

Honky Tonk Portraits of Country Music 1972-1981: Photographs by Henry Horenstein,
June 29, 2007-October 7, 2007

Touring and playing live is the primary means for most country acts to earn money and stay active. There are two venues where country music really rules: country-music parks and bluegrass festivals. Music parks became popular in the 1940s and 1950s as summer gathering places for families. Many, such as Lone Star Ranch, have Wild West themes. Some parks had a lake for swimming by day and a bar for dancing by night. While a few remain, most country-music parks are long gone, victims of real-estate development and changing demographics and musical tastes; but bluegrass festivals are still very popular—more than five hundred are listed in the annual festival guide in *Bluegrass Unlimited* magazine. Although the first festivals started in the 1960s, they became especially popular in the 1970s. Perhaps the most notable thing about bluegrass music festivals is that they have helped preserve the music by providing a place for traditional musicians to work and for their fans to hear them.

The photographs presented in this exhibition capture a fascinating transitional period in country music. The 1970s was a time when country stars received little airplay; when honky tonks and country music parks were still thriving; when today's popular bluegrass music festivals were just beginning; and when some pioneering musicians were nearing the end of their careers. Photographer Henry Horenstein (American, b. 1947) set about to document what he believed to be a disappearing world. His images portray musicians, both famous and now forgotten, their fans, and the venues in which this cultural expression took root and flourished. Horenstein was fascinated by history in high school and continued his pursuit of the subject at the University of Chicago before approaching photography with Harry Callahan at RISD (BFA 1971, MFA 1973). From his professors, especially the influential historian E. P. Thompson, with whom he studied at the University of Warwick in England, he learned the importance of understanding history through the lens of people's everyday experience.

From Callahan, he learned to photograph people and places to which he was naturally drawn. Horenstein was and remains a huge fan of country music, and he saw it as an expression of the lives of working people. For nearly a decade he recorded its culture, searching out musicians and their fans in honky tonks, large halls, outdoor venues, and even in their homes. When Horenstein was beginning this project, he had the good fortune to live across the street from Boston's then upstart, now established and influential Rounder Records. By shooting album covers and publicity photographs for them, he gained backstage access at many venues, including the most important for country music, the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee, during its last years at the Ryman Auditorium. While it is true that many of the people and places he photographed are no longer around, in fact, the music itself is now stronger than ever. It has become big business. His photographs serve as a record of a time now past when country-music performers were close to their audience and honky-tonk neon beckoned. The exhibition tour was organized by the Kathleen Ewing Gallery, Washington, D.C. All photographs in the exhibition are gelatin silver prints.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973, Photography)
RISD Faculty, 1982-present
Interior, Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, Nashville, Tennessee, 1974
Gelatin silver print
Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.1



Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973, Photography)
RISD Faculty, 1982-present
Dolly Parton, Symphony Hall, Boston, MA 1974, 1974
Gelatin silver print
Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.10



Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973, Photography)
RISD Faculty, 1982-present
Waiting Backstage, Grand Ole Opry, Nashville, Tennessee, 1972
Gelatin silver print
Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.2



RISD MUSEUM

Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973,
Photography)
RISD Faculty, 1982-present
Lovers, Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, Nashville, Tennessee, 1974
Gelatin silver print
Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.3



Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973,
Photography)
RISD Faculty, 1982-present
Jerry Lee Lewis, Ramada Inn, Boston, Massachusetts, 1976
Gelatin silver print
Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.4



Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973,
Photography)
RISD Faculty, 1982-present
Harmonica Player, Merchant's Cafe, Nashville, Tennessee, 1974
Gelatin silver print
Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.5



RISD MUSEUM

Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973, Photography)

RISD Faculty, 1982-present

Bartender, Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, Nashville, Tennessee, 1974

Gelatin silver print

Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.6



Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973, Photography)

RISD Faculty, 1982-present

Blue Sky Boys, Gettysburg Bluegrass Festival, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 1974

Gelatin silver print

Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.7



Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973, Photography)

RISD Faculty, 1982-present

Don Stover, At Home, Billerica, Massachusetts, 1972

Gelatin silver print

Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.8



Henry Horenstein, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1971; MFA 1973, Photography)

RISD Faculty, 1982-present

Dancing to Webb Pierce, Lone Star Ranch, Reeds Ferry, New Hampshire, 1972

Gelatin silver print

Walter H. Kimball Fund 2007.116.9

