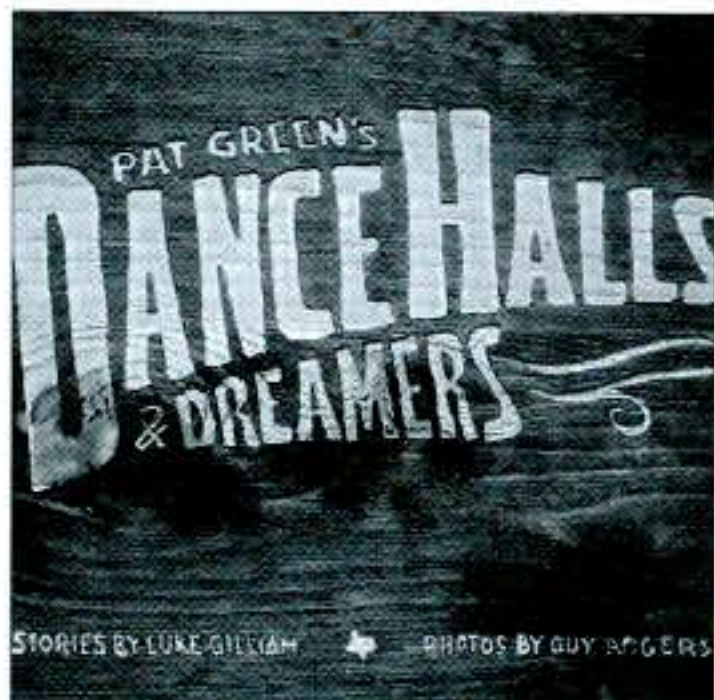


Books & DVDs



PAT GREEN'S DANCE HALLS & DREAMERS

stories by Luke Gilliam,
photos by Guy Rogers III
University of Texas Press (2008);
ISBN 978-0-292-71876-0; 184 pp; \$39.99

"It's history co-mingling with a few cold beers and good music. That's a pretty good way to do things." Texas singer/songwriter Pat Green sums up in a sentence what this book, and in some ways, Texas dance halls, is about. Part community center, part ol' boys club, part music venue, part hang out, part back porch, and part one or two or three too many beers now and then bar, Texas dance halls are unique places to spend an evening — or a lifetime, as some of the owners, and workers, and a not a few of the fans and musicians who speak in this book show. These are places where music may be both background and anthem, depending on the night and the moment. It isn't a comprehensive look at the halls, the nights, or the moments, though if you've never been to one you'll surely get a taste and sound and smell of what some are like, from the venerable Gruene Hall to the flashy Billy Bob's to the laid-back and eclectic Stubb's. It's about dance-hall atmosphere, not about music, though many musicians are interviewed.

Joining Green in the list of dance-hall heroes (they are all heroes — it would have been interesting if they could have been there on a night when Rosie Flores or Tish Hinojosa or Elana James was holding the stage) who speak are Willie Nelson, Robert Earl Keen, Cory Morrow, Ray Hubbard, and Jack Ingram, among others. Writer Luke Gilliam and photographer Guy Rogers III spent a day each at about a dozen mostly central Texas hill country halls to create the book, and Green, who has played all of them, lets them backstage at Gruene Hall and adds comments on the others.

There are times Gilliam tries too hard to add the atmosphere that the photographs show well enough, but then, this is three men's slice-of-life view of what these places are like. There are times when crude language steals the spotlight from the story, and times when things get a little tedious. But most of the time, the photographs, the sidebars, and the narrative work to give a picture of what these halls were like on these particular nights, and what some of the nights and some of the sights and sounds of Texas dance halls are like every night. If you've spent time in a few, you might wonder why they left out your favorite place, or your favorite performer, but you'll enjoy the trip. If you haven't yet been to a Texas dance hall in full swing, this will very likely make you want to check out the experience for yourself.

— Kerry Dexter (Tallahassee, FL)

MILLION DOLLAR LES PAUL: IN SEARCH OF THE MOST VALUABLE GUITAR IN THE WORLD

by Tony Bacon
Jawbone Books; \$19.95

About 1,500 Les Paul Standards, a solid-body electric guitar with two pickups and a three-color sunburst maple top, were made between 1958 and 1960, and they were priced at \$280, a hefty sum back in those days. They were poor sellers, and the model was soon discontinued by Gibson. The irony was that a few Les Paul Standards made their way to England and down south in the USA, where they were picked up by such guitar heroes as Jimmy Page, Keith Richards, Billy Gibbons, Duane Allman, Jeff Beck, and Eric Clapton in the mid-1960s and transformed into the ultimate blues-rock guitar. Soon everybody wanted a "burst," and the guitar has moved into "legend" mode rather quickly, commanding prices nowadays that would buy you a nice

condo in Hawaii or an Italian sports car. Tony Bacon, a leading authority on guitars and guitar players, details why this guitar, probably more than just about any other electric guitar, continues to hold its value as a one of rock and roll's most sought-after instruments on the market.

