

Getting carried away in Dallas

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One of my favorite Texas stories could only have happened at the Sons of Hermann Hall. I was back in Dallas, visiting from San Francisco or college; I don't remember which. But I'd gone to see BR549 at the Sons of Hermann Hall, with my mother. We were talking when an older drunk guy approached and asked me to dance. I declined. He asked again. I declined again. He put his arm around me and began to get a little familiar. I began to get wrathful. (Bear in mind, all this is happening right in front of my mother.) Before I could unleash the fullness of my fury, two middle-aged, lanky, be-Wranglered patrons asked if he was bothering me, took one look at my face, and then carried him from the bar. Carried him. Out. Down two flights of stairs. And did it so efficiently that no one else even noticed. The Wrangler gentlemen returned, apologized for the man's behavior and for the shame he brought on the great state of Texas.

I have a lot of stories about the Sons of Hermann Hall, a dance hall and independent music venue built in 1910. Some involve the Christmas artisan show it hosts every year, where I've purchased gorgeous pottery and jewelry; some involve the fabulous bands who perform there (I saw the very strange Trachtenberg Family Slideshow Players most recently); and most involve the downstairs bar, the long, old-fashioned wooden bar, where honest to goodness one night I stuck my hand out and someone slid me a beer from the other end.

The bar itself looks like a dance hall bar. It's got crummy linoleum floors, a pool table, shuffleboard, some creaky tables and chairs, fabulous tall bar stools and a jukebox so full of Hank and Patsy and Lefty that you just want to cry. And the staff is something else. For example, a bunch of my friends came to visit me over July Fourth (I sojourned in Dallas this summer). After a decadent, glutinous feast, everyone was keen to go dancing. We called up the Sons of Hermann, who informed us that there was no show because the main room was being remodeled, but that we could come down, play the jukebox and dance in the bar. What we didn't know till we (and by "we" I mean my friends, my brother, his friends, my aunts, my uncles, my mother, my stepfather and some other folks) got there was that the whole place was supposed to be closed and we were the only customers that night. As a matter of fact, we were turned away before one bartender announced that the bar wasn't closed until he said it was closed. And he'd keep the place open just for us.

Know why else I love the Sons of Hermann Hall? 'Cause you can rent their remodeled "bowling alley" room -- which is not a real bowling alley, it just resembles one -- for parties.

Just in case you were wondering, the Sons of Hermann named themselves for Hermann the Cherusker, a German captured by the Romans who went on to become a Roman military leader, then revolted and helped the Germans fight Rome (Russell Crowe could play him in a movie). The Sons' unironic motto: Friendship, Love, Loyalty.

As best I can tell, the Sons of Hermann are kind of like the Elks. They have Grand Lodges and orders and such (though the Texas Sons of Hermann seceded from the national organization in 1921). You can buy life insurance from them. And who wouldn't want to go to a dance hall where you and your mom can buy life insurance, see indie-rock bands and play shuffleboard all at the same time?

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Sons of Hermann Hall. 3414 Elm St., Dallas, (214) 747-4422, 5 p.m. to midnight  
Wednes-day-Friday; 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. Saturday; closed Sunday-Tuesday (hours vary, so call ahead)