Retelling the West:

Jules Verne Allen, “The Singing Cowboy”

By Tony Russell

NOTES

1 “Jules Verne Allen, The Singing Cowboy, Has Been Hard Worker Off And On Horses All His Life,” Albuquerque Journal, June 30, 1929. While I admit it would be naïve not to wonder if Allen, talking (as I take him to have been) to a Journal reporter, touched up his portrayal of his youth and early manhood—or if, when he failed to do so, the reporter did it for him—I have decided to accept it as a generally reliable broad-brush picture.


5 “Program For The Evening Performances,” Albuquerque Journal, August 18, 1931.


8 Albuquerque Journal, August 18, 1930.

9 Albuquerque Journal, August 24, 1929.


11 These and other sales figures quoted were obtained by the author from RCA Victor archives.


13 For the purposes of these computations I have selected only the cowboy repertoire from the recordings of three artists who also worked in other idioms, such as hobo and “bum” songs: namely, Harry “Mac” McClintock, “Peg” Moreland, and Goebel Reeves, “The Texas Drifter.” I have excluded early Western cowboy stringbands such as Len Nash and His Country Boys, who recorded for Brunswick in 1929–30, or Otto Gray’s Oklahoma Cowboy Band (Gennett and Vocalion, 1928–31), since their repertoire was heterogeneous and, in fact, contained few core cowboy songs. I have not included Western-themed songs of then recent date, of the type of “The Utah Trail” or “When It’s Springtime in the Rockies.”


I have assumed that “WFI” was an error on Allen’s part, because the only Los Angeles station with a –FI callsign was KFI. It is worth noting, though, that there was a station WFI: it was in Philadelphia, and also began broadcasting in 1922. So Allen, who we have reason to suspect might have been in that city in 1920, could indeed have sung on that station.

23 *San Antonio Express*, December 9, 1931.


25 *San Antonio Light*, February 22, 1932. Allen’s true age at the time was forty-eight.


27 *San Antonio Express*, May 16, 1932.


30 *San Antonio Light*, October 28, 1932.

31 *San Antonio Light*, February 9, 1933.

32 *San Antonio Light*, February 25, 1933.

33 *San Antonio Light*, radio logs, 1933, passim.

34 *San Antonio Light*, December 23, 1933.
San Antonio Express, radio logs, November 10, 1934, December 15, 1934, February 9, 16, and 23, 1935, etc.

Kevin Coffey, notes to the CD Tune Wranglers 1936–1938 (Krazy Kat KK CD 28, 2000).

San Antonio Light, March 15, 1935.

“Cowboy Will Talk At Witte,” San Antonio Light, January 1, 1933. A similar story, “Cowboy Singer In Museum Today,” appeared on the same day in the San Antonio Express. Of the eight songs it said Allen would perform, two were ones he had not recorded, “When the Bloom Is on the Sage” and “I Want to Be in Texas When They Round Up in the Spring.”

“Longhorn Luke To Entertain Children,” San Antonio Light, February 24, 1933. In Cowboy Lore, prefacing his selection of “Songs of the Range,” Allen writes that they “were taken down from my voice just as I sing them, and set to music by Mrs. G. Embry Eitt, San Antonio, Texas.” This is no doubt what is meant by the reference to Mrs. Eitt “recording his voice for phonograph records.”


San Antonio Light, May 18, 1933.

Albuquerque Journal, May 18, 1933.


Time, June 12, 1933.


The personnel I hypothesized in Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921–1942 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) for the Rodeo Trio—D. A. Champagne, fiddle; Kenneth Deshazo, harmonica and jew’s harp; Phil Smith, guitar—is incorrect. According to his daughter (telephone conversation with the author, August 4, 2008), Kenneth DeShazo (as his name is correctly spelled) chiefly played guitar. Other evidence implies that Phil Smith played the fiddle, leaving Champagne playing the harmonica—which is the role assigned to him (as D. A. Champaigne) on the Allen session of April 30, 1928, by the Victor session-sheet.

