

10 Great Places to Get Jazzed About Great Jazz

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Wynton Marsalis
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By Daniel Acker

Baker's Keyboard Lounge

Detroit

"I played here with Art Blakey on one of the first tours I ever went on," Marsalis says. Opened since 1934, the longest-running jazz club in the world has been a rite of passage for many jazz greats, including John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald and Charlie Parker. The low ceiling fills the place up with sound; you can hear every instrument distinctly. The only thing that beats the jazz is the Southern comfort food, ranging from collards and catfish to short ribs with mac and cheese. 313-345-6300; bakerskeyboardlounge.com

Yoshi's

Oakland

With its corner stage and tables fanning out on tiered levels, there isn't a bad seat in the house. "This place is a stalwart. It has been through ups and downs but remains the essence of the '60s jazz scene. Yoshi's has tremendous integrity. Their booking and presentation is right on," Marsalis says. There is sushi on the menu and live music every night of the week. 510-238-9200; yoshis.com

Snug Harbor Jazz Bistro

New Orleans

"My daddy (Ellis Marsalis) has been swingin' here for years. It's a good place for the younger musicians to play. They have good fried oyster sandwiches," Marsalis says. Young hopefuls, some of them toting saxophones and trumpets, come here to try out their chops. 504-949-0696; snugjazz.com

Green Mill Jazz Club

Chicago

"Al Capone had his own booth here," Marsalis says. The place still looks much as it did back in the days of Prohibition, when a trapdoor behind the bar was used to smuggle in alcohol. The gangsters are gone, but much of the art-nouveau interior, including the original banquettes, is intact. Serious jazz fans gather with the good-time crowd for the diverse music menu. 773-878-5552; greenmilljazz.com

El Chapultepec

Denver

"This is a true neighborhood jazz club. The beer is cheap, the burritos are great and the people are real hip," Marsalis says. The name and menu reflect the original clientele, Mexican migrants who came to work in the mines.

A dive bar, located in the older warehouse district, one block from Coors Field, it was always a jazz spot. Now that the skid-row neighborhood is being gentrified, limos are lined up outside. There's no cover, no dancing and no website, just a pay phone on the wall. 303-295-9126

Blues Alley

Washington, D.C.

"Tables surround the stage in this very elegant and intimate club," Marsalis says. An international crowd flocks to this staple of the D.C. scene, where you might spot a senator or Phillip Bailey of Earth, Wind & Fire fame dining with his family. The Creole cuisine, named for musicians, includes McCoy Tyner's Reddened Fish and Stanley Turrentine's Crab Cakes. 202-337-4141; bluesalley.com

Jazz at the Bistro

St. Louis

"The bookings are impeccable at this classy club; it's one of the best-managed places in the business," Marsalis says. There are no age restrictions, so everyone is welcome. Sit by the balcony rail upstairs and feel regal, as if you have your own box seat. Or, sit downstairs, a few rows from the stage, and feel like part of the music. It really draws you in. 314-531-1012; jazzstl.org

Dakota Jazz Club & Restaurant

Minneapolis

On all sides, from Canada and Wisconsin to the Dakotas and Iowa, people cross the state line to enjoy the A-list performances at this Midwestern jazz oasis. "The open room is inviting, and there's live jazz every night," Marsalis says. Quiet listeners favor the weekdays, while the party crowd prefers the weekends. 612-332-1010; dakotacooks.com

Tula's

Seattle

"This is a cool place, nice and small," Marsalis says. Comfortable as a living room, Tula's is owned by a retired Navy band leader dedicated to local talent. It fills an important niche in town, and the lamb souvlaki, prepared by the Iraqi cook, adds to the attraction. 206-443-4221; tulas.com

Elephant Room

Austin

"They have a nice college scene that brings a lot of energy to the room," Marsalis says. You'll find local beer from Live Oak Brewing Company but no food at this dependable basement jazz club. On the main drag just down from the Capitol building, the neighborhood has lots of great restaurants. 512-473-2279; elephantroom.com