

## Swing City meets the Twin Cities

Country crooner Roger Brown sings the blues to Texas Hall of Fame crowd Friday night



By HILLARY GANT  
The Battalion

Roger Brown shook up the Hall of Fame Friday night with his fusion of country, swing and big band.

The clean-cut, country crooner hung a maroon Texas A&M flag on the edge of the Hall of Fame stage in honor of his father, who graduated from A&M in 1949 and was a Corps of Cadets commander.

"My dad would have been proud to see me play here in Bryan," Brown said.

Brown performed with an abbreviated band because his regular touring band was plagued with medical emergencies. The audience did not seem to mind as they two-stepped around the dance floor while Brown covered a selection of songs made popular by artists from Hank Williams to Buck Owens.

Brown returned to his home state, Texas, in 1998 after almost 20 years of successful songwriting in Nashville. He has penned songs recorded by George Strait, Randy Travis and even Barbara Streisand. His first big break came when Tanya Tucker covered his song "Fool Fool Heart" in the '80s.

But Brown, being a native Texan, wanted to return home.

"As long as I lived in Tennessee, I always felt like a prodigal Texan, just waiting for the right time to move home," Brown said.

Brown has joined the recent wave of alternative-country artists like Roger Creager and Pat Green, who are finding an audience without the support of a major label. Often, these artists are only considered alternative because they do not fit in with the cookie-cutter country music played on the radio.

"When I was in Nashville, they were always saying, 'the radio is not going to play

that,'" Brown said. "But I'm just stubborn I guess, because I just keep doing it."

Brown said he has had bad luck with failing recording labels. He recorded a 5-song CD in 1996 called *Swing City* for Decca Records just before it went belly-up. The short album was critically acclaimed, but Brown said it was unable to reach enough people because the label was not able to support the album.

"It was like being a baseball player in the minor leagues," Brown said. "Then, when you finally get your shot at the majors, you never even get up to bat."

Brown has recorded his first, full-length album, *Rodeo Boogie*, and has released it on his own label, Prairie Crooner Records. Brown is touring Texas promoting the new album and playing in cities like San Angelo, Dallas and his hometown of Menard, Texas.

*Rodeo Boogie* features a 10-piece band for a full, rich western swinging sound. Brown's self-taught rhythm guitar accompanies his soft, smooth voice with just a hint of Texas twang. Brown said his unusual combination of various musical styles has meant that he often has to convince others that the combination will work and appeal to a broad audience.

"My stuff's different, but that's not to say that it can't be mainstream," Brown said.

Brown describes his music as a mixture of his favorite musical influences.

"It's Bob Wills meets Duke Ellington," Brown said.

Brown said Texas is the perfect place to play his music because Texas has such a great musical heritage and the fans are open to new things. He said Texans have embraced different musical styles from western swing to Tejano and Americana, so his style should fit in here.

"Texas is like a country unto itself musically," Brown said. "People accept stuff that might not be played in Nashville or California."

He said he would love to play in other Western states like Colorado, but, for now, he is focusing on Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana.

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