It was surely no coincidence that one of the Rodeo Trio’s recordings consisted of medleys of cowboy songs all of which had been recorded by Allen: “Bury Me out on the Prairie”—“Home on the Range”/“When the Work’s All Done This Fall”—“Cowboy’s Lament.”
Figures obtained by the author from RCA Victor archives.

Abilene Daily Reporter, April 15, 1936.

Lubbock Morning Avalanche, April 15, 1936.

Dallas Morning News, May 8, 1936. This and the following reference were kindly supplied by Kevin Coffey.


Or, at any rate, had been living. He is listed in the Tucson city directory of 1936, though not that of 1941, but the report of Jules Allen’s death in the Tucson Daily Citizen (see note 56) refers to Luther as a Tucson resident.

Tucson Daily Citizen, March 20, 1942.

Despite what has repeatedly been said by other writers, Cowboy Lore contains not thirty-six but thirty-seven songs; perhaps the last item, “By the Silvery Rio Grande,” is discounted because, uniquely in the book, it lacks music. The piece continues to be popular among old-time country singers, in part because of the Carter Family’s recording under the title “My Heart’s Tonight in Texas” (by which Allen too knew it), but its author remains unknown.

Allen, Cowboy Lore, p. 63.

Of the remaining cowboy songs in Allen’s recorded repertoire, “Jack o’ Diamonds” is a composite of verses very like Lomax’s and others not found in his text. “Chisholm Trail” may be a much edited and somewhat reshuffled version of the Lomax text, or derived from another source. “Cowboy’s Love Song,” Allen’s variant of the “Bright Sherman Valley”/“Red River Valley” song complex, has little in common with the text of “Red River Valley” in Lomax, which in any case did not appear in the 1910 edition but was added in 1938, derived from a then recent songbook. “Long Side the Santa Fé Trail” is close to Lomax’s “The Santa Fe Trail,” but, again, that song was not in the 1910 edition. “Cow Trail to Mexico” is not from Lomax.

Notes to Jules Allen, The Texas Cowboy (Folk Variety FV 121502, 1973).

San Antonio Light, December 9, 1931.

Notes to Jules Allen, The Texas Cowboy (Folk Variety FV 121502, 1973).

Some examples are “Oh Mo’nah” by Ted Weems and His Orchestra (Victor 22822, 1931), “You Shall Be Free Monah” by Bill Boyd and His Cowboy Ramblers (Bluebird B-6694, 1936), “Oh! Monah!” by The Blue Chips (ARC 6-09-55, 1936), and “Oh Monah!” by the Sons of the West (Decca 5608, 1938).

Since the harmonica player on the 1928 El Paso session is identified by Victor as D. A. Champaigne, who recorded the following year in the same city in the Rodeo Trio (see note 49), the other accompanist may be the Rodeo Trio’s fiddler, probably Phil Smith. The fiddler
on the 1929 session in Los Angeles, again according to Victor, was named Charles Coffey, but further identification is impossible.


67 From “Make Me a Cowboy Again for a Day,” as given by Ohrlin, *The Hell-Bound Train*, pp. 136–37, a slightly superior text to the one in Allen, *Cowboy Lore*, pp. 144–45. Allen, though he sang it, did not record it, but his contemporary, the Dallas radio singer Jackson Arnot “Peg” Moreland, did (“Make Me a Cowboy Again,” Victor V-40272, 1929).

Though the song is of unknown authorship, it was plainly inspired by the 1860 publication “Rock Me to Sleep Mother”—claimed by several writers but perhaps most credibly by Florence Percy and Ernest Leslie—the first lines of which, “Backward, turn backward, Oh Time, in your flight, make a child again just for tonight,” are echoed in the later song’s “Backward, turn backward, Oh, Time with your wheel . . . make me a cowboy again for a day.”