

**A New Angle**  
**MTPR Episode 14**  
**Jeff Brandt**

**Justin Angle** This is A New Angle, a show about cool people doing awesome things in and around Montana. I'm your host, Justin Angle. This show is supported by First Security Bank, Blackfoot Communications and the University of Montana College of Business.

Hey, folks, welcome back and thanks for tuning in. This week at MTPR, we're celebrating music and stories from 1971 to commemorate 50 years of National Public Radio. Titles like Maggie May, You Won't Be Fooled Again and Just My Imagination are but a few of the many iconic songs that made 1971 a pivotal year in music and culture. So to understand the musical significance of 1971, I decided to phone a friend, the University of Montana's resident expert, on all things rock and roll, Jeff Brandt. Jeff is a faculty member in the College of the Arts and Media and teaches the most popular course on our campus, The History of Rock and Roll.

Jeff, thanks for coming on the show today.

**Jeff Brandt** Thanks for having me.

**Justin Angle** So where did you grow up and what did your parents do?

**Jeff Brandt** I grew up in Sitka, Alaska. It's a tiny little town. It's a huge island in Southeast Alaska. And my parents were public school teachers from the Midwest. And they ended up there because of an extra 50 dollars they had on their honeymoon. So

they took the ferry up from Seattle and visited all of these communities. And in visiting those communities, they discovered there were some teacher positions available who were so they applied and they ended up there and they've been there ever since.

**Justin Angle** Nice. So give us kind of your potted bio of, you know, how did you get from Sitka, Alaska, to being the most popular teacher on the University of Montanans campus?

**Jeff Brandt** I don't think I'm the most popular teacher.

**Justin Angle** You have the most popular class. I mean, that's important.

**Jeff Brandt** I might have one of the top three popular on the podium. I guess so. Well, I had an interest in music as a kid, actually. My interest was in music and baseball and it kind of flip flopped between the two. And then, cut to the chase, I went to college. I got cut from the baseball team because I had an injury and I couldn't throw from the outfield to the cutoff man anymore.

**Justin Angle** That's a problem.

**Jeff Brandt** That was a problem. I walked directly from the office where the cuts were listed for the baseball team to the band director's office. And I said, I want to get a degree in music, but I don't want to be a band director.

**Justin Angle** OK.

**Justin Angle** And he was my advisor slash mentor at that time. He said, great, get a degree and performance. So I started studying percussion more seriously. I'd studied it in high school. But, you know, in high school, you're not ever too serious about anything. You say you're really serious, like, I think I'm totally going to be a skateboarder, you know. But then, you know, four years later, your skateboard is collecting dust in some closet. But I just got more serious about percussion and really classical percussion. But I always play drum set. And then I joined a band, got into rock and roll. Long story short, I spent a little time in the music business. Things didn't work out. And then a publisher encouraged me to go to grad school. So I went to grad school and the history of rock and roll fell in my lap. And I have to be honest, I. I knew stuff about the history of rock and roll, like anybody who's a fan of rock and roll. But it's very spotty and very subjective to, you know, certain periods of time. I think like any occupation, you know, or or profession or hobby, people have this certain, you know, area that they're really knowledgeable. And I didn't know a lot about Bob Dylan. I didn't know I honestly didn't know a lot about the Beatles at the time. But then, yeah, I just I just started getting into it. And when the the class just became more popular, I think, because I was willing to maybe go a little further with some of the stories that were in-depth about some of the artists. I think the basically for me what it ended up being was the anecdotes that I had about the artists were what drew students in, because I knew things about them that maybe I had read in some obscure magazine or heard from somebody who was a musician in the biz.

**Justin Angle** So you got these stories that are hooks, right? I can see how these anecdotes, you know, and, sort of, give you some credit. It would also get draw the students in. Yeah. How do you then weave these stories in to some sort of theory about history?

