

WRITTEN BY JON ELLISTON, ALI MCGHEE, MATT MCGREGOR,
JEN NATHAN ORRIS, MELISSA REARDON & JASON SANDFORD

LIVE from ASHEVILLE

20 WAYS | TO EXPLORE THE CITY'S
EXPLODING MUSIC SCENE

Photographs by Rich Orris • Illustration by Drew Findley

Brooklyn-based indie band MOTHXR at The Mothlight, one of the city's many venues to catch live music

Ashville's siren song lures locals and visitors alike into underground clubs and booming music halls, and the hills of downtown echo with street performers who create an urban sound track as unique as the city itself. A hub for eclectic and diverse music ranging from electronic to jazz, indie rock to soul, Asheville's still home to traditional old-time and bluegrass music, of course, but it's the city's newer sounds that have attracted major attention this year.

The acclaimed NPR music program *World Cafe*, which airs on more than 200 radio stations across the country, featured Asheville in its "Sense of Place" series this spring. Host David Dye recorded performances and interviews with a dozen local performers and music pioneers, while a studio session featuring The Get Right Band showed off what Dye called the city's "healthy funk presence." Guitarist Tyler Ramsey (of Band Of Horses fame) acted as *World Cafe's* guide to the city, and local innovators Echo Mountain Recording and Moog Music added their take on Asheville's growing musical landscape.

Amidst all the hype, the Asheville Convention and Visitors Bureau recently launched a major music-promotion initiative highlighting local musicians, festivals, recording studios, and venues. Live-streaming concert footage and curated playlists are now featured on explorea-shville.com/music, and the campaign is bound to beckon even more music lovers to this city of sound. There's never been a better time to experience Asheville's music scene—here are 20 quintessential ways to take it all in.

—Jen Nathan Orris

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICH ORRIS

1



Philadelphia indie-folk rockers Hop Along

See a Rising Act at The Mothlight

Constantly upping Asheville's street cred, The Mothlight brings slightly under-the-radar acts to the stage. The venue showcases cutting-edge music and makes it accessible with affordable shows and a fun atmosphere. It's hosted artists on the cusp of fame, like Sylvan Esso and Small Black, and up-and-coming acts like Raleigh-based Oak City Slums. (828) 252-5433; themothlight.com. —**Ali McGhee**



LaZoom's roving showcase of local beer and bands sometimes features The Resonant Rogues and horn players from Empire Strikes Brass.

Get on the Bus

If you like music, alcohol, and parties on wheels, hop on the **Band & Beer Bus Tour**. Conducted via one of **LaZoom's** can't-miss purple buses, each tour features a smoking hot, live, local band—the type that can play on as the bus traverses curves and hills—and makes pit stops at three standout Asheville breweries (such as Altamont, Highland, and Wedge). With its improbably low \$29 tab, this three-hour tour is one of the best and most musical ways to get to know a fun side of Beer City. (828) 225-6932; lazoomtours.com

—**Jon Elliston**



2



Chad Hugo of electronic duo MSSL CMMND, performing at Moog Music factory during Moogfest 2012



3

Tour the Moog Factory

When the late, great Bob Moog designed and built one of the first synthesizers in the 1960s, it was a musical game-changer. Today, instruments inspired by his designs are still built by hand at the Moog Music factory, located in downtown Asheville since 2011, and you can go see the process in action. While you're waiting for the tour, you can play with samples of the gear, including Minimoogs, effect pedals, theremins, and more. The tours are free and take place at 10:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., Monday-Friday; reservations recommended. (828) 239-0123; moogmusic.com —**A.M.**

PHOTOGRAPHS (HUGO) BY RICH ORRIS; (MOOG FACTORY) COURTESY OF MOOG MUSIC; (MUSICIANS) COURTESY OF JACK OF THE WOOD; (BLAKE) BY ERIN DERHAM

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICH ORRIS

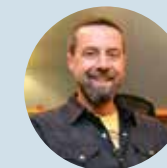
Get Old-timey at Jack of the Wood

One of Asheville's most beloved longtime pubs, Jack of the Wood hosts several jam sessions throughout the week. Check out the Old Time Mountain Music Jam, which happens every Wednesday starting at 6 p.m. and features pros and learners alike. Come and watch while you have your pint(s)—or get in there and pick a tune yourself. (828) 252-5445; jackofthewood.com —**A.M.**



4

{INDUSTRY INSIDER}



Josh Blake

musician, producer, engineer, and founder of lamAVL.com

You moved to Asheville in 1997 to start a band, Granola Funk Express. What made you think this was a good place to do that?

