



Several years ago, the Marr Sound Archives was fortunate to have received a large collection of manuscripts, photographs, film, and transcription discs from the son of Arthur B. Church, founder and president of Kansas City's CBS affiliated radio station KMBC. After securing funding from NEH to provide access to the collection, we began listening to and researching these recordings. Soon we were humming the Western swing music of the Texas Rangers and it became apparent that in the 30s and 40s the Rangers had become quite a franchise to Church and KMBC. They performed in:

- The Big Brother Club
- Flying Horse Ranch, which became Red Horse Ranch
- Brush Creek Follies
- Diamond City News
- Nighttime on the Trail
- Under Western Skies
- Circle "G" Ranch
- and frequently worked with Tex Owens

They also went to Hollywood and performed in several films. Today we'll give you a broad overview of the KMBC-CBS Texas Rangers--you'll get some facts about their career, and most importantly, you'll get to hear them perform. So who were the Texas Rangers?



Here, you can see our four man singing group known as the Midwesterners or The Lamp Post Four depending on which program they performed in (in this case, The Lamp Post Four on the Brush Creek Follies). That's Arizona with the guitar--more on him later. Three of these guys were in singing groups together at the same high school in Independence MO. There were also in the same church choir and sometime in the late 20s the church choir director matched them with another young man and our quartet was formed.



In 1932, when their house band moved to Chicago, KMBC needed to hire 4 new instrumentalists. Gomer Cool, a fiddle player, was already on staff at the station so they hired three additional musicians to add to the station's talent roster.



They combined the two groups to form the Texas Rangers. An eight man Western swing group that played 20 instruments between them. The instrumentalists are Clarence "Idaho" Hartman on bass, Gomer "Tenderfoot" Cool on fiddle, Joe "Monty" Strand on accordion and Herbie "Arizona" Kratoska on guitar and banjo. Joe Strand replaced Paul Sells in 1941 which is a good time to mention that over the years, the members of the group changed but their "cowboy" names remained with the group. The vocalists from left to right are tenor Fran "Irish" Mahaney sitting in the rocking chair, standing the baritone Robert "Bob" Crawford, then the bass Edward "Tucson" or "Tookie" Cronenbold followed by the first tenor Rod "Dave" May.

Life on Red Horse Ranch



In this video clip, you can see how the show was produced. There were professional actors playing more prominent roles and the Rangers stepped in to perform their musical numbers.



Things really took off for the Rangers in 1939 and 1940 starting with January 1939 when the Governor of Texas commissioned the musical group The Texas Rangers, along with Tex Owens, as honorary members of the the state's famed law enforcement group. It's interesting to note that in an interoffice memo, the Rangers express their disappointment that Tex was included since he was never an official member of the group, but Arthur Church didn't really see they had anything to lose by including Owens.



Then Hollywood came calling. Their first appearance was in the serial The Oregon Trail starring Johnny Mack Brown in May of 1939, followed by multiple films starring Johnny Mack Brown and Gene Autry.



Here are shots from some of the films. In fact, the Rangers relationship with Autry reached beyond the silver screen when they began backing him on his radio program "Melody Ranch." This, in turn, led them to request their own show on the CBS network.



And they got it--in the fall of 1940. Their radio show, Circle "G" Ranch was sponsored by Old Gold cigarettes. It ran for 13 weeks but while very popular, it failed to get renewed when Old Gold changed ad agencies.



From 1941 to 1942, the Texas Rangers Library comprised of nearly 400 selections was produced and distributed around the country. When World War II broke out in the US, the boys performed in camps and hospitals until they joined the service themselves. Even though temporarily disbanded, their music continued to be played during the war. After the war, they got back together and started performing again on radio, TV, and film. But in the late 40s, the transcription library wasn't doing well and the station management saw the original 8-man group as too expensive. And so the Texas Rangers became a completely different group altogether, a 5-man group called The New Texas Rangers.

Inter-Department Communication		
To <u>Mr. Church</u>	KMBC	Date <u>7/1/36</u>
From <u>Gomer</u>		Time <u>9 AM</u>
Subject: <u>SONS OF THE PIONEERS</u>		
<p>I was able to obtain the following information about the "Sons of the Pioneers" transcriptions.</p> <p>TIME: 8:45 AM Daily - WLBF</p> <p>The transcriptions are exclusive to WLBF in this territory - or city.</p> <p>I listened to the program over WLBF this morning. Their type of singing undoubtedly has a great appeal. However we believe that the Texas Rangers have them beat on the following points (1) Variety (sweet, peppy, solos, trio, quartet, orchestra, comedy, etc.). (2) Selection of numbers. Those played this morning weren't especially good. (3) Quality. The Texas Rangers, as a legitimate musical group can carry a wider appeal. I believe they have us beat a little on the fiddle.</p> <p>Pioneers" program, preferring to use their own. Probably because it is a commercial program over WLBF.</p> <p>I listened to the program over WLBF this morning. Their type of singing undoubtedly has a great appeal. However we believe that the Texas Rangers have them beat on the following points (1) Variety (sweet, peppy, solos, trio, quartet, orchestra, comedy, etc.). (2) Selection of numbers. Those played this morning weren't especially good. (3) Quality. The Texas Rangers, as a legitimate musical group can carry a wider appeal. I believe they have us beat a little on the fiddle.</p>		

The Texas Rangers can easily be compared to another Western group prominent at the time, The Sons of the Pioneers. And given their popularity, in the summer of 1936, Arthur B. Church tasked the Rangers' fiddle player, Gomer Cool with investigating the Pioneers' transcription library. We can't be certain if Church was soliciting his thoughts on the group as well, but Cool offered them regardless saying, "I listened to the program over WLBF this morning. Their type of singing undoubtedly has great appeal. However we believe that the Texas Rangers have them beat on the following points (1) Variety (sweet, peppy, solos, trio, quartet, orchestra, comedy, etc.). (2) Selection of numbers. Those played this morning weren't especially good. (3) Quality. The Texas Rangers, as a legitimate musical group can carry a wider appeal. I believe they have us beat a little on the fiddle."