**Jeff Brandt** I'm still working on that, to be honest. I think maybe that's part of the success, if I can say, of my class, is that I'm still working on it. There was somebody at one point in time who said to me, wow, well, you should have that in the bag by now. Right? You're you've been doing that for like five years. And I was like that was when I was on my second set of slides with my second or third text. And I was like, oh, no, I, I don't have it yet. I'm I'm close with this text, but then I'm going to have a different text eventually that I'm going to find that reads like a Rolling Stone magazine, which ended up sort of falling in my lap later. And I made my slides tailored to that. I think it'll be good for about another ten years. It's called Think Rock. It's by Kevin Tegtmeier from Pomona College.

And so for me, the success is continuing to put my back into it, because honestly, I don't think that you can rest on your laurels for too long. I think anybody will tell you that. I mean, Allyson Felix, the sprinter, will tell you that. I think any professional athlete would tell you that. I think any author would tell you that you have to keep chasing the carrot. And for me, it's been learning more stories, learning more about their music. I mean, which I never feel like I know enough because, you know, speaking of artists that I didn't know, I didn't know very much about Elvis Costello when I got into the the class. And then I was like, oh, man, I could go down the rabbit hole of Elvis Costello for months at a time. And then there's Frank Zappa and then there's like Al Green and then there's Metallica.

**Justin Angle** Right.

**Jeff Brandt** And there are so many others like like and then there's Marvin Gaye and then there's Aretha Franklin. And that's an endless abyss. And so I'm still chasing the carrot. I think that is part of the success is just continuing to find new information. Which, a professor, a while back in my personal history, said he thought that that was the success to any class, was it would keep your your own personal interest up.

**Justin Angle** So, yeah, I mean, I think that's a great, great kind of central compass for how how to navigate teaching. So we are here to talk specifically about nineteen seventy one. This is part of my 1970 one week kind of celebrating all things music and culture around the celebration of 50 years of National Public Radio. So I thought to reach out to you to sort of learn about music in 1971. A lot of people say it was a, you know, transformative year in music history. I don't know if that's like such a thing that you can say about a single year, but situate us in 1971. What's happening in music at that moment?

**Jeff Brandt** Well, I can tell. First, I want to talk about how the 70s in general and specifically in 1971 to about 1973 were transformative.

**Justin Angle** OK.

**Jeff Brandt** It really has to do with a single instrument. Most of you will have heard of it, but maybe not know what it is. It's a fancy piano and it's called a synthesizer. OK, a synthesizer is basically, for lack of a better term, it's a piano on acid. It makes, today, tens of thousands of sounds that can all be manipulated to make then hundreds of thousands of sounds. It is how Katy Perry and Taylor Swift and a lot of artists in that vein, Beyonce, will start recording an album using a synth. Synthesizers, though they

came about in the 1960s, they were very clunky. When you get to right around 1971 to 1973 and for sure, 1975, the synthesizer is the reason that rock and roll from that era still sounds relevant today. OK, but in 1971, David Bowie was experimenting with the synthesizer and he ended up being a big synth experimenter. And he had an album called *Hunky Dory* that came out in 1971 that has a lot of experimental synth stuff on it for the time.

Now, understand, when I say experimental for the time, if you go out and listen to *Hunky Dory* for the first time, you're not going to go, wow, that blows my mind. It's not going to blow your mind. Should I say it sounded very modern for that day because of the way sounds were being bent. There's a cut on that called I think it's Andy Warhol—

**Justin Angle** OK.

**Jeff Brandt** Where he not only teaches people how to how to pronounce Andy Warhol, which he says it's Warhol, not Hall. It's whole, as in Warhol. He goes to this whole it's Soho as in whole. Whoa ho. And so he goes through this, but then they manipulate the sound with the scent and then it goes into a song that was a thing that was attractive to people at that time. So that's one reason that that's a transformative year for music. Like, for me, that's not the album that does it. Probably for most people, the album that does it is *Led Zeppelin four*, which was untitled. And the reason I say that for rock and roll fans, just because *Led Zeppelin* and the *Beatles* and *Black Sabbath* are kind of like especially for people that like kind of like the stereotypical edgy rock, those are the bands that that sort of fit that bill. I mean, the *Beatles* maybe weren't edgy compared to *Black Sabbath*, but when they first came out,.