JB: *It wasn't that I moved here thinking I was going to make it in music. It was a cool town with an alternative culture, and I had friends living here. We were creating our own thing. The scene was small enough—and it still is—that we all knew each other and made noise together.*

Tell us about the online music channel you manage.

JB: *The inspiration for lamAVL came from playing out a bunch and noticing that new bands were constantly showing up on the scene. We created what we call a community-based music Web channel. We have livestream installations in a bunch of venues in town, and also bring a whole crew out to livestream festivals or concerts.*

Where is Asheville's music scene headed?

JB: *Asheville has already become a music destination. There are bands who come through here that don't usually play markets this size, and I think that's because we're a welcoming town and community. ... This is a special time: We're kind of an open book, and there are a lot of people here to help write it. Where will it go? The sky's the limit.*

—**Jason Sandford**

The Altamont's black box-style listening room offers chances to get close to the music of artists like singer-songwriter PW Gopal or Acoustic Syndicate (below right).



Make an Echo Mountain Playlist

For a decade, Asheville's Echo Mountain Recording has served as the recording and production suite of choice for scores of top-tier music acts. The studios fill vast and varied spaces with a vintage feel that doesn't shirk state-of-the-art technology. Here are just some of the hit records that were born at Echo Mountain: Band of Horses' *Infinite Arms* (2010) and *Why Are You OK* (2016); Dierks Bentley's *Home* (2012); The Avett Brothers' *The Carpenter* (2010); Widespread Panic's *Street Dogs* (2015); and Grammy-winning albums by Steep Canyon Rangers (*Nobody Knows You*, 2012) and Zac Brown (*Uncaged*, 2013). echomountain.net

—A.M. & J.E.



{INDUSTRY INSIDER}



Jessica Tomasin
studio manager at
Echo Mountain Recording

What's one of your most memorable experiences at Echo Mountain?

JT: We've done a lot of projects with kids that I love. For example, there was a teacher who would bring his fourth-grade class in, and he'd ask the kids to write songs on everything from the Ice Age to migrant farm workers. We'd have them come and perform the songs and record them. The first time I was ever in a recording studio I was 16, singing background vocals on a hip-hop track. I can't imagine what it would have been like to be exposed to something like this when I was 10.

What's especially exciting or unique about Asheville's music scene?

JT: We have such an eclectic mix of musicians. We have people who were born and raised here that are third-generation traditional musicians. We have people like Billy Edd Wheeler, the man responsible for writing the song "Jackson," made famous by June Carter and Johnny Cash, and we have bands like *Sex Knuckle* that moved here from North Dakota. My point is, we have something for everyone.

That said, what's missing?

JT: We need more outlets for urban music. I say that partly because of my background: Being from Detroit and having so much exposure to R&B, soul, and hip-hop, this was really where my love of music started and I would like to share that with others. —A.M.

6

Get Intimate at The Altamont

The Altamont Theatre is one venue that lives up to its tagline: "Asheville's best listening room." The building was extensively remodeled and opened in 2010 as a black box theater. Today, it seats up to 200 and its incredible acoustics make for a listening experience like none other in town. Catch multi-instrumentalist Zach Deputy on July 22, which opens with a special storytellers set. (828) 782-3334; thealtamonttheatre.com

—J.S.



PHOTOGRAPHS (2. SHINDIG) BY JERRY NELSON; (2. ALTAMONT THEATRE) BY SAM KATZ

5

Swing Your Partner

Loggers twirl and fiddlers' fingers fly at **Shindig on the Green**. The outdoor summer concert series, at Pack Square Park in downtown, starts at 7 p.m. every Saturday July 2 through September 3 (except for July 30 and August 6).

This summer marks the 50th anniversary of this Appalachian tradition. Folklorist Bascom Lamar Lunsford led a movement to bring mountain music out of the hills and hollers and into contemporary culture. Through his efforts and with help from the Folk Heritage Committee, in 1967 Shindig on the Green was born.

