

NIGHTCLUBS

Legendary jazz landmark

JOHN GRIFFIN
THE GAZETTE

Nightclub: House of Jazz/Maison du Jazz

Coordinates: 2060 Aylmer St., below Sherbrooke St. W. in the heart of downtown.

Phone: (514) 842-8656

Web: www.houseofjazz.ca

Hours: Monday to Thursday 11:30 a.m. to 1 a.m.; Friday 11:30 a.m. to 3 a.m.; Saturday 6 p.m. to 3 a.m.; Sunday 6 p.m. to 12:30 a.m.

History: If you have lived in this city for any length of time, or if you visit during the jazz festival, you probably know this place as Biddles Jazz. From its opening in 1981 – by legendary restaurateur George Durst – until his passing last year, the club was named after Charlie Biddle, the equally legendary bass player, outsize character and man-about-town.

During all those years, virtually everyone who was anyone, and many who weren't, stopped by to listen, have a few drinks, shoot the breeze and maybe get up onstage to play. Records have been made and launched here, careers started or extended, and musicians like Montreal pianist Oliver Jones were able to play enough to be locally lionized for their extraordinary talent.

The action was, and is, especially intense during the jazz festival, but this remains one of the very few venues in town that features live music in one way, shape or form, all year long, every night of the week.

Details: The space seats 120 and consists of a restaurant, bar, stage and terrace. One of the initial attractions of the place – apart from being across the street from the old Playboy Club – was ribs on the menu, a rarity in this city at the time. Ribs are still front and centre, along with chicken and beef, but changing times have also brought more health-conscious options, like salads, and a late menu, for nighthawks catching the last set on a Friday or Saturday night. Prices are reasonable, and the bar is full service. A cover of \$5 is added to your bill for the music.



MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER THE GAZETTE

House of Jazz, formerly Biddles, has been making careers since 1981.

The schedule changes regularly and sometimes suddenly, so it's always good to check ahead. Recent artists have included Johnny Scott, Michelle Sweeney, Nancy Martinez and Pascale Lavoie. Monday nights are jam nights, with Chet Doxas, from 8 to midnight. If you want to play the House of Jazz, send a press kit and demo CD to George Durst, care of the club. Private events are also welcome.

Ambience: Faux New Orleans cathouse, with lots of leather, wood and mirrors, brass lamps, memorabilia and bric-à-brac, all thrown together in a comfortable, overstuffed way that is the Durst trademark. "Make yourself at home" is the House of Jazz motto. People have been doing just that for 23 years.

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