**Justin Angle** At the time, in context—

**Jeff Brandt** For the time they were. I mean, they had long hair. Sure. At one point. So Zeppelin four would be the album that would be transformative in 1971. But for me, that's not so much the album as there are two others. First of all, there's one that is by Marvin Gaye, which is called What's Going On, which I think is worth a listen for any I can say honestly, any human being on the planet. I don't think there's anything in that album that would be offensive. Even though at the time, for Motown Records, it was because Motown's theory was we don't do anything, that is we don't say anything that's too overtly sexual, we don't talk about politics. We keep it clean. You know, we sing about, you know, boy meets girl, girl meets boy. They have a romance. That's a song like songs like My Girl, OK? He was writing about politics. And what's going on was about politics. It was about the environment, which I think is really relevant today. It was about, I mean, there's a line in one tune about and there's too much mercury in the sea. That would have never resonated with me than it does now.

**Justin Angle** Yeah, for sure.

**Jeff Brandt** But he was also talking about the Vietnam War. And those are some just absolutely great tunes, not only to listen to, but there's just a lot of great lyricism in that album. And again, you know, if you talk about edgy rock and roll, probably most people would say, well, Led Zeppelin for sure would be the thing. But for me, it would be Marvin Gaye. What's going on?

**Justin Angle** So when you're talking about edginess or wherever you want to sort of think about it, I mean, you've got both the technological innovation that is allowing changes to how sound is created and what these artists are doing with sound. I like that term use bending the sound, but you've also got kind of the political cultural forces going along. How do you kind of think of how those two forces either coalesce or operate in isolation? How do they interact?

**Jeff Brandt** I mean, it's a complex question to answer, and I don't know if I can answer it from the 1971 perspective. I can answer it from the 1973 perspective, which is the dark side of the moon, Pink Floyd. Because that's an album that almost everybody is aware of. And you still see people wearing a T-shirt with that. Yeah, that rainbow triangle design or the triangle with the rainbow blending out of it, you might not see as many people with a Marvin Gaye what's going on shirt.

But Pink Floyd, they were taking the sounds of the synth and some stuff about politics and blending them together in a way that did pull and tug at people. And it does challenge the listener in a way, I guess in this sense, you know, an album like for lack of better example, Thriller, can stand on its own because of its hits. But you listen to Thriller all the way through, it's a different experience. Dark Side of the Moon is a piece of art that is meant to be taken in as a whole entity.

**Justin Angle** OK.

**Jeff Brandt** You don't you know, you don't go to the Louvre if that's the correct pronunciation, and just run straight in and see the Mona Lisa and then run out. You take in all of the other artwork and hopefully you learn something about art in the process.

With Pink Floyd and Dark Side of the Moon, 1973, you have to listen to whole thing to understand it. And so it does pull and tug at you in different ways. And I hope that that is a decent answer for how it brings them together. But understand, too, that the synth technology at that time, it was very difficult for them to do what now sounds easy.

**Justin Angle** Sure.

**Jeff Brandt** Because now you can you know, you can just push a couple buttons and move one dial and then you can make da da da da da da da da da da. And then it was, you know, you had to do all of these different things and then plug a cord in maybe in a different patch.

**Justin Angle** Although how you framed it at the beginning of the conversation with something that you hear from that era with the synthesizer can still sound relevant today. That's probably a testament to how difficult it was to do in the moment for it to still sort of sound current and interesting.

**Jeff Brandt** It is. And it's not. It is in that, first of all, they worked very hard to make the synthesizer sound the best they could at that time. Now, again, you had to work really hard to do that. Then anything that the Beatles did with a Mellotron synthesizer at the time, which is a pretty primitive synth, they had to work fairly hard to make it sound good. Now, it's easy to do that. But because around 71, 72, 73, the synths became a little bit more accessible. They worked very hard to make sound sound right that then in the 80s were easy to do. And so then it became let me step back for a second.

