Gail Folkins and J. Marcus Weekley have produced a delightful chronicle of their travels through a series of popular Texas dance halls. For Folkins, an English professor, her account of Texas Dance Halls: A Two-Step Circuit has been a personal adventure. Her husband is a bass player in a country band, and having spent considerable time in these singular venues, she describes herself as “a dance hall wife.” (p. xiii.) Her academic credentials, coupled with her “family fieldwork,” have served her well in this multi-dimensional analysis of Texas’s historic halls.

In eighteen essays that highlight twenty dance halls, the author describes these institutions as “community and cultural centers” that have “served as meeting places where fraternal organizations met to conduct business in support of local farmers, merchants, and other residents.” (p. xiv.) Folkins paints a picture of an Old World-New World conduit that has acted as an instrument of immigrant acculturation as well as “an important link in the transmission of ethnic culture from one generation to the next.” (p. xiv.) She touts the role that the dance hall plays in the careers of aspiring Texas bands, as well as their historical significance in the careers of many established Texas music icons.

These observations and insights come together to define Folkins’s concept of “place.” She then layers in the human element by focusing on the oral histories of the individuals “who keep dance hall culture strong—hall owners, musicians, patrons, and friends.” (p. xiii.) Her informants offer captivating tales of haunted halls. They relate family histories intertwined with a particular venue or community. They tell stories of bootleggers and local characters, or stories of the famous Chicken Ranch in La Grange, which operated with impunity as late as the mid-1970s. Folkins expands the personification of the venues with such biographical observations as her treatment of Alice Sulak, the owner of Sefcik Hall and fifty-year veteran saxophonist who regularly takes the Sefcik stage with her group, “The Melody Five.” In addition, Folkins successfully blends personal and public perspectives with such accounts as her discussion with Gary McKee of the Fayette County Historical Commission. As McKee points out, “Someone can celebrate an entire lifetime in a dance hall, from baptism, to birthday parties, to wedding and funeral receptions.” (p. 45.)

Folkins’s analysis of the synergistic blend of place and people is artfully reinforced by Weekley’s crisp monochromatic photography. He captures the detail and individual spirit of the halls, as well as the mood and movement of its patrons, proprietors, and players. A typical shot might feature a stationary backdrop, such as a stage or a wall decorated with antique signs, set against a crowd of swirling dancers, moving as blurred swaths of light, as they outpace the speed of the shutter. The resulting composition presents an image of modern movement contrasted with the staid visual anchor of the historic hall. This dynamic technique is reinforced by a variety of contextual shots—exteriors, detailed interiors, portraits, and performance photographs—to produce an overall visual component that truly enriches the accompanying text.

Despite such wonderful features, there are certain aspects of the book that some readers might find a bit tedious. Folkins writes with a sharp eye for detail, but perhaps too much detail at times. Is it necessary, for example, to introduce new characters with (seemingly) compulsory descriptions of their attire? A steady stream of fashion-based terms—lace-trimmed blouse, hot pants, summer top, tall boots, cobalt-blue suit, handkerchief hem, periwinkle hospital scrubs—runs throughout the text. On another note, there might have been more research undertaken on certain points of musicology. For example, linking the introduction of the accordion into the Lone Star State solely to German and Czech immigrants to Texas overlooks the parallel migration of the instrument from Central Mexico north through Monterrey into the Rio Grande Valley.

These minor critical comments, though, pale in comparison to the larger value of this well-crafted book. Folkins and Weekley highlight several important elements of Texas dance hall culture—gender, race, and ethnicity—which have been largely overlooked in other ethnographies. Women play a significant role in this book by taking the lead in a number of “two-step” stories, including Terrie Chase, owner of Saengerhalle, the mother-daughter team of Marian and Glynis Tietjen who manage the Swiss Alps Dance Hall, such world-class musicians as Cindy Cashdollar, featured in an essay on Gruene Hall, and such dynamic personalities as the sax-playing grandmother, Alice Sulak, who runs Sefcik Hall.
Folkins goes on to explain the ubiquity of the African-American cowboy in Texas cultural history by describing an event at Wright's Park, a dance hall outside of Schulenburg. "This group [of African American riders] looks as if they've just stepped off the Texas range in the early nineteenth century, when according to historians half the cowboys were African American or Hispanic American." (p. 155.) Although the cowboy's heyday is more accurately placed in the post-Civil War period, when the Texas cattle drives moved north to the railheads beyond the Red River, Folkins brings to light an important and frequently overlooked aspect of Texas "frontier" history. Cowboys and trail drivers of the period usually did not resemble Clint Eastwood, Eric Fleming, and the television cast of Rawhide; they were generally a much darker hue. The author and photographer bring the significance of the historical African American into twenty-first century dance hall culture with their treatment of the Juneteenth celebration at Wright's Park. Finally, in the chapter, "Dancing in the Park with Little Joe y la Familia," they highlight the seminal influence of Hispanic culture in the "Two-Step Circuit" and in Texas music history.