Today, old-time customs meld with Asheville's modern sensibilities. Conversations linger as longtime locals mingle with visitors, and passersby pause for epic banjo duels. Bring a lawn chair and don't forget pocket change for barbecue and ice cream. (828) 258-6101; folkheritage.org

—J.N.O.



Salsa at The Millroom

The Millroom, a multi-use event space that hosts everything from receptions to comedy shows, is the place to go salsa dancing to live music. Once a month (summer dates TBD), local Latin outfit Juan Benavides Group kicks up heated rhythms while crowds take to the dance floor. (828) 225-2585; ashevillmillroom.com

—Melissa Reardon



Asheville's Electric Owls in the studio

PHOTOGRAPHS: (EQUIPMENT) BY STUART O'SHIELDS; (RECORDING) BY JOSH RHINEHART; (JUAN BENAVIDES GROUP) BY MICAH MACKENZIE; (TOMASIN) BY JULIA PETHTEL

8



Juan Benavides Group

{INDUSTRY INSIDER}



Arieh Samson

event producer, tour manager,
founder of All Go West music
festival

What's one of your favorite memories of music in Asheville?

AS: I was on the road with Yo Mama's Big Fat Booty Band and we had booked a really long tour. At the end, we rolled into town Bele Chere weekend and were able to catch the Sunday performances. Stephanie'sid was playing, and they were so powerful—it was very, very Asheville—and the music just rushed over me. I thought, "Wow, I'm so lucky to be alive in this city—to be on the road with a band from Asheville putting music out into the world and to come home and be reminded why I'm here."

Why did you start All Go West, and what's your vision for how it fits into the Asheville music scene?

AS: We asked ourselves, "How can we bring something new that isn't already being done?" We decided to do something in West Asheville because there weren't any events in that part of town. West Asheville was the perfect location: It's residential, it's a cool side of town, and people can walk around it easily. I wanted something that showcases what's happening in Asheville that's not bluegrass and jam music, something a little edgier. There's such cool music in town, and some of it's a bit underground. I wanted to showcase that. **—A.M.**



Local African folk outfit Les Amis

Get Close to the Music at 5 Walnut

If you're anywhere near Walnut Street most any night of the week, you're bound to be drawn to the eclectic sounds streaming out of the large open windows at 5 Walnut Wine Bar. Inside the handsome, 1,400-square-foot space, up to 80 people can be found mingling over wine, beer, and small bites (such as cheese and olives or smoked trout dip) while taking in some of the best free live music in town. Catch African folk music on Wednesdays or blues-rockers Pleasure Chest on Thursdays. Other nights showcase everything from swing jazz to gypsy blues to indie rock. **(828) 253-2593; 5walnut.com —M.R.**

Dance in the Street



Downtown After 5 concert series

Lexington Avenue comes alive at the Downtown After 5 concert series, which starts at 5 p.m. the third Friday of the month, May through September. Local acts open for big-name headliners, and high-energy funk, country rock, and the Asheville All-Stars are just a few of the sounds that will surge through the city this summer. And you can party like it's 1990 when alt-rock band Cracker headlines September 16. ashevilledowntown.org/downtownafter5 **—J.N.O.**

PHOTOGRAPHS (5 WALNUT) BY RICH ORRIS; (SAMSON) BY DAVID SIMCHOCK; (DTAS) BY JIM DONOHOO PHOTOGRAPHY



The Avett Brothers at Asheville's largest venue, the U.S. Cellular Center

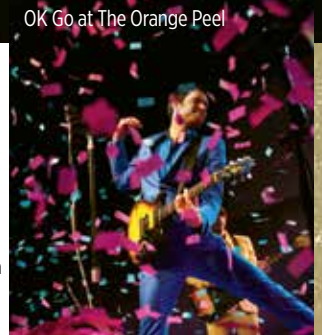
Find contact info for these venues on our website.



Catch the Big Headliners

As Asheville's reputation for culture and arts has grown, so too has the list of acclaimed musicians who roll through town, lending the added bonus of chance encounters with the likes of Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins or David Byrne of Talking Heads fame. Ten venues in Asheville and nearby Black Mountain host headlining acts.

