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Review of *Dance All Night: Those Other Southwestern Swing Bands, Past and Present* by Jean A. Boyd

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The patrons of Saturday-night Texas dance halls still two-step to the music of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, more than thirty-five years after
Wills’s death. Jean Boyd is one of the Texas music authors who has mythologized Wills in her previous “We’re the Light Crust Doughboys from Burrus Mills: An Oral History (2003) and The Jazz of the Southwest: An Oral History of Western Swing (1998). In her newest book, Dance All Night: Those Other Southwestern Swing Bands, Past and Present, Boyd puts the spotlight on less well known practitioners of the music that Wills pioneered along with his Light Crust Doughboys’ partner Milton Brown in the early 1930s. But such performers will forever remain in the shadow of Wills. The book’s title borrows a line from one of Wills’s most famous songs, “Stay All Night, Stay a Little Longer.” Indeed, such is Wills’s stature that a section of this book focuses on the various incarnations of the Texas Playboys that have continued to perform after his death in 1975.

Boyd writes that western swing transcended the popularity of Wills and his West Coast counterpart, Spade Cooley: “Western swing bands dominated local airways and dancehalls in every town and rural setting throughout the Southwest in the 1930s. . . . The purpose of this book is to discuss the other western swing bands, the ones that did not garner national fame, but were local sensations to thousands of Southwesterners looking for entertainment and good dancing during the years of the Great Depression and World War II.”

This is an engagingly written, carefully researched book that tells the story in episodic fashion of such accomplished but lesser-known bands as Bill Boyd’s Cowboy Ramblers and Hank Thompson and the Brazos Valley Boys. These bands, while not as influential as the Doughboys, the Playboys, or Milton Brown’s Musical Brownies, are well worth the respectful chronicling they receive here. Dance All Night is very much a musician’s book, even including a generous section of musical analysis and notations. Handsomely designed and hefty, it offers a generous section of choice photographs capturing the spirit of a musical genre that enjoyed its peak of popularity in the 1930s and 1940s, but remains vibrant today.

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