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JASON BOLAND AND THE STRAGGLERS

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This summer, the Gruene Historic District celebrates 35 years since the rebirth of this once-sleepy cotton town.

Set along the banks of the Guadalupe River on the old stagecoach road between San Antonio and Austin, Gruene, Texas, began revitalization in 1975 when entrepreneur Pat Molak purchased Gruene Hall, the state's oldest continually operating dance hall and the adjoining grist mill. Beer has been served at Gruene Hall since 1878, but the mill had been dormant since boll weevils killed the cotton during the Depression.

Known for focusing on singer-songwriters and artists who play original material, Gruene Hall has helped to launch the careers of music greats such as George Strait and Lyle Lovett. During the past 35 years, hundreds of musicians have graced the Gruene Hall stage, exemplifying the diversity of talent and musical styles featured. They include Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Garth Brooks, Little Richard, Chris Isaak, Jack Ingram, the Dixie Chicks, Hootie and the Blowfish and Taj Mahal.

The Historic District now encompasses the Gristmill River Restaurant & Bar and more than 30 businesses. Today, Gruene, Texas is one of the state's most popular tourist destinations.



at one of knbt's americana jams i was playing, cody canada was sitting in with my band and was trading guitar licks with my son lucas on snake farm. it seems my wife judy had gotten a belly dancer friend to show up with some kind of funky snake and she proceeds to shimmy out on stage with the thing. cody and i were not thrilled by this act of old school show business upstaging. lucas didn't seem to care one way or the other. i'm glad i wasn't singing wasp nest off my latest cd, a.enlightenment, b. endarkenment: hint: there is no c (sneaky plug, huh?)

- Ray Wylie Hubbard

Playing Greune Hall was like becoming a part of music history. The Texas air, the hum of the ceiling fans, and the character of the building itself, give both the patrons and musicians on stage, an unmatched energy. It was an honor, and I'm filled with a deeper sense of pride in what I do, for having the experience.

-Jeff Allen



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I was booked on what must have been one of the hottest days of the summer. It was Sunday and I was performing with Jim Volk. We were playing one of those marathon gigs from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM. When it came time for a break, we set down our instruments and looked at one another and simultaneously said, "River!" We booked it down to the river, and jumped in fully clothed shoes and all. We squished back up the hill and to the Hall, while shaking the water off ourselves like a couple of mutts. We smiled, tuned up, and continued our day's work. Those in the audience thought we were soaked due to sweat. A few even made comments. We did not correct them. We just looked at those tourists with puppy dog eyes, let them feel sorry for us and fill our tip jar with sympathy cash.

- Terri Hendrix



I have not played there, but Kacey has and I can tell you it is one fun experience. You burn up in the summer and freeze in the winter when the wind blows up between the cracks in the floor. I go back every chance I get, as there seems to be something magical about the place. The great music from the past and present gives it a super spirit.

- Barbara Musgraves (Proud grandmother of singer-songwriter Kacey Musgraves)

We have been playing Gruene Hall on Wednesdays for a total of eight of the last 14 months and a few other dates dropped in just for good measure. I can honestly say that we have never had a BAD night there. The place is amazing. The staff is amazing, and the crowd is always there to see the music. My mom has a picture of my brother and me when we were about three years old sitting on the bar. In the background, playing around the wood stove is Towns Van Zandt and a few other Texas greats. We used to play fiddle there on occasion when we were growing up, too. So to be able to play regularly in a place that was such a big part of my musical upbringing is a very, very cool thing. I know it sounds cliché, but that place is the center of Texas music and it is always an honor to be able to play there.

- Tyson Carver, Texas Renegade Band

It took me over two years to secure my first booking at Gruene Hall, so you can only imagine my excitement when I first got an e-mail, from Tracie, saying they had an opening and were looking for some "Japanese Classic Music" (per my MySpace).

Gruene Hall is a legendary venue, so popular in fact, that I saw an elementary school teacher, from Florida, when I last played there. Her daughter and I had been in the same 5th grade class and were two of the strongest kickball players! The family are Texans, and they were visiting. Of course, they had to stop by this legendary venue. You can only imagine when we made eye contact in such an unexpected shared environment. They stayed the whole night, with a group of 20 family members, and sang and danced the whole time. I LOVE Gruene Hall.

- Jeremy Steding

The band played Gruene Hall for the first time last November, opening for Roger Creager. It is always fun playing with the Creager guys because the crowd is electric and it fuels the evening. As we walked on stage, I could not help but think of all the history: the bands, the artists, and the fans who have gathered there throughout the years. It was hard to not be emotional when our drummer Spencer Booth kicked off the first tune. The people who support Texas Country Music are absolutely the best on earth, and that night was no exception. They get it, and we love it when they do! Thanks, Gruene Hall, for being the sanctuary that you are for those of us who love Texas music.

- Scott McMahon of the Kyle Hutton Band



The first time I ever played Gruene Hall, I opened for Kevin Fowler for \$150 bucks!

- Aaron Watson



NOT ONLY DO DANCE HALLS HAVE TO HAVE THAT UNMISTAKABLE FEEL WITH HARDWOOD FLOORS AND CERTAIN THINGS THAT GO CREAK AND BOOM IN THE NIGHT, BUT THEY ALSO HAVE THE HISTORY TO GO ALONG WITH IT. YOU CAN WALK AROUND AND LOOK AT THE PICTURES ON THE WALL IN THAT PLACE AND KNOW IT'S SOMETHING SPECIAL. I LOOK AT THE FLOOR AT GRUENE HALL AND IT HAS BEEN DANCED ON SO MUCH. THERE ARE RUTS IN IT WHERE BOOTS HAVE SCOOTED OVER THE FLOOR. THERE ARE INDENTATIONS BY THE NAILS.

PAT GREEN, FROM THE BOOK, DANCE HALLS AND DREAMERS.

Photos by: Hunter Artz, Ann McClendon, Dirck Halstead, R. Fletcher, Brooke Thompson