



‘Willkommen zum Saengerfest’

The 2022 Texas Capitol ornament honors the musical traditions of Austin’s early settlers.

WRITTEN BY WILL KORN

“Willkommen zum Saengerfest” is the German phrase for “Welcome to Songfest.” In April 1889, this inscription was prominent on a temporary illuminated arch, decorated with evergreen garland, that stretched across Congress Avenue and welcomed travelers and locals alike to one of Austin’s first music festivals.

Ten years prior, German settlers in Austin formed an official singing association named “Austin Saengerrunde.” In 1889, singers arrived in Austin to attend a songfest featuring German-Texan choirs. Events like these, which also celebrated German culture, were documented in the *Austin Weekly Statesman*, including an April 25, 1889, article that featured a week of festivities that included a “Grand Torchlight Procession” under the temporary illuminated arch. The tradition of celebrating music is still alive and well in Austin—some even call the city the “Live Music Capital of the World.”

While there was a large German population in the Austin area and the Hill Country, Texas was settled by many people of

diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, including Europeans from Poland, Sweden, England, Ireland, and France. Upon arrival in the 1830s and 1840s, they met Tejanos, Anglo-Americans, and others who had moved to the area. They all brought with them their cultural traditions. The 2022 capitol ornament pays homage to Austin’s rich musical traditions, featuring the pearl-colored center Saengerfest arch with dark evergreen garlands.

The ornament program was established in 1996 by the late Nelda Laney, wife of then-Speaker of the House Pete Laney. The program has raised over \$21 million, making it the largest state ornament program in the country. All proceeds from ornament sales go toward the preservation and maintenance of the Texas Capitol, Capitol Extension, the 1857 General Land Office Building, other designated buildings, and their contents and grounds. Funds also go toward preserving the Texas Governor’s Mansion and to operating costs for the Bullock Texas State History Museum and the Texas State Cemetery. For more information and to purchase an ornament, go to texascapitolgiftshop.com.