



FROM THE EDITOR

HOME OF THE HAYRIDE

BY ERROL LABORDE

▶ STANDING ON THE STAGE AT SHREVEPORT'S LEGENDARY MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM, Winston Hall, a musician and tour guide with a passion for the city's music legacy, points to a spot on the floor, right up from in the center. The auditorium is empty this afternoon, but the imagination quickly fills the seats as though it is Saturday night of yesteryear as radio station KWKH staged its weekly "Louisiana Hayride" broadcast.

Hall fills in the rest by playing a soundtrack from October 16, 1954, when the announcer introduces a young man from Mississippi named Elvis Presley. After assuring the crowd that he was proud to be there Presley launches into a song called "That's Alright Momma." And then — from that very spot on the stage — the world changes. Really. Because the concert is being broadcast, microphones were set up throughout the audience section. The sound technician quickly noticed that something different was happening. Teenagers, who had been dragged along by their parents to hear a country music show, suddenly seem possessed. Turning the sound pods the technician integrates screaming, unlike anything ever heard into the song. Through the woods and hills of northcentral Louisiana and into Arkansas and east Texas the airwaves are raucous, as though sending a message that a king is born.

Only two year earlier, also in October, young Hank Williams stood on that same spot. Nobody reached hearts (whether they were, "Cheating" or "Cold, Cold") better than him. In Louisiana his hit, "Jambalaya" was as hot as a crawfish pie. On that October night it was announced that Williams had just been given a contract (thought modest) to regularly appear on the "Hayride." It might have been a long and blissful life together except that Williams' life, ended on Jan. 1, 1953. He was found in the backseat of a car in West Virginia, possibly the victim of a painkiller overdose.

Hall argues that Shreveport has such a rich music legacy that it should have a Music museum. Being the birthplace of the early blues singer known as "Leadbelly" justifies some enshrinement.

(Shreveport and neighboring Bossier City on the other side of the Red River qualified for our list in this issue of the state's desirable places to retire. Certainly, a lazy day on the Red River with the latest listening device tuned to the songs from the city's legacy could cure the blues.)

Having been completed in 1929, the old auditorium is now a spry 90 years old. It has lost none of its Art Deco good looks and still houses travelling road shows. Like any respectable old building it is also haunted by ghost stories though neither Hall nor a regular staffer who joined us claim to have ever seen an apparition there. (Although—there is a window that seems to keep reopening after being shut.)

Maybe it is the spirits from the past hoping for a matinee.



Errol Laborde