

Queens Is Where The World's Music Comes Together

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Body

If the term world **music** makes you think of wide-eyed, long-haired bohos noodling on the dance floor of a SoHo nightclub in their latest ethno-chic garb, then get yourself quickly to **Queens**.

In **Queens**, world **music** is home **music**. And night life is in large measure a commemoration of all the places that the people of **Queens** have left behind. It is the syncopated Trinidadian soca or the breakneck beat of Dominican merengue. It is the middle-aged children of Irish immigrants learning to dance like the Irish in the back of a Woodside pub, or the children of South Asian immigrants picking up the mother tongue from Hindi films screened in Jackson Heights. It's a man in a rumpled suit singing Korean love songs in his own karaoke studio in Flushing, or it's a table of men in a smoky, half-empty tavern in Astoria throwing back their heads and singing along to rebetika, songs considered the urban blues of Greece.

Queens has become an important place in many people's diasporas, an outpost of Lima and Lahore, Port-au-Prince and Seoul. And so, to step out for the night in **Queens** is to vault the vast blue sea and sky that separates the New World from the Old. It is to eavesdrop on the remembrances of expatriates, to watch how they move their hips and mouth the lyrics of well-remembered songs, usually only in the company of one another. Or it is to watch their American children delve into their roots with an enthusiasm that new immigrants can hardly muster.

"Irish-Americans are a little bit more sentimental about their roots," observed William Collins, a second-generation Irish-American fiddler, as he watched a roomful of set-dancing students at Breffni Pub in Sunnyside. As for the new Irish immigrants, he said, "These people **come** here and listen to rock **music**."

One should note, however, that stepping out in **Queens** does not always mean finding world **music** and dance in well-packaged folklorica. One is likely to stumble into, say, a Haitian restaurant near La Guardia Airport and find the band playing "Girl From Ipanema" or, at a vast Brazilian disco in Astoria, to watch the crowd move to the Village People.

A few night spots offer musical fare that could just as easily be found across the river. For example, Flushing Town Hall is wrapping up its spring jazz series tonight with the Latin jazz sextet of Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band, while the nightclub Amazura, in Jamaica, serves up a standard hip-hop bill. Scheduled to play tonight are two of the genre's most thuggish icons, the rappers Jay Z and DMX.

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Occasionally a whiff of the avant-garde is to be found. At the P.S. 1 Center for Contemporary Art in Long Island City, for instance, in an outdoor pavilion designed by the architect Philip Johnson, a crew of D.J.'s and self-described "noise terrorists" will entertain at a series of Saturday evening performances starting this weekend.

Every now and then someone tries to pull together all the people who live side by side. On Sunday, for instance, the Queens Council on the Arts will present a concert of drumming traditions from around the world at Bohemian Hall, an 89-year-old Czech beer garden in Astoria. The stage will be shared by a trio of Korean women, a Bukharan doira player and a West African djembe man, among others.

And next month the Queens Theater in the Park will be the stage for the annual summerlong AT&T Latino Arts Festival. The lineup is intended to draw crowds from inside and outside Latin New York, with crossover bands like Inti Illimani of Chile and Noche Flamenco of Spain, as well as Armando Manzanero, the crooning balladeer regarded as the Burt Bacharach of Mexico.

Still, Queens, not unlike the rest of the city, is for the most part an archipelago, with each island occupied by members of a particular tribe. Casablanca, a warehouse of a club on Queens Boulevard in Sunnyside, draws mostly young Dominicans and Puerto Ricans equally at home in hip-hop and merengue, while Chibcha, in nearby Jackson Heights, is known for an older, flashier Colombian crowd. The Bollywood pictures (that's the Hollywood of Bombay) shown at the Eagle Theater in Jackson Heights draw a strictly subcontinental crowd, while Calypso City in Richmond Hill plays to a Caribbean crowd and Carmichael's, an unassuming railroad diner in Jamaica, commemorates the jazz heritage of southeast Queens with its weekly Wednesday evening jam sessions.

You can dance, eat and groove your way across the world in Queens. But you have to know where to go. What follows is a rough and selective guide.

Recreating Colombia

Barrel-chested men in tuxedos guard the doors to Chibcha, a sprawling Colombian nightclub and restaurant on Roosevelt Avenue, the commercial and cultural artery of Hispanic Jackson Heights. Inside, a cluster of red-and-white checkered tables frame the dance floor. The east wall is taken up by a chiva, a bright red and yellow jitney that has been brought from somewhere in rural Colombia and retrofitted here with tables and chairs inside.

It's all part of the project of recreating the old country.

"They come here for the nostalgia, you know?" explained Jorge Alarcon, the Medellin native who runs a mini-empire along Roosevelt Avenue, including the nightclub, an adjoining restaurant and a travel agency. "They live there. But they live here."

Chibcha is an extravagant place. The menu offers standard Continental fare like shrimp scampi and pasta, but if you ask, the waiter will also bring you aguardiente -- fire water -- an anise-flavored Latin American cane liquor that pours into you, indeed, like a flame.