Wait till the sun shines, Nellie

(from Musterole and Zemo audition, 1938-05-26, KMBC: 850)

- To get an idea of their instrumental and vocal skills, this popular standard Wait till the sun shines, Nellie
- This photo is from the set of the film “Chip of the Flying U” with Johnny Mack Brown (11/1939)
- Idaho on bass was also known as “Dad” as he was the oldest member of the group. He also liked to paint landscapes and desert scenes.



Mexicali Rose

(from Texas Rangers Library, 2561, KMBC: 1070)

- And here, a popular ballad selection from their transcription library. You'll notice with this and the next selections, their use of traditional Barbershop harmonies.



When bugle is sounding taps

(from Texas Rangers Library, HH-2700, KMBC 828)

- Several members of the Rangers composed original songs for the group. Bob Crawford (pictured here), the most prolific composer of the group, composed this particular selection “When the bugle is sounding taps” in 1942, which is rather topical for the time given the outbreak of the second world war in America.
- Topical: soldier longing for his sweetheart.



Over the blue horizon

(from Texas Rangers Library, 29614--29615, KMBC 834)

- Yet another selection from the transcription library. The Rangers' are masters of the Western ballad.
- This is vocal trio. Without the bass part.
- This scrapbook is part of the songbook that was published in 1946. You can see some changes in membership here (Monty)



Instrumental

Another hallmark of the Rangers were their instrumental performances. These selections are both from a 1938 audition recording which is why you see Paul Sells on accordion rather than Joe Strand.

Monty Sells on accordion (composed by Monty)

(from Musterole and Zemo audition, 1938-05-26, KMBC: 850)

- Instrumentalists also composed their own numbers.

Tiger rag

(from Musterole and Zemo audition, 1938-05-26, KMBC: 850)

- Perhaps the biggest “ham” of them all, Arizona displays his skill on the banjo in “Tiger rag.”
- In the early 40s, he established a world’s speed record for guitar with an arrangement of “Flight of the bumblebee” (more than 18 notes per second)
- Kratoska had a long career with KMBC not only performing with the Rangers, but also the Rhythm Riders and the Tune Chasers in the 1950s.



Hand me down my walking cane

(from Musterole and Zemo audition, 1938-05-26, KMBC: 850)

- This traditional song will be stuck in your head when this is over.
- But also it perhaps best demonstrates the ensemble's chemistry.
- Arizona's bull frog voice.



Ocarina choir

(from Musterole and Zemo audition, 1938-05-26, KMBC: 850)

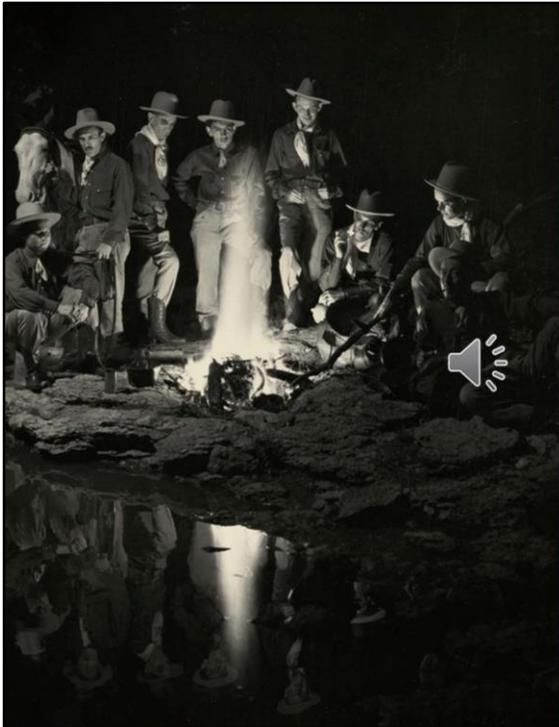
- That's Hiram Higsby "radio's original rube" hosting. He also was the host of KMBC's Saturday barn dance show, The Brush Creek Follies for 15 years. [<http://www.crb.org/hof/inductee.php?wid=89&orderNum=41>]
- The Texas Rangers performed novelty especially well.



Cowboy camp meeting

(from Under western skies, 1948-04-06, KMBC 1183)

- And finally, a cowboy song from the CBS network program, “Under Western Skies” starring the Rangers with Martha Mears and Smiley Burnette.



QUESTIONS?

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Marr Sound Archives
LaBudde Special Collections
University of Missouri--KC

Arthur B. Church Production followed by “So long little doggies, so long”
(from Preview theatre of the air, KMBC 1182)

Questions?