When I started teaching the course, I was like, why do all of these kids like Def Leppard? I seriously couldn't figure it out. I was like when I was growing up, you know, we didn't like the 60s because that was in the past. Now they like this stuff. And I saw the trend more and more and more that people would have these different pockets of time that they were onto. It was almost always post 1975 because that's when the synthesizer sort of came into its being. It became an entity that was affordable, accessible. And then by the time you get to the 1980s, everything that they worked so hard to make on the Dark Side of the Moon or on Hunky Dory by David Bowie was now easy to do. And so that's why that stuff is still relevant. Today, because now the technology hasn't progressed that much further than that.

**Justin Angle** So when you say they worked so hard to produce a certain sound or do something with the synth, what does that actually mean? Is it the artists like trying to tweak the technologies, the artist with some technologies, like how does that collaboration come to be?

**Jeff Brandt** I mean, I can't honestly say that I know the answer. I can speculate. It's the best I can do. I would speculate this. First of all, it would be like, let me give a parallel. If you gave somebody who was a fantastic chef a tray of ingredients and said, make something. I mean, you know how there are people that can just —

**Justin Angle** Oh yeah.

**Jeff Brandt** Like they can just pull something out of nowhere. They don't have to read a recipe that says two and a quarter cups of flour. They already know how much to put in because they know the consistency. But if you give them a tray of ingredients that

includes spices or whatnot, they will experiment with those and know how to make it taste a certain way.

With the synthesizer, at the time in the early 70s, there weren't that many options on them. And so what they did was they would experiment with the options that were not in the manuals. This is one of the things that David Bowie emphasized was what we like to do was to throw the manuals out because the manuals were written by these, as he would say, high tech buffs that were basically treating it like a machine. We wanted to treat it like a musical instrument. So we didn't want to plug the cord in where they told us to plug the cord and we plugged it into a different jack.

**Justin Angle** OK.

**Jeff Brandt** And we tried to make sounds that they couldn't. He called them like crackles and farts. That was his thing. We tried to make it crackle and fought the way that other instrumentalists wouldn't think of. And so it was like he was like trying to find a way to make the this synthetic instrument, which is why it's called the synthesizer sound, even more synthetic, more different. And so they had to work hard to find those sounds. Now, those sounds are accessible in the thousands of options you have. So it would be like giving that chef then a tray of, OK, anything you want, make anything you want instead of this limited number of items.

**Justin Angle** We'll be back to my conversation with Jeff Brant after this short break.

Welcome back to A New Angle. We're exploring the music of 1971 with the University of Montana professor of Rock and Roll, Jeff Brandt.

So we touched on, you know, the technology. We touched on the sort of politics of the time, what sorts of, you know, when you when you sort of look back on 1971 in that period of years from now, what are the things that you think have been the most enduring as far as the changes that were made that that are still sort of persistent today are still forces in music?

**Jeff Brandt** Well, I mean, one of them that starts around that period of time, it's really starting again, starting as kind of a relative term, because. Let me step back. Because when they say that the blues developed, you know, at a certain period during, you know, like, say, 1905.

**Justin Angle** Yeah.

**Jeff Brandt** Pin that date on it. And then there are other people, they say, well, no, it was like 1898. And they'll say we found evidence that it was New England. Right. There were blues artists. And they say, well, no, no, the real blues was, you know, in the Mississippi Delta and it started at this specific date. It's always relative. But what I'm getting at is the singer songwriters, as they've been labeled, which is a funny term, and I'll explain why. But singer songwriters like Carole King and not to be confused with Carly Simon. And then, you know, anybody in that realm. Singer songwriters taking the ideas of the 60s and the ideas that, you know, the Beatles and then the harder edged bands from San Francisco in the 60s had the late 60s and then saying, you know what, I'm going to put my own kind of feel to this. I'm going to put my own lyricism to this that focuses on me, because the 70s are often called the ME decade. I'm going to give this from my perspective. This isn't going to be boy meets girl. This is me.