The action doesn't begin on the dance floor until close to midnight, when stiff, straight upper torsos give way to undulating hips, and women in pinprick heels offer hours of fancy footwork.

Most patrons are no longer Colombian, as they were when Mr. Alarcon first converted an abandoned Irish pub into the nightclub 20 years ago. Today the lineup at Chibcha reflects the panoply of Latin Americans who have settled into Jackson Heights and Corona: a strapping Mexican ranchera starlet one night, a Venezuelan folk ensemble another, followed the next night by vallenato music from Colombia's northern coast. Members of that other tribe -- the English-only bohemian fresh from a salsa lesson downtown -- are still conspicuously absent.

A Mexican Hideaway

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Five blocks east of Chibcha is a more intimate, younger venue, Plaza Garibaldi, catering mostly to Mexican immigrants, the borough's newest and fastest-growing Latino group. At Garibaldi one recent Saturday evening, young men in flannel shirts and goatees sat at the long narrow bar, nursing red cans of Tecate beer, and \$3.50 bought a sandwich of potato and Mexican sausage topped with red sauce and a dollop of cream. The stage was aflame with a mural of the Virgin of Guadalupe framed by red, white and green streamers, the colors of the Mexican flag. A small Asian woman wandered in, peddling fake gold jewelry from a briefcase.

Arturo Carlos, the club owner, said he was well aware of how much Latinos love one another's music: Mexicans are drawn to the lilting Colombian cumbia as much as to their own version of country music, called ranchera, just as Mr. Alarcon's South American patrons down the road are crazy about salsa, rooted in the Afro-Cuban tradition. So on the tiny Garibaldi stage, a five-piece band from Elizabeth, N.J., played an irrepressible mix of merengue, ranchera and cumbia. The lead singer scratched rhythms on a scraper called the guiro. Congas shared the stage with a drum machine. Still, Plaza Garibaldi, named after the square in Mexico City where mariachi music is said to have been born, is unquestionably a Mexican hideaway.

"Years ago, there was no place where Mexican people could go to dance, eat and drink," recalled Mr. Carlos, a 24-year veteran of Queens. "We thought, we need something for our own people."

This is the logic of much of the cultural life of Queens. You can stay up until dawn most nights of the week, peeking into these hideaways. Down Roosevelt Avenue, an arepa stand does a brisk business all night, frying up the traditional Colombian cornmeal cakes topped with cheese. You can cap off the evening with an espresso at La Meson Asturias, a Spanish restaurant as famous for its paella as for the 1992 shooting death of a crusading journalist, Manuel de Dios Unanue. Or if you're up late enough, you can linger until the Mexican bodegas roll open their gates for an exclusive Sunday morning treat: trays of fresh tamales.

Subcontinental Film

A few blocks to the west is the Jackson Heights of the South Asian subcontinentals. Night life here is limited, though. By sundown the gold shops and sari emporiums roll down their forbidding metal gates, and all that's left is the Eagle Theater, a former porn palace turned Bollywood cinema on 37th Road, off 74th Street.

Now that cricket season is over (the Eagle has been packed for weeks for World Cup Cricket matches, broadcast by satellite from England), Saqib Hussain, the theater's Pakistan-born manager, promises a summer of new Hindi film hits. But don't expect an especially eclectic mix. India's film industry churns out one boy-meets-girl story after another, all with musical numbers, many with mustachioed villains and weeping mothers.

But if the Bollywood films, which draw as many children of South Asians as their immigrant parents, have become a vital part of the subcontinental cultural life in New York, the Eagle must also work hard not to fuel communal sentiments among this diverse crowd. This month, for instance, a poster promised a film produced by Smita Thackeray, the daughter-in-law of Bal Thackeray, the head of a militant Hindu political party in India. Theater officials quickly removed the poster, and plans to screen it are being reconsidered.

"We don't want to put ourselves in trouble," Mr. Hussain said simply.

Philip Johnson Onstage

Paraphrasing the architect Philip Johnson, the programming people at P.S. 1 are calling their outdoor music pavilion "a cross between Studio 54 and a medieval amphitheater."

Whatever you call it, the five-cornered stage framed by steel-and-mesh towers will be the site of its second annual summer music program, "Warm Up 2: Live and Electronic."

On Sunday, Mr. Johnson, just weeks shy of 93, ceremoniously dropped the first vinyl of the season onstage, choosing Frank Sinatra's "My Way," "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" and the disco classic "I Will Survive," to which

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he performed a minimalist dance. He was incongruously followed by the rapper Fat Joe and D.J.'s from Jimmy's Bronx Cafe, Tony and Loco, spinning a ferocious mix of merengue and house music.

