

Kansas City Jazz Swings Across Downtown

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Lonnie McFadden blows away The Phoenix crowd with Andrew Ouellette on keyboards. (Photo by Kim Mueller)

By Kim Mueller

Lonnie McFadden stood smiling beside the piano inspecting his trumpet before beginning his regular gig at [The Phoenix](#) where he entertains the Friday night crowd by playing his horn, tap dancing on the bar or singing a variety of songs.

“What you have here is a music venue,” McFadden said before beginning his regular gig at the downtown restaurant and bar that also serves a variety of live music.

“But you definitely are going to hear some jazz tonight right out of the box.”

In fact, every night of the week, 365 days a year, Kansas City jazz can be heard playing somewhere downtown.

When the the Black Dolphin opened last year, the jazz club became just one of [18 downtown venues](#) offering the distinctive riff-based music along with signature cocktails.



The Phoenix charms the corner of Eighth and Central in the Garment District. (Photo by Kim Mueller)

Local musicians routinely rotate among these clubs, often changing their outfits and bands to fit the distinct style of each club and booking. Many of these venues offer a variety of live music, but only a few dedicate their stages just to jazz.

Located in the historic jazz district at the corner of 18th and Vine streets, the **Blue Room** jazz club is attached to an outside corner of the American Jazz Museum at 1616 E. 18th Street.

By day, the **Blue Room** is a working exhibit where visitors enter through the club's interior backdoor. By night, the club is filled with jazz lovers.

The atmosphere is friendly and energetic. And the music is free except after 8:30 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays when patrons pay a \$10 cover charge.

"It's a listening room," said Andre Tyler, manager at the Blue Room where patrons can buy a drink but not any food.

"Cocktails and live jazz is our focus. There is not a distraction because of food. And the musicians really like that."



The Blue Room is part of the American Jazz Museum exhibition space by day, at night it's a jazz venue.

Patrons who forgot to eat before leaving home can buy an \$8 Louisiana alligator sausage from Jimmy McCauley's street stand located at the same corner before going inside to listen to more jazz.

Although the **Green Lady** and **Black Dolphin** lounges are neighbors with separate addresses, the properties owned by John Scott actually operate as a single jazz venue, including the **Orion Room** located in the Green Lady basement.

The staff uniform: black cocktail dresses or black suits with black shirts and bright red ties. Food is limited to two types of snacks plates. And drink tabs started in one location follow patrons when they move to the other two clubs.

"I lead with the jazz and the ambiance," Scott said. "If it's between cooks and jazz, I'll go with the music."

The **Green Lady** at 1809 Grand Blvd. offers traditional live jazz acts typically booked six months in advance. The red walls and mid-century lights give a retro feel to the club where patrons sit at the bar, talk at small tables, or cuddle in curved lounges.



The Green Lady, part of swinging jazz trio of clubs on Grand Boulevard. (Photo by Kim Mueller)

The Orion is a smaller, more intimate space with chandeliers hung from the dimly lit ceilings, speakers lined at the top of the walls, and tables scattered throughout the narrow space.

The service bar is for staff only. No standing or waiting allowed. Waiters and waitresses bring drinks to the tables.

Finally, the Black Dolphin at 1813 Grand Blvd. boasts a more contemporary feel with its exposed brick and light bulbs.

While patrons at the other two clubs try to engage in conversation over the band music, patrons who come to the Black Dolphin don't talk. They only listen.

"I don't think we intended it to be a listening room, it just evolved that way," explained bartender Zack Alvey. "We have more fusion jazz and out of town groups here."



The Majestic offers three distinct venues in a 107 year-old building with a colorful history. (Photo by Kim Mueller)

Originally built as a saloon and brothel in 1911, the building at 931 Broadway Blvd. is now home to **The Majestic Restaurant** and its three venues: the private Pendergast Club cigar bar upstairs; The Majestic Restaurant on the main floor; and the **Kansas City Jazz Club** downstairs.

The Majestic features jazz music seven days a week, with solo piano music on the main floor when the jazz club is closed on Sunday and Mondays.

Although the club does not have a cover charge, patrons must purchase an entrée (\$24- \$88) at dinner tables or a suggested two drink minimum (\$20) at the bar or cocktail tables.

"We can't just have people taking up a table and listening to music," said The Majestic Assistant Manager Cap Narine.

"At the end of the day, we are a restaurant not just a jazz club, and we have to make money."



Musicans jump from club to club, the Lonnie McFadden Quartet at Black Dophin. (Photo by Kim Mueller)

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