This is going to be I met someone and I'm going to give you my autobiographical perspective.

**Justin Angle** And is that what you mean by singer songwriter, somebody sort of being, you know, biographical about the process?

**Jeff Brandt** But the funny thing about the term is that everybody's a singer songwriter. I mean, Ozzy Osbourne is a singer songwriter. I mean, he's a singer. And he wrote songs and he sings them. But he gets categorized as, you know, he's a hard rock, you know, musician. It's kind of like in baseball when somebody says, oh, well, so-and-so is a pitcher, but they weren't a pitcher when they were a kid. When they were a kid, they played every position probably. I mean, there are people in the major leagues that specifically, you know, it's one thing that they've honed. But generally speaking, you have people that are athletes, they're athletes, they're good at Ping-Pong, they're good at whatever you try them at, they're going to beat you.

So the singer songwriter term got attached to Carly Simon and Carole King and James Taylor, people like that, because generally it was a guitar and they were accompanying themselves and they had a certain type of background music going on. But that was a big thing in the 1970s. And specifically in 1971, the album that Carole King released, which is called Tapestry, was one that ended up being personal to me later because the hits on Tapestry, like I Feel the Earth Move is one I would hear those in the grocery store.

**Justin Angle** Yeah, I can hear it right now.

**Jeff Brandt** As a little kid. And so when I was walking around in Lakeside Grocery where it used to be, and sit by the actual lake where it's not by the lake. Now, I remember hearing Carole King and that sound of the era permeated for I guess until disco. It really was it was a big deal.

**Justin Angle** And so these singer songwriters, I mean, you mentioned that sort of like 70s were this ME generation. Is there some sort of conceit to the notion of a single performer whose writing is that the solo artist? Is that kind of a precursor to that?

**Jeff Brandt** I don't know. I mean, again, it's one of those things where it's it's very subjective, you know, depending on who looks at it. I think personally, having taught the history of rock and roll for as many years as I have. Understand that the authors oftentimes are trying to put the artists in drawers.

**Justin Angle** Hmm. OK. Yeah.

**Jeff Brandt** I mean, it's again, to go back to the baseball analogy. Well, you know, you're a pitcher, so that's what you do, right? You wouldn't be playing outfield, but they probably could. Well, you are a singer songwriter because you started in this decade and this part of the decade and you did this type of music. So therefore you are that. But if you take an artist like Phil Collins, like Phil Collins was in a progressive rock band called Genesis that then kind of became a pop band later he then he had his own pop career, which, you know, everybody's heard of his music. But he also recorded a big band album. At some point, even though he couldn't really read music, he made arrangements of his tunes in a big band style. Does that mean that he is an 80s pop artist or does he fit into other categories? But they like to put people in draws. The

authors do. And so singer songwriter became this term that was attached to people like Carole King.

**Justin Angle** Sure. And you mentioned Phil Collin's career. I mean, these artists. And to your knowledge, how do they think about these drawers or categories that others try to put them in? Or are they just irrelevant to these folks or these folks think, you know, I'm going to prove that I'm more than the media saying I am or whatever?

**Jeff Brandt** I think a good example is, is Garth Brooks actually. Because Garth Brooks, he released an album as Chris Gaines, he was trying to do his rock and roll persona. Because Garth, you know, he's a huge country artist. And I know that he accepts that category and embraces that. But he was like, but I can also do this because he was a big Kiss fan. Sure. Well, the general public didn't really like that. Yeah. And so the general public sees him as this guy and kind of tighter pants and a cowboy hat singing his, you know, typical country fair. To him as an artist, yeah, I think the categorization probably it probably stung a little bit that that was where he was stuck. But I think that with artists in general, they don't like to be pigeonholed. They like to think of themselves as making music. And for example, if you take David Bowie, he's a great person to look into in terms of somebody that said, I'm going to make whatever kind of music I want to. I don't care what people think about it. I'm going to do this. And he just happened to have a following that accepted that.

