

# New York jazz joints

You might be forgiven for thinking Birdland and the Blue Note are the only jazz clubs in New York, given the hold they seem to exercise on the imaginations of guidebook compilers. A New York-based jazz musician bangs a drum for a set of equally authentic venues.

**Sweet Rhythm (pictured)** Housed in the former Sweet Basil club, once one of New York's finest jazz venues, Sweet Rhythm gives a titular nod to its previous incarnation. Now the hippest-looking jazz club in the city, its eclectic booking policy covers everyone from established stars – drummer Billy Hart, saxophonist Sonny Fortune, vocalists Claudia Acuna and Andy Bey – to world music acts and young up-and-comers such as Gretchen Parlato, winner of this year's prestigious Thelonious Monk vocal competition. Jazz legends Kenny Barron, Branford Marsalis, Cassandra Wilson, Regina Carter and Ornette Coleman regularly hang out at the friendly bar. Minimum charge: US\$10; 88 Seventh Avenue South, NYC; tel: 212 255 3626; www.sweetrhythmny.com.

**Fat Cat Billiards** This relatively new club is managed by Mitch Borden, founder of Smalls, the best all-night jazz joint in New York until it closed a couple of years ago. Deep underground, tucked behind a pool hall, the club is something of a dive but attracts a young, hip crowd who like to be seen with the equally young and hip musicians who play there. Pianist Jason Lindner's Big Band perform on Thursday nights. The club occasionally gets in the big guys too, including Hank Jones, Frank Wess and Jimmy Cobb. Entrance fee: \$15, including one drink; 75 Christopher Street, NYC; tel: 212 675 6056; www.fatcatjazz.com.

**Jazz Gallery** This tiny, not-for-profit jazz performance/exhibition space in SoHo has no bar and a distinctly down-home appearance: chairs are lined up (like at a school

assembly) to face a stage area at the back of the room. But don't be fooled. The space has an imaginative booking policy, with performers ranging from the obscure and unknown to the young and hip (Avishai Cohen, John Benitez), to such jazz giants as Randy Weston, Ravi Coltrane (son of John), Jeff "Tain" Watts and Cecil Bridgewater; \$12-\$20; 290 Hudson Street, NYC; tel: 212 242 1063; www.jazzgallery.org.

**Smoke** One of the few jazz clubs uptown, this intimate space has an excellent bar, plush carpeting, cosy gothic couch seating, red-brick walls and candle-lit mahogany cocktail tables under antique chandeliers. Get there early (or turn up for the last set) or be prepared to stand for most of the night. However, if you want to get up close and personal (it seats only 70) with the likes of Victor Lewis, Eddie Henderson and George Benson (who dropped in one night to jam with Lonnie Liston Smith), this is your place; \$10-\$30; 2751 Broadway, NYC; tel: 212 864 6662; www.smokejazz.com.

**Zinc Bar** This is one of the best venues in town – and with an entrance fee of just \$5 on most nights, one of the cheapest. Saturday night is Brazilian bossa nova night; Sunday is Brazilian samba night. On Monday nights, guitarist Ron Affif

starts the early set with a featured vocalist then jams with his amazing band (Essiet Essiet on bass, Jeff "Tain" Watts on drums) until the wee hours, with a series of greats dropping by regularly, including frequent visitors George Benson and Roy Hargrove. Tuesdays and Wednesdays feature world jazz, Thursday is flamenco, Cuban and Latin night, and Friday is African night. The place is packed at weekends with a mixed crowd. Listen to the music out front or chill in one of the cool booths in the Moroccan-themed back room; 90 West Houston Street, NYC; tel: 212 477 8337; www.zincbar.com.

**55 Bar** A jazz and blues dive since prohibition days, some of this bar's customers have been fixtures for 40 years. The early sets (7pm-9pm Sunday to Thursday, 6pm-9pm on Friday and Saturday) star some of the best musicians in New York, free. The later sets, which incur a cover charge, feature bigger stars such as singer-bassist Richard Bona, guitarist Mike Stern and Ravi Coltrane until 4am. Legends such as Cecil Brooks frequently drop by to check out the up-and-comers. Often standing-room only, go early to get a seat at the bar and chat with the regulars. Move up front if you want to focus on the music. Free-\$5; 55 Christopher Street, NYC; tel: 212 929 9883; www.55bar.com. *Tessa Souter*



Tato Riquelme



**Zinc Bar's \$5 cover charge treats patrons to an eclectic range of vibes, from Latin to African.**

## Travellers' checks

**Stressed out** Most airline passengers find airport departures the most stressful part of their journeys, according to a survey by watchdog website Skytrax. More than 13,000 responses to an online questionnaire were recorded in six days. Of the respondents, 90 per cent said they found air travel stressful, with 66 per cent citing the departure airport as the biggest culprit, 15 per cent indicating the flight itself and 19 per cent citing arrivals. Skytrax quoted 69 per cent of travellers as saying they would give the most honest opinion in a post-trip online survey rather than in an onboard questionnaire handed out by airlines. For a full list of the results, see www.skytraxsurveys.com.

**Know before you go** Air passengers flying with any United States carrier might do well to choose bottled water,

judging by the results of a recent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) study. It revealed the onboard water provided for drinking, bathroom use and hot beverages on one in eight US commercial aircraft contained bacteria from human waste. The EPA suggests anyone with "compromised immune systems", such as HIV sufferers or transplant patients, use only pre-packaged water.

**Burning desire** Anxious eyes were on Braathens Airlines passenger David Mason of England in February after he took offence to some interracial harmony in a pornographic magazine he was reading and attempted to set light to the offending pages. The incident occurred after a flight attendant refused his demands that the article be incinerated in the plane's galley on the flight from Norway to London. Mason has had his day in court, where he was given a wrist-slapping conditional discharge and ordered to pay £263 (HK\$3,710) in costs. A recent change in

medication for Mason's mental problems was the main mitigation offered by the defence.

**Deal of the week** Travelex is selling a package to Perth, Western Australia, that includes round-trip, economy-class flights with Qantas and two nights' accommodation at the four-star Hotel Grand Chancellor for \$4,190 (see www.ghihotels.com). Breakfast, airport transfers, guaranteed early check-in (flights arrive in Perth at 7.10am following an 11.30pm Hong Kong departure) and travel insurance are also included. The offer is valid to the end of this month but tickets must be paid for by Tuesday. Similar packages valid until December 9 are available for \$5,390. Prices are quoted on a twin-share basis, and solo travellers pay an extra \$800. For further details and reservations contact Travelex on 2270 7600, or e-mail leisure@travelex.com.hk. *Peter Walbrook (tchecks@gmail.com)*