

*The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry.* By Diane Pecknold. Refiguring American Music. (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 2007. Pp. x, 294. Paper, \$22.95, ISBN 978-0-8223-4080-5; cloth, \$79.95, ISBN 978-0-8223-4059-1.)

In this intelligent, wide-ranging book drawing on trade journals, fan magazines, personal interviews, and other sources, Diane Pecknold studies the culture and economy of country music from the 1920s to the present and reveals how a complex discourse of commercialism lay at the core of the industry's development. Her achievement is to demonstrate how commercialism functioned not as an abstract, historical concept but as an active, conscious strategy over which numerous groups struggled (including listeners, disc jockeys, music industry executives, folklorists, and others). However, what makes Pecknold's history particularly interesting is its departure from simplistic narratives juxtaposing shrewd businessmen in support of commercialism and passive or simple-minded consumers opposed to it. Instead she shows, for example, how many country music listeners had a relatively sophisticated understanding of the financial economy of the music business and how some listeners, in the face of the broad denigration of country music as the dross of the lower classes, came to embrace commercialism as a validation of their standing in the American "consumer democracy" and as a means to safeguard the availability of music they valued (p. 201). Indeed, Pecknold effectively complicates the neat line between producers and consumers; in one of the book's most compelling sections, she analyzes how the professionalization of the country

music business led to the marginalization of (unpaid, female) fan club presidents, who had earlier functioned as de facto publicity agents.

Alongside this historicization of commercialism, Pecknold's complementary project is to explore the relationship between the country music business and the rest of the music industry and American society at large. Thus, her compass stretches from Tin Pan Alley's contentious stance toward hillbilly music in the 1920s and 1930s, to the place of country music in the mass culture debates of the 1950s, to the explicit politicization of country music by Republican strategists in the late 1960s and 1970s. In the sections on the 1950s and 1960s, Pecknold's account of class politics includes at least some consideration of race, but unfortunately this dimension is largely absent from earlier sections (for example, in hillbilly's relation to blues). One wishes, too, that gender had entered into her analysis with greater definition, which might have been expected given that Pecknold coedited a volume on this subject (*A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music*, coedited with Kristine M. McCusker [Jackson, 2004]). Moreover, it bears mentioning that the book's title can be misleading. (Full disclosure: I have a book coming out with a similar title.) The phrase "the Selling Sound" comes from an industry sales presentation to potential sponsors and advertising executives in the 1960s, the aural element of which goes largely unremarked upon; except for some discussion of the smooth production aesthetic known as the "Nashville Sound," Pecknold seldom comments on sonic or musical issues per se. That said, Pecknold has written a rich cultural history whose thoughtful reconsideration of commercialism and class values in country music makes this book an important contribution to interpretations of the political economy of culture in the twentieth century.

University of Delaware

DAVID SUISMAN

*Air Castle of the South: WSM and the Making of Music City.* By Craig Havighurst. Music in American Life. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, c. 2007. Pp. [xx], 279. \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-252-03257-8.)

Among academic historians, radio has long been a neglected area of American popular culture. Craig Havighurst's *Air Castle of the South: WSM and the Making of Music City* charts the history of the South's most renowned radio station. Founded in 1925 as a promotional tool for National Life and Accident Insurance Company, WSM blossomed instead into the chief promoter and shaper of commercial country-and-western music. As Havighurst notes, such a destiny would not have occurred to anyone in WSM's management, an educated group of men who evinced little interest in the raw sounds of their rural hinterland. Nashville in the first half of the twentieth century could be "inhospitable terrain" for country musicians, and for many years WSM maintained a love/hate relationship with the genre that filled its coffers and cemented its legend (p. xvi). But from the inaugural appearances of Dr. Humphrey Bate's band and Uncle Dave Macon in the summer of 1925 to the development and increasing popularity of George Hay's Grand Ole Opry to the creation of the so-called Nashville Sound, hillbilly and country music took center stage.