**Justin Angle** Yeah, that's not something everybody can do, right? I mean, you have to be well, I mean, everybody can do it, but you might not be a professional musician if that's the case.

**Jeff Brandt** Like like Motley Crue can't do it. Yeah. They they can't say we're going to record a gospel album. That doesn't fly with Motley Crue fans. And similarly, James Brown probably wouldn't say, I'm going to record an orchestral album. There's going to be no hey, where vocals on it. It's just going to be the orchestra. And I'm going to focus on writing the cello lines. No. Yeah, that's that won't fly. So you have to respect that to some degree. So, I mean, I think that people don't like to be pigeonholed in that way just because they want to feel like they're free. But most artists, I would say that the general public has a pretty good idea of where they fit and that's what they need to do if they're going to keep bringing in the money.

**Justin Angle** Make sense. So back to 1971, what are some things, if anything, from that era that are hanging around that you'd like to see go away? We should move on from?

**Jeff Brandt** well, honestly. And, you know, I'm never afraid to speak my mind. I was never a big fan of singer songwriters. I just and this is just a personal thing. I, I felt like when James Taylor had the band going behind him, which ended up being most of the time, it was more interesting than when it was just him and the guitar. Like Leonard Cohen, is one that many people just they just really love. I love Leonard Cohen in the sense that I think it's great music to relax to. Maybe if you even want to take a nap and I don't have a problem with saying it because I respect his writing.

**Justin Angle** I like naps.

**Jeff Brandt** I respect. But I like naps, too, you know, and I don't think there's anything wrong with saying that. That's something that I don't enjoy. But I know that somebody is always going to say, well, how can you not appreciate that? Well, I'm a drummer.

**Justin Angle** Right.

**Jeff Brandt** I mean, I play drums, so I generally gravitate towards music that includes the drums and solo guitar. And voice is not one that I have been particularly fond of in general. That's one thing. Another thing I think is the like the the early 70s fashion. I never liked the bellbottoms that much. I thought they were, you know, I'm not going to come up with the right description for it, but I'll say that it seemed like they were trying too hard.

**Justin Angle** Yeah.

**Jeff Brandt** Like, look how wide my pants are, you know, like look at them. Love my wide pants. I'm like, I don't love your wide pants. They look uncomfortable, you know.

**Justin Angle** I'm gonna trip over them.

**Jeff Brandt** Right. I mean, that's one of those things, but. I think for me, you know, whereas it's nostalgic for me to listen to Carole King, I think that I don't appreciate it as much as, say, like with Marvin Gaye, where there's the whole, you know, kit and caboodle, the whole band going behind. I mean, the whole really the whole arrangement at Motown that they added in.

**Justin Angle** Well, Jeff, this has been fantastic, kind of picking your brain on all things '71 and beyond the synthesizer, the singer songwriter, The Bell Bottoms. Thanks for coming in, taking time away from your busy teaching of The History of Rock and Roll and what. Yeah, what's next for you?

**Jeff Brandt** Next for me is to continue chasing that carrot for me. That's next. Yeah. And thanks so much for having me on. I really enjoyed it.

**Justin Angle** Awesome. Thanks, Jeff.

Thanks for listening to A New Angle. We really appreciate it. And we're coming to you from Studio 49, a generous gift from University of Montana alums Michelle and Loren Hansen. A New Angle is presented by First Security Bank, Blackfoot Communications and the University of Montana College of Business with additional support from Consolidated Electrical Distributors, Drum Coffee and Montana Public Radio.

Aj Williams is our producer, VTO, jeff Amett and John Wicks made our music, editing by Nick Mott, and Jeff Meese is our master of all things sound. Thanks a lot. See you next time.