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Review of *Pat Green's Dance Halls & Dreamers* , By Luke Gilliam

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Pat Green's Dance Halls & Dreamers. Stories by Luke Gilliam. Photographs by Guy Rogers III. Introduction by Pat Green. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008. 183 pp. Photographs. \$39.99.

Texas Dance Halls: A Two-Step Circuit. By Gail Folkins. Photographs by J. Marcus Weekley. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007. xvii + 193 pp. Photographs, sources, index. \$34.95.

In Texas, music and dancing are inseparable. Whether country, blues, Tejano, or zydeco, most Texas music is crafted specifically for active audience participation. Dance halls have been the cornerstones of many Texas communities; thus it is not surprising that two recent books, *Pat Green's Dance Halls & Dreamers* and *Texas Dance Halls: A Two-Step Circuit*, examine these cultural institutions. Both works investigate how personal and community histories unfold across the dance floor and celebrate the individual owners, musicians, and patrons who distinctly mark each hall.

As the title suggests, country musician Pat Green conceptualized *Pat Green's Dance Halls & Dreamers*, but the work is a collaborative project. Guy Rogers's beautiful color images capture the look of the halls themselves and the personalities of the people associated with them. Luke Gilliam provides a brief history of each site, introduces us to its present-day owners, and depicts each venue's feel as a different country music legend performs there; such pairings include Cory Morrow at Luckenbach Dancehall, Robert Earl Keen at John T. Floore's Country Store, and Willie Nelson at Billy Bob's Texas. The behind-the-scenes information Gilliam provides on each venue is fascinating

and should offer something new even to those well acquainted with Texas dance hall culture.

Despite these engaging profiles, those interested in scholarly approaches to dance hall architecture, history, and culture will be disappointed by what Gilliam himself acknowledges as a "loose definition of dance hall." Most of the ten featured venues, such as those in Gruene, Schroeder, and Coupland, are historic halls with family-friendly atmospheres that fit anyone's definition of the term. Yet other choices may raise some eyebrows. Opened in Fort Worth in 1981 and offering thirty-two bars, a capacity of 6,028 patrons, a live bull-riding arena, a casino, an arcade, and conference facilities, Billy Bob's is more country music culture theme park than dance hall. An even more surprising inclusion is Austin's Stubb's Barbecue. While the site has hosted country music performers Loretta Lynn, Merle Haggard, and Willie Nelson, it much more often showcases performers along the lines of Sonic Youth, Eminem, and Snoop Dogg. Stubb's features most of its music in its outdoor arena, where almost no dancing—at least not the couple dancing that defines Texas dance halls—takes place. Though clearly Pat Green enjoys Stubb's as a venue, this in itself does not a dance hall make, and the equation of Stubb's and Billy Bob's with traditional dance halls obscures the very cultural traditions that make dance halls so valuable.

Folkins's *Texas Dance Halls* examines nineteen traditional Texas dance halls in a series of creative nonfiction essays. Like Gilliam, Folkins is at her best providing historical and ethnographic details about these institutions. We learn of the Austin Saengerrunde, the singing club founded by German immigrants in 1879 that has continuously operated Saengerrunde Hall since its creation, and of the soaking of the wooden supports for Club 21 in Plum Creek so they could be bent into arches. Equally interesting are the varied stories of how proprietors have managed to make the dance hall business work in the twenty-first century. J. Marcus Weekley's black-and-white photographs highlight architectural details and

give the buildings and their patrons a timeless feel. *Texas Dance Halls* also suggests Texas's multiple dance cultures in profiles of the Tejano group Little Joe y la Familia at Indian Springs Park and of an African American Juneteenth celebration at Wright's Park dance hall. Unfortunately, though, Indian Springs Park is not a dance hall, and the move to profile it is confusing. A description of a Tejano dance hall, such as Benito Juarez Hall in Karnes City or La Terraza Hall in Corpus Christi, would be much more relevant.

One factor both works tend to overlook is the diversity of music that is hosted *within* individual halls, likely because both projects are strongly affiliated with a particular band. *Dance Halls & Dreamers* obviously highlights performances of Pat Green and musicians like him. *Texas Dance Halls* focuses predominantly on performances of TC Taylor and 13 Days. A more rich and complicated understanding of Texas culture could be obtained through observations of the different audiences that make use of these sites. For example, Gruene Hall, a

site profiled by both books, hosts music including gospel, Americana, folk, country blues, and western swing. Both works fail to attend to this diversity within country music culture that dramatically affects the demographics and overall experience of any particular dance hall event.

Overall, the success of *Dance Halls & Dreamers* and *Texas Dance Halls* lies in bringing individual stories to light, and the photography and narratives of both works will engage both insiders and outsiders of Texas dance hall culture. Their authors evoke boots quietly shuffling across wooden dance floors; smells of parking lot dust, wooden rafters, and beer; and most of all the experience of all of a community's generations, from schoolchildren to octogenarians, enjoying themselves in one place. In doing so, they leave their readers with a powerful sense of why dance halls matter to Texas culture.

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