— T.J. McGrath (Woodbridge, CT)

BILL MONROE: FATHER OF BLUEGRASS MUSIC

MVD Visual MVDV4577 (2008), DVD

Fusing the fiddle tunes and Scottish-Irish ballads that he learned from his mother, Malissa, and his uncle, Pen Vandiver, with the blues that he learned from black guitarist Arnold Schultz, Kentucky-born mandolinist Bill Monroe (1911-1996) laid the still-resonating foundations of bluegrass. *Father of Bluegrass Music*, co-produced by music journalist Larry Nager and film director Steve Gebhardt and originally released in 1993, tells Monroe's story. It includes vintage photos and performance clips, mostly filmed in the 1990s, and tributes by Emmylou Harris, Ricky Skaggs, Marty Stuart, Jerry Garcia, and ex-Bluegrass Boys Mac Wiseman, Del McCoury, Kenny Baker, Bill Keith, Chubby Wise, and Peter Rowan. A front-porch interview with Monroe, conducted by John Hartford, provides new insights into the genesis of bluegrass. Musical segments feature Monroe duetting with Dolly Parton on "Muleskinner Blues," Paul McCartney interpreting "Blue Moon of Kentucky," and Monroe's reunion with McCoury, Keith, and Wise. Bonus footage includes Monroe at home, recalling his first night at the Grand Ole Opry and picking out a tune, "Never Leave the E String," and full-song versions of "John Henry" and "Workin' on a Building," featuring longtime Bluegrass Boy, Clarence "Tater" Tate on fiddle.

— Craig Harris (Chicopee, MA)

HONEYDRIPPER

Screen Media (2008), DVD

Premiered at the 2007 Toronto International film festival and already shown in 150 theaters throughout the United States, John Sayles' latest movie, *Honeydripper*, tells the fictional story of blues' evolution into rock 'n' roll. Danny Glover plays an ex-blues pianist, Tyrone "Pine Top" Purvis, who owns a

struggling blues club in Harmony, Alabama, in 1950. Losing customers to a "modern" club up the street, he comes up with a plan. Booking an appearance by radio star Guitar Sam, he lures the biggest crowd that the Honeydripper Lounge has even seen. When Guitar Sam fails to show, an itinerant electric blues guitarist, portrayed by Gary Clark Jr., is hired to impersonate him; the result has the makings of mythology. Charles S. Dutton is Purvis' friend, and Lisa Gay Hamilton is Purvis' Bible-toting wife. Keb' Mo' appears as a mysterious street singer. Seventy-seven-year old Dr. Mable John plays an over-the-hill blues singer, Bertha Mae, a role originally intended for the late Ruth Brown. Mason Daring's soundtrack captures the essence of turn-of-the-50s blues and adds to this fictitious snapshot of cultural history.

— Craig Harris (Chicopee, MA)

SO YOU WANT TO BE A ROCK AND ROLL STAR: THE BYRDS

DAY-BY-DAY, 1965-1973
by Christopher Hjort
Jawbone Press; \$29.95

Beginning with the group taking flight up to the top of the *Billboard* charts with Bob Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man" in 1965, to their implosion after the death of guitarist Clarence White on July 15, 1973, the Byrds were one of the most influential rock bands of the era. With Roger McGuinn's jangling 12-string guitar, Gene Clark's melancholy pop songs, David Crosby's brilliant harmonies, Chris Hillman's inventive bass lines, and Michael Clarke's rock steady drumming, they can be credited for creating the first stirrings of folk-rock ("Turn Turn Turn"), psychedelic-rock ("Eight Miles High"), space-rock ("Mr. Spaceman"), and country-rock ("Hickory Wind"). This handy reference book will certainly be cherished by all fans of the group, as it lists important day-by-day events of the Byrds, including television and radio appearances, recording session dates, and album retrospectives. A complete (!) concert location index from 1965-1973 lists every one of their shows around the world.

— T.J. McGrath (Woodbridge, CT)