With a concert capacity of 7,200, the **U.S. Cellular Center** packs in the largest crowds, while the somewhat smaller **Thomas Wolfe Auditorium**, **The Orange Peel**, and **Pisgah Brewing Company's** outdoor stage attract equally big names. Venues with capacities of 300 to 500, including **The Grey Eagle**, **New Mountain**, **White Horse Black Mountain**, and **Asheville Music Hall**, are where you can catch local and national bands on the rise and across multiple genres. **Isis Restaurant & Music Hall**, named Best Venue of 2015 by the International Bluegrass Music Association, is known for showcasing acclaimed bluegrass acts such as Sam Bush and David Grisman, as well as jazz, blues, and soul. And while **Diana Wortham Theatre** presents all manner of plays and dance performances, it also features a variety of musical performers in a refined auditorium. **—M.R.**



OK Go at The Orange Peel



It can be hard to get a handle on Asheville's musical diversity, but a brand new album that melds musical genres is a great start for listeners looking for guidance.

The *Asheville Symphony Sessions* showcases the classically trained musicians of the Asheville Symphony Orchestra alongside some of the area's best-known roots, rock, jazz, and pop talents. Featured artists include everybody from bluegrass stars Steep Canyon Rangers to indie rockers Electric Owls to world music faves Free Planet Radio. With symphonic treatment by arrangers such as Michael Bearden (who was musical director for Michael Jackson's *This Is It* tour), the songs soar. Van Dyke Parks, who most recently worked on *The Jungle Book* animated film, also arranged music on the album, which was released in May.

More than 150 people worked on the project, says Jessica Tomasin, studio manager at Echo Mountain Recording, where the music was recorded. Michael Selverne, a producer with decades of experience in New York and Los Angeles who relocated to Asheville and produced the album, calls it "life-sized art" that captures "the spirit and the soul of our community." ashevillesymphony.org/sessions

—J.S.



Keep it Classy at the Symphony

Hear some of the finest musicians in Western North Carolina and beyond at the Asheville Symphony Orchestra. Each concert features a notable guest soloist for a mix of contemporary pieces and well-known orchestral works. There's no dress code, so don't fret if you left your ball gown at home. (828) 254-7046; ashevillesymphony.org —J.N.O.

13 Enjoy a Side of Music with Brunch



Brunch at Burial Beer

Asheville loves music. Asheville loves brunch. So it's only natural that the city offers up spots where you can enjoy both simultaneously.

Every Saturday, have brunch on the patio at **Isis Restaurant & Music Hall** while locals Lenny Pettinelli and Jacob Baumann play instrumental covers of pop, classic rock, and old favorites on the lawn. Brunch starts at 10 a.m., with music from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. (828) 575-2737; isisasheville.com

The Southern, with its splendid stone and wrought-iron patio, hosts **Yacht Rock Brunch** on Sundays from noon to 3 p.m. DJ Kipper Schauer spins classics

of the genre, from Hall & Oates to Michael McDonald to Christopher Cross and beyond. The Southern's hearty brunch options are backed with a build-your-own Bloody Mary bar. (828) 251-1777; southernkitchenandbar.com

The One Stop and **Mojo Kitchen** team up for **Bluegrass Brunch**, every Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., with live bluegrass and rock. Kick back and enjoy items like jerk chicken and waffles with pecan-honey butter, poutine, or a plantain pancake stack. (828) 255-7777; ashevilmusicall.com

Burial Beer's Sunday Jazz Brunch offers the microbrewery's signature brews alongside New Orleans-inspired food from Salt & Smoke and live jazz from The Digs. The menu changes every week, so check the website for the latest inspired options. (828) 475-2739; burialbeer.com —A.M.



Yacht Rock brunch at The Southern

PHOTOGRAPHS (2. SYMPHONY SESSIONS) BY JOSH RHINEHART; (ASHEVILLE SYMPHONY) BY MICHAEL MOREL; (FOOD) COURTESY OF SALT & SMOKE; (PATIO) BY RICH ORRIS; (OPPOSITE PAGE: (BURGER BAR & THE ADMIRAL) BY JULIA PETTEL; (2. THE DOUBLE CROWN) BY RICH ORRIS



Decked with New Orleans flair, The Double Crown offers live shows, DJs, and karaoke. Below, Kimmy Drake of Beach Day

Take a Dive

A trio of West Asheville "dive bars" takes late-night denizens back in time, to a place with no-frills but unforgettable nights. These are hardly rough and tumble joints, mind you, and each shines in ways both nostalgic and modern.

