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ALL ROADS LEAD TO FORT WORTH

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Green'er on the Fort Worth Side

Pat Green doesn't wear cowboy hats. They're not his thing. On stage, he might don a baseball cap or let those waves of blond run amok. But when it comes to Stetsons and big belt buckles, forget it.

story by DANIEL C. BARTEL
photos by JIMMY BRUCHI

It's not really about the look anyway. It's about getting the Texas music sound into the hearts of fans outside of Texas, those who might cheer the music but jeer the cowboy image, he said.

"The day I go bald is the day I might consider wearing a hat," Green said.

And yet this Texas native has again found a new place to hang it. A year has passed since Green settled into a deluxe celebrity pad he's still in the process of renovating near Texas Christian University in southwest Fort Worth.

For the San Antonio native, Fort Worth is another thumbtack on his map of previous Texas dwellings, including Waco, Lubbock and Austin.

"All my friends call me a Texas transient," he said.

For now, Fort Worth suits him well, he said. The city is near Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, a good springboard for hopping to and from national concert venues. Cowtown moves at an easy pace, too—busy without being bustling, cozy without being too sleepy and—like all residents will say—ideal for growing a family.

What's more, Fort Worth's youthful vibe gets him back to the spirit of the dancehall days, playing to college kids until the early morning, he said.

So it's safe to say he'll be in Fort Worth - for a while anyway.

"It's the biggest small town in America," he said. "I love the whole atmosphere."

AT HOME ON THE ROAD

One would be hard pressed to find many roadside vendors in Fort Worth shucking star maps to tourists. But that doesn't mean that celebs aren't around. Some singers, a few actors but mostly professional

athletes have chosen Fort Worth as a home, mainly to keep a low profile.

And Fort Worth likes to keep things quiet. Very quiet.

"Some celebrities have second or third homes here," said Nancy Lohman, a Realtor with Williams Trew Real Estate Services in Fort Worth. "It's not unusual for a baseball player to play in Minnesota but live here."

Green kindly refrained from giving too many details about the exact size and location of his new place, which is understandable given his fame. One can only stand so many doorbell rings from enthusiastic neighbors asking for sugar, barbecue sauce, autographs and backstage passes.

Knowing Green though, he's most likely been the one doing the door-to-door glad-handing, Lohman said.

Green can claim a numeric address in Fort Worth, but work this summer has kept him from it. In May, Green embarked on a three-month national tour, opening for country superstars Kenny Chesney and Gretchen Wilson. It proved to be a test of Green's endurance traveling on the road, in the air, playing to arena-sized crowds and racking up time away from his family.

"Sometimes I have to bring them along just so I remember what they look like," he said, jokingly.

THE SPEED OF SOUND

Green is a bit of a rooster on stage: cocky, upbeat, always looking to spark the crowd.

Now 33, Green retains his imp-

ish, fraternity boy good looks but has eased into life as the working, family man—no more weekends with guitars, bottles of Jack and road trips until dawn. The boy has grown up along with his music. His latest album, *Lucky Ones*, released in 2004, reveals a polished Pat Green, upbeat and rocking as usual, but just a touch more refined than before, as if the classroom cut-up will at least agree to tuck his shirttail in.

It certainly took love for family and future to pull him away from the fast-paced, party atmosphere of Austin, where for seven years he forged his name and sound.

The past year and a half has proved to be the era where Green has gone public with his music, playing to unfamiliar crowds at strange venues in places where critics continue to label him a “newcomer.”

All the same, Green said he’s happy being the new guy.

“I love it. It’s like I have a new career again,” he said.

The route to putting his music on the national map was a process that began by cultivating a Texas audience, which he proved he could do by playing to sellout crowds.

Taking the music to the next level required thinking a bit less like an artist and more like a strategic marketer. Dallas-Fort Worth gives Green the benefit of jetting around the country in “less time” than takes to fly in and out of Austin or Houston, Green said. Less travel time offers more time to play shows.

As a home base, Dallas-Fort Worth has both symbolic and practical applications, said Dr. Kevin Mooney, associate director at the University of Texas at Austin’s Center for American Music. Big business uses the Metroplex as a midway point for storing and shipping products around the country. Green can use DFW similarly as a launching point to create a national fan base, blazing a trail for other Texas musicians to follow, he said.

“No one wants to be identified as just another Austin band,” Mooney said. “The dispersion of these musi-

cians throughout the state reflects their desire to go national.”

But what Green and others will have to master, Mooney said, is the delicate balance of appealing to a wider audience without alienating the one already established.

MUSICAL ROOTS

For much of his career, Green has been among the fiery preachers touting the virtues of Texas music.

Green, along with music buddies Cory Morrow and Kevin Fowler, is a standard-bearer to a new wave of progressive country that started in 1970s and infuses blues, rock, soul and song-story style. Progressive country has always been a loose term, used more as a marketing label to hook audiences fed up with conservative Nashville, Mooney said.

Whatever you call it, Green said his music is still about living life and having fun. Critics have taken jabs at him for writing too many songs about beer, tacos and road trips. Truthfully, he said, how much different are they from songs by the elder country music statesmen—Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard—who sang about whiskey, prison, trains and mama.

“I grew up listening to those guys. I owe it to them to make it big,” Green said.

But Waylon, Willie and Merle were only the starting point. Green also cites Robert Earl Keen and Jerry Jeff Walker as seminal influences in his career.

Growing up in Waco, the eighth of nine children of divorced parents, Green found himself wrapped into a big family when his parents remarried. Green’s ears were constantly sipping a musical cocktail made by stepbrothers and sisters that mixed Waylon and Willie with splashes of The Beatles, The Doors, Louis Armstrong and even Broadway show tunes.

Green’s father, Craven, a school-teacher, had roles in local musical theater. So it stands to reason that Green doesn’t claim one single musical influence, or even two or three. He praises music in genres

such as reggae and hip-hop.

It wasn’t until his junior year at Texas Tech that Green began experimenting on the guitar with fellow troubadour, Cory Morrow. In those days, Green and Morrow didn’t have the money for studios or equipment, so they practiced at the apartment of another college buddy. Then something strange happened: people started showing up to listen.

“That was the genesis of it all,” Green said. “Things started to really click, only David was getting tired of his apartment getting trashed.”

From that point, Green was on to recording and playing fraternity parties, barns and hole-in-the-wall bars, places he says he’d gladly play at even now.

MOVING AHEAD

Green’s gritty, rollicking style of performance has bumped heads with the likes of his spit-and-polish Nashville contemporaries.

He bypassed the whole Nashville scene after signing with the New York-based Universal-Republic in 2001. Up to that point, he’d sold around 200,000 self-produced records without any major label support. This included Green’s live recording from the Live at Billy Bob’s series in 1999, which sold more than 70,000 copies, one of the highest of any artist in the series.

Three albums since the Universal signing have led to hundreds of thousand of albums sold, multiple Grammy nominations and sold-out shows at venues such as the old Houston Astrodome.

And yet Green is still not a household name. It doesn’t matter where the music is so much as where it’s going, he said.

“The worst thing I can think of is becoming stagnant. I want our music to go as far as it can,” he said. ■