

The Chattanooga Guides Series

# A Sheet for Chattanooga Live Music

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**Seasonality:** Year-round; outdoor concerts peak summer (May–October), festivals fall–spring

#music #live-performances

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**Neighborhoods:** Downtown, St. Elmo, North Shore, East Ridge, Ooltewah, Arts District

**Best for:** Music lovers, Date night, Families, Festival-goers, Nightlife seekers

## Overview.

Did you know Chattanooga prides itself in its musical roots? Legendary blues singer Bessie Smith, aka the “Empress of the Blues”, called Chattanooga home as she and her six siblings literally raised themselves on street performances. She then went on to be arguably the most popular blues singer of the 1930’s. For a taste of her music check out of her most popular songs, “Downhearted Blues”, below.

Bessie Smith - Down Hearted Blues (Audio)



In exploring Chattanooga's musical history I've also come to learn of the Glenn Miller Orchestra. They're the group that popularized the song "Chattanooga Choo Choo" which was written for the musical film "Sun Valley Serenade" in 1941. The song went on to be nominated for an Oscar for best song that year and was such a standout success it was awarded the first ever Gold Record for selling 1.2 million copies.

**Fun fact:** The Glenn Miller Orchestra still performs to this day. If you want to check out a live performance view their event schedule [here](#).

Chattanooga Choo-Choo



If you're interested in listening to contemporary artists hailing from the Chattanooga area be sure to check out the music profiles of country star [Kane Brown](#), [Lauren Alaina](#), or maybe 2000's R&B and Pop star [Usher](#).

Bluegrass, country and folk music scenes are still prominent in the area's today, with its close proximity to and influence from the Appalachian mountains.

# By Topic.

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## Local Bars .

In exploring the Chattanooga live music scene you'll probably find a performance going on any night of the week. In saying that, there were a few standout spots worth highlighting below, but there were so many good options we had to add an honorable mentions section to do this list to do it justice and shout out more of the local establishments supporting our cities artists. There are acoustic sets for more intimate shows, or high energy bands for a lively night out, Chattanooga has something

for everyone. If you don't see your favorite spot in the list, please [reach out](#).

## 1. The Woodshop Listening Room

A casual and intimate neighborhood bar located off of St Elmo Ave, this venue looks like another house in the historic district upon visiting you'll quickly see through its humble veneer. It's essentially a dedicated music venue that regularly draws a crowd from locals and visitors alike. Their emphasis on fostering community and nurturing local live music in Chattanooga makes them worth a visit in any season. The music selection varies but it tends to lean towards the bluegrass roots of Chattanooga.

## 2. JJ's Bohemia

A dive bar music venue in Chattanooga that's favored for its many musical performances, inviting staff and fun atmosphere. Self proclaimed 'Chattanooga's favorite little venue since 2006' the bar has had a long run providing entertainment in the area. Check out their calendar on their [facebook page](#)

## 3. The Dragon's Roast

Founded by musicians looking to create the music venue they wished existed. The musician's origins are in heavy metal but their goal is to be a "crossroads of diverse melodies". Calling out specifically to blues and bluegrass, but it certainly extends beyond. Check out their website for an updated [live music schedule](#).

## 4. Buds Sports Bar

Just outside Chattanooga in East Ridge, TN. On weekends they host some of the best live bands in the area. Advanced notice, it

can get pretty rockin some nights, so when you're ready bring out your favorite old band t shirt and have some fun on a Friday or Saturday watching the bands Aunt Betty or Local Slim (sometimes others too). Check [their calendar](#) for more events and details.

## Honorable mentions

There is no shortage of bars and restaurants offering musical performances on various days. If one of the previously mentioned venues doesn't have a show for you some other places to check out include [Cherry Street Tavern](#), [Puckett's](#), [Hi-Fi Clyde's](#), [Tremont Tavern \(Tuesday open mic\)](#), [Bar Watson](#).

Venue	Description	Music Type
The Woodshop Listening Room	Intimate neighborhood bar with a focus on local live music	Bluegrass, Folk
JJ's Bohemia	Dive bar with a long-standing reputation for live performances	Various
The Dragon's Roast	Founded by musicians to create an inclusive music venue	Blues, Bluegrass, Heavy Metal
Bud's Sports Bar	Hosts rock bands on weekends in East Ridge, TN	Rock

## Recurring Music Events.

Do you think free weekend outdoor concerts in the summer sound like a good time? If you answered no, I'm not sure this guide is for you, but if you're still with me, I've great news; Chattanooga has two recurring concert series in the warmer months. Most weekends you'll have your choice between a downtown riverfront live show or one at the popular marketplace of Ooltewah's Cambridge square. We recently added a third option to this list to keep things exciting. No matter which you choose, these concerts are a great way to enjoy live music while enjoying warm evenings in Chattanooga.

## 1. TVFCU Riverfront Nights

To celebrate the summer TVFCU puts on a Saturday evening [concert series](#) in Chattanooga for FREE. The concerts feature the area's talented local artists performing from Memorial Day - Labor Day at Ross's Landing in downtown Chattanooga. Vendors are onsite with food and drink items for purchase, concessions start at 6PM and opening performance at 7PM. Don't forget to pack a beach towel and/or your favorite lawn chair. The concert goes on rain or shine so be prepared with an umbrella should it be needed.

## 2. Cambridge Square

On Saturday nights from April - October venture up to Ooltewah, Tennessee for local live music on an outdoor stage. Music genres you might find include rock, country, jazz, or bluegrass. The events are weather permitting so be sure to check before heading out. With a rotating lineup of local musicians, each weekend offers a little something different for all types of music lovers. Check their website for an [updated schedule](#) as the warmer months near.