The Burger Bar, serving the west side since 1960, doesn't serve burgers, but its relatively new owners have kept the place indubitably authentic while amping up the music. DJs playing gritty roots and rock, open mic nights, raucous karaoke, and local and regional singer-songwriters provide a steady sound track. (828) 253-9794; *Facebook: The Burger Bar*



The Burger Bar

On the east side of Haywood Road, West Asheville's main drag, **The Admiral** is famous for both its cuisine and its Friday and Saturday night dance parties, which draw on DJs immersed in soul music, garage rock, and hip-hop. (828) 252-2541; theadmiralnc.com

Similar mixes fill **The Double Crown** nearby, where an added delight is live performances that sometimes become legendary, for those in-the-know enough to go. (828) 575-9060; *Facebook: The Double Crown* —J.E.



The Admiral



15

Follow Your Ears to a Street-side Serenade

Ubiquitous and talented street performers, also known as buskers, sing out from downtown street corners and doorways while wild drummers, old-timey jazz bands, and daring jugglers show off their skills. Hear some of Asheville's most diverse musicians play old favorites and experiment with new sounds as you stroll by. avibuskers.com —J.N.O.



The Big Dawg Slingshots are among Asheville's dozens of street performers, aka buskers.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICH DORRIS

16

Sway to the Rhythm Riverside

Sure, paddling and tubing are big draws on the French Broad River, but music unites everyone along the shore, and there are plenty of places to keep the good tunes flowing.

The rush of the river inspired **RiverMusic**, a free concert series hosted by environmental nonprofit RiverLink each month between May and October. Bands range from local favorites Floating Action and Grits & Soul (August 13) to national acts like Blitzen Trapper (October 7). (828) 252-8474; riverlink.org

Salvage Station is a new outdoor concert space that's big enough to handle 2,500 fans. A former salvage yard, the venue was recently transformed into one of the city's largest live music venues, with the capacity to draw big crowds and even bigger bands. salvagestation.com

The Bywater is so close to the river that tubers can drag their vessels onto the banks for a beer. Winter Wednesday shows ward off the chill indoors, and country crooners harmonize around the bar's fire pit on summer nights. (828) 232-6967; bywater.bar

Also, keep an eye on **Smoky Park Supper Club** and **New Belgium Brewery** for occasional riverside performances served with a side of local food. (828) 350-0315; smokypark.com | (828) 333-6900; newbelgium.com/brewery/asheville —J.N.O.



PHOTOGRAPHS: (SALVAGE STATION) BY JOSH RHINEHART; (RIVERMUSIC) COURTESY OF RIVERLINK; (ALOFT ROOFTOP & HANK WEST & THE SMOKIN' HOTS) COURTESY OF ALOFT ASHEVILLE DOWNTOWN

Salvage Station is Asheville's newest hot spot on the river.

17

Raise the Roof at Aloft

Rooftop venues for live music in downtown Asheville are rare, which makes the Live@Aloft series, held atop the Aloft hotel, special. Mix and mingle during these free shows featuring local bands such as Hank West & the Smokin' Hots and Juan Benavides Group. The third-floor pool deck affords lovely views, and dogs are welcome at this canine-friendly hotel. The performances take place one Sunday a month through October. (828) 232-2838; aloftasheville.com

—J.S.



Hank West & the Smokin' Hots



Biltmore's South Terrace turns into a concert venue for six shows this summer, starting with rocker Chris Daughtry on July 28.

18

Rock in Style at Biltmore

Biltmore's outdoor concert series combines great music with a stunning setting. Every summer, major artists rock the estate's South Terrace, with sweeping views of the Blue Ridge Mountains providing the backdrop. Emmylou Harris, Mary Chapin Carpenter, and Rick Springfield are a few of the acts scheduled to perform this season. (800) 411-3812; biltmore.com —J.S.