Folkins's scholastic approach in this well-researched, well-written offering, coupled with Weekley's creative photographic interpretations, make for an excellent book and a lasting contribution to Texas cultural history. *Texas Dance Halls: A Two-Step Circuit* is part of the Voice of the American West series from Texas Tech University. If this book is any indication of the quality of others in the series, I look forward to reading more of their fine publications.

In *Pat Green's Dance Halls & Dreamers*, Luke Gilliam and Guy Rogers III make another valuable contribution to what might be described as the twenty-first-century romantic renaissance of the Texas dance hall. In a treatment of ten venues, journalist Gilliam guides the reader through the performance world of a new generation of singer-songwriters—Jack Ingram, Kevin Fowler, Cory Morrow, Randy Rogers, Pat Green, Cross Canadian Ragweed, and Wade Bowen—while highlighting the ageless contributions of Willie Nelson, the power and depth of Ray Wylie Hubbard's solo show, and the honky-tonk spark and spirit of Robert Earl Keen.

Although Gilliam touches on the social utility of the halls, he focuses mainly on the contemporary scene from the artist's perspective and includes insights from the colorful characters that own, manage, and work in these halls. The author enhances the stories with sidebars in the various chapters, including Hondo Crouch's role as "Imagineer" and impresario in Luckenbach, or the relationship between barbeque, blues, and boogie, as represented by C.B. Stubblefield and Stubb's BBQ in Austin. Gilliam then sprinkles in pithy quotes throughout the text from the musicians who tell their personal dance hall and performance stories. In the introduction, singer-songwriter Pat Green recounts long-standing reverence for these special settings and describes his transition from audience member to dance hall star. Beyond the introduction, Green contributes brief anecdotes to all ten chapters sharing his impressions of each particular hall.

Gilliam's narrative flows well, with animated details depicting the full-throttle party ethos of a younger generation of fans
supporting a new breed of artists. Highlighting such shows as Randy Rogers at Schroeder Hall, Kevin Fowler at Coupland Inn, or Pat Green almost anywhere, it seems that the weekend frat party has moved from the campus to the rural dance hall complete with an endless supply of adult beverages and a supercharged Texas attitude. Indeed, after an evening reading the book, between the weekend shows and Pat Green’s “liquid-fueled” personal experiences in the various halls, I woke up the next morning feeling as if I had a slight hangover!

The promotional information on the book’s dust jacket promises “An unprecedented day-in-the-life look at the people who make the Texas music scene flourish,” as well as the significance of the “Dance hall owners, bartenders, bouncers, and fans, who co-mingle at these halls.” In this regard, the book certainly delivers. Gilliam’s treatment of the musicians is balanced and greatly enriched by a solid oral history-interview catalogue. Of particular interest, however, are the biographical sketches of the aforementioned

dance hall owners, bartenders, bouncers, and fans.” As mentioned, some of the sketches, including Hondo Crouch and C.B. Stubblefield, appear in the sidebars, but the bulk of the biographical information flows through the text. For example, Gilliam provides accounts of such colorful characters as Larry Kelso, the larger than life “one-man circus” and owner of the Coupland Inn; “Grandmamma” Jo Nicodemus, the manager of The Sons of Hermann Hall, whose selfless dedication to live music has won her the affection of countless musicians; or Robert Gallagher, Billy Bob’s tenured entertainment director with an encyclopedic knowledge of the Texas music scene, are valuable contributions to the documentation of the twenty-first-century dance hall renaissance.

The photography of Guy Rogers III is more than simply a classy supplement to the book’s attractive layout; it is the aesthetic binder that pulls together the book’s many fascinating stories. Not only does Rogers do a first-rate job with the “physics” of photography in his shooting technique, but his composition and subject choices clearly illustrate his talent as a photojournalist. His craftsmanship draws the viewer into the fabric and feel of the scene by capturing the excitement and revelry while still maintaining the distinct personality of the various venues. Rogers creates an inclusive photo journal by incorporating detailed shots, such as Ray Wylie Hubbard’s eagle-claw fingernails coaxing guitar strings into action, and images that collectively depict the vast expanse of Billy Bob’s Texas, the “World’s Largest Honky Tonk.” Any reader who spends some time with this book will feel right at home visiting these dance halls and honky tons.

Both of these books explore important aspects of Texas dance hall culture. Folkins delves into the larger questions of historical significance and the efficacy of the dance hall as a pragmatic social institution in Texas communities. Gilliam places the hall and honky tonk in the contemporary entertainment arena with a special focus on the musical ‘orch’ passing to a new generation. Dance Halls and Dreamers and Dance Halls: A Two-Step Circuit play a vital role in documenting the history of the dance hall tradition in Texas, while also celebrating the dynamic twenty-first-century dance hall renaissance, which promises to keep the dance hall tradition alive and flourishing for generations to come.

Craig Hillis