their own terms, consolidating an eclectic mix of contemporary sounds with old-fashioned catches in the throat, tinkles of the mandolin, sugary sobs and vertiginous swoops of pedal steel guitar. This generation's performers are the first bred on both rock and

country, who are consciously choosing Nashville, as Vince Gill did when he turned down a chance to join the rock group Dire Straits in favor of continuing his country career.

If the baby boomers have discovered country, however, it is not just out of nostalgia. They have looked across the musical landscape and found a cast of artists who are very much like themselves. Today's hot country stars, Garth Brooks foremost among them, are more likely to be college graduates with IRAS than dropouts with prison records. They put Mercedes and Volvos in their videos and refer to wine and cafes as much as beer and honky-tonks. They worry about keeping in shape and, in an era of middle-class constriction, about keeping ahead. The women sing about their heartbreaks, but they also rejoice in their sexual independence and ponder their opportunities. Both genders extol the virtues of marital longevity.

Gill, for one, looks as if he stepped out of an L. L. Bean catalog, and he loves golf so much that he lives on a course outside Nashville. Cleve Francis, one of the few black country singers signed to a major label since Charley Pride in the '60s, is a 46-year-old cardiologist from the suburbs of Washington. Mary-Chapin Carpenter has a degree in American civilization from Brown University, she drew the idea for her highly successful *When Halley Came to Jackson*, about the appearance of Halley's comet in Mississippi, from a line in the memoirs of Eudora Welty. K. T. Oslin once made a living as a Broadway chorus girl, and when she turned to country in her mid-40s, it was to sing about such nonbucolic topics as older women sleeping with younger men. Even the downhome Reba McEntire, who spent her youth on her father's ranch and on the rodeo circuit,



went on to college, where she studied classical violin and piano and “analyzed Mozart every which way.”

But more than any other country headliner, Brooks encapsulates most of the complexities of the baby boomers. He was raised in an Oklahoma City suburb, where he listened to Kiss and Queen, and graduated from Oklahoma State, where he was a middling jock and an advertising major. He hides his receding hairline under his Stetson, and once said, “I’d rather be like Schwarzenegger—perfect teeth, perfect body, full head of hair.” He can be a pop nostalgist who croons old Billy Joel songs, a country nostalgist who traces his lineage to the backwoodsdy George Jones, or a rock nostalgist who remembers what the back and forth between a jumping-jack-flash performer and his audience is supposed to be like. “Like great sex,” he says, “where you get wild and frenzied, then turn that around quick to something gentle, tender and slow, and then get wild and crazy again and just keep doing that over and over until one of you drops dead.”

His essence, above all, is in a ballad like *The Dance*, a palliative for a generation that has begun to lick old wounds as it approaches middle age. “I could have missed the pain,” he sings. “But I’d of had to miss the dance.” The video of *The Dance* shows images of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and



the song's autumnal, retrospective tone is what seems to touch millions of listeners. Says Sue Thayer, 43, a machine-shop secretary from Grayling, Mich., and a convert to country music from rock: "It's about love affairs gone bad, and death—the finality of relationships."

Aging rock'n' rollers have been quietly defecting to country for years. But since 1990 the process has accelerated sharply. "Elvis Presley was the first time I saw this kind of reaction," says Jimmy Bowen, whose Nashville-based Liberty Records distributes Brooks. "Then I saw it again with the Beatles. And now I see it with Garth Brooks. When you turn on millions of people in a short period of time, that's called a phenomenon."

Brooks has yet to prove he has the imagination of John Lennon, much less the death-defying charisma of Elvis, but he has broken all of Nashville's sales records. Until his 1991 *Ropin' the Wind*, no country album had ever entered *Billboard's* pop chart at No. 1. Since his recording debut a short three years ago, Brooks has moved more albums with more velocity than anyone else in the history of Nashville: when the figures for *Ropin'* are added to those for *Garth Brooks* and *No Fences*, his first and second releases, he has sold more than 16 million records.

Country is reaching deeper than ever into the lives of Americans. Since 1980 the number of country radio stations has gone from 1534 to about 2500 nationwide. By one measure, country has become the nation's second most popular radio format, after adult contemporary. Country stations rank in first place in 45 of the top 100 radio markets, including Buffalo, Kansas City and Orlando. Without much fanfare, discos that used to play Top 40 tunes have been converting into country music clubs, where cowboy wannabes pull up in Hondas to dance the Slappin' Leather, the Tush Push or the Texas Two-step.

Actually, the country music lover long ago abandoned the southern holler for the middle-class suburbia of satellite dishes that politicians like to call the heartland. Republicans have understood this ever since Richard Nixon became the first President to visit the Grand Ole Opry in 1974. George Bush campaigned with country music stars Loretta Lynn and Peggy Sue, and made a pilgrimage to Nashville last year for the Country Music Association Awards.

Country is also benefiting from the determined eclecticism of the twenty-something generation. At a Nashville concert by country hunk Alan Jackson, Brandi Byrd, 19, arrived with her hair teased into a punk sculpture, wearing a replica of an artfully threadbare Aerosmith outfit. At home she puts her Jackson and Brooks tapes alongside the work of groups like White Snake, Poison and Motley Crue. Says Julie Hall, a 23-year-old clerk at TNN: "I'm just as likely to buy the Black Crowes as I am to buy a Travis Tritt tape. I like good music. I don't care what it is."

But country's message makes the music belong, first and foremost, to the baby boomers now coping with being in their

40s. "Twenty-year-olds," says record executive Bowen, "are having their first romance, and we're talking about the third divorce over here." If rock is about feral impulses country is about spiritual nourishment. Cultural critic Camille Paglia who has celebrated the Dionysian power of rock music in her writings, believes the genre suffered an identity crisis as it moved further from the rural immediacy of folk and blues and lost its restless, questing spirit. "In rock you're getting middle-class suburban kids who have no experience of anything except what they hear on the radio," she says. "Country music speaks emotional truth. Rock has drifted from it." Says Paul Shaffer, David Letterman's bandleader: "Country is soul music for white people, and people always return to soul music, because that's where the feeling is."

If, as in Shaffer's description, country's appeal has something to do with race, it is because pop has rarely been as racially polarized as it is in the ear of rap. Country fans, who, like their stars, tend to be white, are not shy about describing their music as the musical equivalent of the urban escapism known as white flight. "Thank God for rap," says Bowen. "Every morning when they play that stuff, people come running to us." Says Ralph Emery: "Rap music speaks only to black issues, and has turned a lot of white people off."

But much more than race is involved in country's success. At the end of a decade marked by lip-synching scandals and Material Girlhood, Americans are reclaiming their right to sentimentality, civility and a little bit of cellulite on the dance floor. Take, for example, some patrons of the Golden Nugget, a night spot in Buffalo's flourishing country-and-western scene. "In a