Isis Restaurant & Music Hall

19

Chill Out with Hot Jazz

The local jazz scene heats up at **Tressa's Downtown Jazz & Blues** any night of the week. Let the good times roll in this New Orleans-style spot or drop by **Isis Restaurant & Music Hall** in West Asheville for a jazz showcase on Sundays. A rotating group of musicians performs and you never know who you're going to catch: Asheville-based horn players Justin Ray and Jacob Rodriguez can sometimes be seen when they aren't on tour with Michael Buble. (828) 254-7072; tressas.com / (828) 575-2737; isisasheville.com —J.N.O.



Tressa's Downtown Jazz & Blues

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF: (2) THE BILTMORE COMPANY; ISIS RESTAURANT & MUSIC HALL; (TRESSA'S) BY FRANK ZIPPERER PHOTOGRAPHY



Jam to the Beat of Your Own Drum

Thundering drumbeats reverberate through the streets of downtown on balmy Friday nights, when locals and visitors crowd around the weekly Pritchard Park Drum Circle. Everyone is invited to dance, clap, and drum along during this quintessential Asheville experience. Want to join the circle? Skinny Beats Drum Shop offers a beginning drum class twice a week (Sundays at 2 p.m. and Wednesdays at 6 p.m.). Drums are provided, so no need to BYOD. (828) 768-2826; skinnybeatsdrums.com —J.N.O.



PHOTOGRAPH (DRUM CIRCLE) BY RICH ORRIS

The Best of the Fests

Mark your calendar for year-round festivals to suit every flavor of music

Music Video Asheville

Local bands and filmmakers come together to deliver a juried selection of music videos during this red-carpet, Grammy Award-fashioned event entering its 10th year on April 19, 2017. musicvideoavl.com

Asheville Electro Festival

Experience two days of experimental music and film created with groundbreaking technology at this electronic festival, which takes place each spring. emavl.com

RiverMusic Series

With live local and national music, plus food trucks and local brews, this free music series is a fundraiser for the environmental nonprofit RiverLink. It takes place on the first Friday of May and the second Friday of the month from June to October. riverlink.org

LEAF and LEAF DOWNTOWN

For a weekend every May and October, the LEAF Festival in Black Mountain showcases around 50 local and international acts spanning dozens of cultures. Healing arts, lake activities, a kids' area, and camping make this a family-friendly event. And July 30 & 31, LEAF Downtown brings some of the same musical magic to Asheville's Pack Square Park. theleaf.org

Downtown After 5

Every third Friday of the month from May to September, starting at 5 p.m., local acts and nationally touring bands take the stage on Lexington Avenue for free performances. ashevilledowntown.org

Concerts on the Quad

This Monday-night free concert series, held in June and July at the University of North Carolina Asheville, invites students and the public to spread a blanket in the quad while listening to live music. cesap.unca.edu/concerts-quad

Asheville Percussion Fest

In mid June, this resounding percussion

and dance festival includes workshops on Indian and Middle-Eastern drumming and features collaborations with international performers. ashevillepercussionfestival.com

All Go West Fest

Usually the third weekend in June, Haywood Road in West Asheville springs to life with live music, food, and beverages during this multi-staged festival presenting local and national performers. allgowestfest.com

Shindig on the Green

Bluegrass and old-time musicians, storytellers, and cloggers take the stage in Pack Square Park for this 50-year tradition, which runs every Saturday from July through the first Saturday of September (except for July 30 and August 6, 2016). folkheritage.org

LAAFF

On September 4, Lexington Avenue transforms into the Living Asheville Arts and Fun Festival, designed to celebrate all things local, including art, craft, food, and beer. cosmicengine.com

Goombay Festival

Rhythmic beats and exotic cuisines enliven downtown September 9-11 during this festival celebrating African and Caribbean culture. ashevilligoombayfestival.com

Brewgrass Festival

This convergence of craft beer and bluegrass music is a chance to sample brews from over 55 local and national breweries, with proceeds going to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Western North Carolina. On September 17, Brewgrass will celebrate its 20th anniversary at Memorial Stadium. brewgrassfestival.com

Warren Haynes Christmas Jam

In December, musician, philanthropist, and Asheville native Warren Haynes invites friends and the public to spread a blanket in the quad while listening to live music. cesap.unca.edu/concerts-quad

xmasjam.com

—Matt McGregor