## 3. Chattanooga River Market

Saturday's during the spring, summer, and fall the Chattanooga River Market hosts vendors selling artisan goods and produce. More often than not the event also includes a live musical performance from a local artist. The relaxed atmosphere makes it a great way to spend a weekend morning while supporting local businesses and musicians. Find more about their schedules on their [website](#).

If you like being outdoors for concerts, there's a good chance you'd like outdoor activities at the [best state park in Georgia](#) just outside of Chattanooga. We wrote a [guide](#) for you.

Event	Location	Music Genre
TVFCU Riverfront Nights	Ross's Landing	Various Local Artists
Cambridge Square	Ooltewah, TN	Rock, Country, Jazz, Bluegrass
Chattanooga River Market	Downtown Chattanooga	Acoustic, Folk, Indie

## Larger Music Venues .

Are you looking for bigger named acts, high quality production, and a seat to yourself? There's a few options in Chattanooga and a lot of them take place in beautifully architected, historic theatres.

Do the acoustics, kinder prices, and diverse lineups of a mid-sized venue sound like it's more up your alley? Chattanooga's

got your bases covered.

## 1. Tivoli Theatre Foundation

Comprising three separate venues under this nonprofit umbrella organization including Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Auditorium, Tivoli Theatre and Walker Theatre the Tivoli Theatre Foundation. These historic venues regularly bring household national names to the stage, as well as providing a space for local talents to perform. These historic venues provide an exciting atmosphere to watch live music and other live performances.

## 2. The Signal

An event space and concert hall in downtown Chattanooga, The Signal is located on the historic grounds of the Chattanooga Choo Choo. This venue draws national music talent for live performances and keeps a regularly updated event calendar on their website, check there for the [latest details](#). Attendees 14 and under must be accompanied by an adult

## 3. Barrelhouse Ballroom

Self described as trying to fill the need for a mid-sized music venue in the enthusiastic Chattanooga music community, the Barrelhouse Ballroom hosts regular music events throughout the year. They aim to bring good people, music, food and drink together in one place for a reasonable price. Check their calendar [here](#).

## 2. Songbirds

This nonprofit music foundation has a few different ongoing projects including Guitars for Kids; which aims to help music funding in public schools, Write to Rock which gives elementary

school children a chance to write music with professional songwriters, Project Guitar! which brings school groups into the foundation to participate in STEM based Activities. The foundation is partially funded through live events, many of them music focused, which you can see on their website [here](#).

Venue	Description
Tivoli Theatre Foundation	Three historic venues for national and local performances
The Signal	Mid-sized concert hall attracting national talent
Barrelhouse Ballroom	Aims to be Chattanooga's premier mid-sized venue
Songbirds	A nonprofit supporting music education and events

## Festivals .

If you're looking for the excitement of a music festival, Chattanooga has a few options for you. Some of the local favorites haven't been going on recently, but there's a couple new kids in town that may grab your attention. See your favorite performances, discover new artists, and feel the energy of a multistage festival at one of this year's music festivals.

### 1. IBMA World of Bluegrass

Previously hosted in Raleigh, NC, Chattanooga will be the newest host of the International Bluegrass Music Association's

World of Bluegrass through at least 2027. The inaugural event will be held from September 16-20 in 2025 and will be a mix of activities including a tradeshow and two day musical festival. It's expected to draw tens of thousands of visitors to the city, so be prepared for a little extra traffic over the five days. Headliners to be announced later but previous ones have included Sierra Ferrell, Danny Paisley, and Sierra Hull.

## **2. Smart Music Fest**

Coming to Ross's Landing in May of 2025 is the Smart Music Fest. This music festival features pop-electric music on four stages in Downtown Chattanooga beginning May 23 and concluding on the 25th. As their [website](#) says 'immerse yourself in a vibrant community where limitations are transcended and diversity is celebrated'. The venue will also be offering an Art-Garden with an assortment of installations and sculptures to go along with ~30 food trucks and a craft beer tent.

## **3. 3 Sisters Festival**

A free bluegrass festival held at Ross's Landing in the fall. It's a two day festival featuring some of the best of local and regional bluegrass talent. A Chattanooga tradition, the 3 Sisters Festival has been performing since 2007. This years scheduled dates are for October 3rd and 4th 2025. Vendors are local, giving you a chance to support our businesses who will be providing a variety of food and drink.

## **4. Riverbend and Moon River Festivals**

These festivals were on hiatus in 2024 but are rumored to be returning in 2025. We'll be on the lookout for more information and will update this guide as we know more. Please reach out if

you have any more information on these Chattanooga festival staples.

Festival	Dates	Music Type
IBMA World of Bluegrass	Sept 16-20, 2025	Bluegrass
Smart Music Fest	May 23-25, 2025	Pop-Electric
3 Sisters Festival	Oct 3-4, 2025	Bluegrass
Riverbend & Moon River	TBD 2025	Various

## Outro .

There's plenty of live music to be enjoyed by locals and visitors alike in Chattanooga. Come to town for a festival. Or go see a free concert at the riverfront. If you're ready for more, check out lineups at Barrelhouse Ballroom. Maybe see a larger show in a historic theatre. Just have a beer and enjoy a casual show, Chattanooga has an option for everyone.

Get your tickets (or enjoy the free concerts) we've listed. The artists and city would love for you to get out and show your support. If you feel like we've missed anything, do not hesitate to reach out; the details provided here are subject to change.

If you've made it all the way to the end of this guide, you're in luck, we're going to send you off with one more historical Chattanooga song. Have you ever heard of Johnny Cash? On the not so off chance you have and you have interest in

Chattanooga, here's his song "Chattanooga City Limit Sign". For even more on history in Chattanooga, take a look at our guide on the American civil war in this city [here](#).

Chattanooga City Limit Sign



Other Guides:

[Civil War History](#)