Starting tomorrow and continuing through Sept. 11, D.J.'s, dancers and live bands from around New York and across the globe will descend on the P.S. 1 stage on Saturday nights. Attractions will include the London-based Russell Haswell ("He's noise for sure," said Tarra Cunningham, a development and programming associate at P.S. 1) as well as local D.J.'s from the Soundlab crew, a Paris-based disco band with Japanese vocals ("with a James Bondy flavor," Ms. Cunningham said) and an electronic "bluegrass-country-gothic" band called Who Killed Teacher.

"Stylistically, it's everything from drum and bass to bluegrass to really straightforward punk to disco galore, true disco," she added.

Who's Playing And Where

Here is information about places mentioned in the article about nightlife in Queens:

AMAZURA, 91-12 144th Place, between Jamaica and Archer Avenues, Jamaica, (718) 298-6760. Tonight at 9, the rappers Jay Z and DMX. Tickets: \$25

BREFFNI PUB, 43-45 40th Street, Sunnyside, (718) 729-9803. Irish set dancing classes on Tuesdays, 8 to 10 P.M., and Thursdays, 6:30 to 10 P.M. Fee: \$7 each night.

BOHEMIAN HALL, 29-19 24th Avenue, Astoria, (718) 647-3377. On Sunday, 3 to 5 P.M., Drum Dance, a performance of West African, Central Asian, Indian, Korean, Colombian and American Indian drumming traditions and dancing. Free.

CALYPSO CITY, 121-08 Jamaica Avenue, at 123d Street, Richmond Hill, (718) 847-8900. Fridays and Saturdays, 9:30 P.M. to 4 A.M. Cover, \$10, Fridays, \$12 on Saturdays.

CARMICHAEL'S, 117-08 Guy Brewer Boulevard, Jamaica, (718) 723-6908. Diner that offers jazz on Wednesday nights from 7 to 10.

CASABLANCA, 40-15 Queens Boulevard, Sunnyside, (718) 482-1199. Call for performance schedule and admission prices.

CHIBCHA, 79-05 Roosevelt Avenue, between 79th and 80th Streets, Jackson Heights, (718) 429-9033. Live music most nights at 10. Cover: \$15 Fridays through Sundays; no cover charge Mondays through Thursdays.

EAGLE THEATER, 73-07 37th Road, Jackson Heights. For movie listings and showtimes, call (718) 205-2800.

FLUSHING MUSIC STUDIO, 136-76 Roosevelt Avenue, second floor, Flushing, (718) 460-4300. Private karaoke rooms available at \$25 an hour and up. Open daily, noon to 6 A.M.

FLUSHING TOWN HALL, 137-35 Northern Boulevard, near Main Street, Flushing, (718) 463-7700. Appearing tonight at 8 and 10 P.M. is Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band. Tickets: \$20; \$17 for students and the elderly; \$15 for Town Hall members.

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LA MESON ASTURIAS, 40-12 83d Street, near Roosevelt Avenue, Jackson Heights. Open daily, noon to midnight, till 1 A.M. Fridays and Saturdays.

PLAZA GARIBALDI, 89-12 Roosevelt Avenue, between 89th and 90th Streets, Jackson Heights, (718) 651-9722. Live music Fridays through Sundays, beginning at 10 P.M. Minimum, \$15; no cover charge.

P.S. 1 CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, 22-25 Jackson Avenue, near 46th Avenue, Long Island City, (718) 784-2084. Performances Saturdays, starting tomorrow, 4 to 9 P.M., with programs of international music. Through Sept. 11. Included in center admission, which is by suggested donation: \$5; \$2 for students, children and the elderly.

QUEENS THEATER IN THE PARK, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. From July 21 through Aug. 8, the AT&T Latino Arts Festival. Highlights include Paquito D'Rivera on July 21 at 7 P.M.; Maldita Vecindad on July 27 at 8 P.M.; Inti Illimani on July 30 at 8 P.M. and Munequitos de Matanzas on Aug. 8 at 7 P.M. Tickets are \$20 to \$35. For schedule information, call (718) 760-0064 (English) or (718) 760-0686 (Spanish).

TAVERNA O ANANIAS, 29-35 Newtown Avenue, at 30th Street, Astoria, (718) 932-1456. Rebetika music on Tuesday nights, starting at 11 P.M.

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Graphic

Photos: The Eagle Theater, above and left, on 37th Road in Jackson Heights, shows the latest films from India. Jerry Gonzalez, above, will be the star at two performances tonight with the Fort Apache Band, at Flushing Town Hall. Dancing to the live music at Chibcha, on Roosevelt Avenue in Jackson Heights. (Photographs by Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times; John Abbott (Gonzalez))(pg. E1); Plaza Garibaldi, top (Photographs by Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times), has a band after 10 P.M. on weekends, here Sonora Latina. It caters to younger Mexicans, while Chibcha, above, with live music most nights, has older Colombians. At right, the architect Philip Johnson dances with Tamar Osorio in the pavilion he designed for the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center. (Stephanie Diamond)(pg. E22)

Map of Queens highlighting clubs. (pg. E22)

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