

A vibrant live music venue with a brick wall, a large disco ball, and a band performing on stage. The scene is filled with energy, with warm stage lights and a large crowd of people. A large disco ball hangs from the ceiling, and a band is performing on a stage in the background. The overall atmosphere is lively and intimate.

LIVE ★ FROM

NEW YORK

FIFTEEN OF THE TOP VENUES, DIVE BARS, CONCERT HALLS,
THEATERS AND CLUBS FOR WORLD-CLASS LIVE MUSIC IN NYC.

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photographs
by
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In ★

SHEER SCALE AND VARIETY, NO CITY TOPS NEW YORK for live music. On a given night, you can be taking in the New York Philharmonic at Lincoln Center or discovering an indie band at Elsewhere, a sprawling warehouse-turned-music complex in Bushwick. Major bands and artists don't skip the city when they go on tour, either. They can be found playing in the backrooms of tiny bars for 30 people and at one of the five boroughs' stadiums for screaming masses of thousands. ¶ New York has lost several important venues over the years—CBGB, Fillmore East, Roseland Ballroom among them—but music is still a booming business here. More live-performance tickets are sold in New York than in any other city and, according to the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, the industry is growing faster than the city's economy overall. Entrepreneurs in recent years have reinvigorated old venues through extensive renovations and opened entirely new ones, with more to come. And in late November—just after creating an official Office of Nightlife to support live performance spaces and clubs in this era of rising rents and gentrification—the city government finally repealed its 1926 Cabaret Law, which forbid venues from allowing dancing without a costly, hard-to-get license. In other words, New Yorkers are celebrating, knowing that their city's music scene is about to get even better.



LINCOLN CENTER MANHATTAN

Spread across more than 16 acres on Manhattan's Upper West Side, Lincoln Center is the city's (if not the world's) most venerated performing arts center. It's home to 11 resident organizations, including the Metropolitan Opera, Jazz at Lincoln Center, the New York City Ballet, the New York Philharmonic and the Julliard School. With 30 event spaces—from the 3,800-seat Metropolitan Opera down to the 140-seat Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola jazz club—Lincoln Center also brings in an outstanding array of musicians, singers and dancers from abroad and across the country. The center also presents important annual festivals, including Mostly Mozart in the summer and American Songbook in the winter. This year, there's a new conductor for the New York Philharmonic, Jaap van Zweden; a staging of Puccini's *Tosca*; Mozart's *Così fan tutte*; and much more. lincolncenter.org

BROOKLYN BOWL BROOKLYN

This Williamsburg bowling alley-meets-concert venue, in an old ironworks foundry dating back to the 1880s, is the perfect place to spend a whole night. Start with a round of bowling on its 16 lanes, then break for food from the owners of Blue Ribbon Fried Chicken and Blue Ribbon Sushi in Manhattan. Order the fried chicken and ribs and finish them off with a local beer (Brooklyn Bowl's beer list skews local, with Lagunitas, Brooklyn Brewery and Coney Island Brewing Company on tap). Finally, head to Brooklyn Bowl's 600-person live music venue, which features a mix of rock, indie, hip-hop, R & B and funk acts. Kanye West, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Guns N' Roses and James Murphy have all played there, along with DJs such as Questlove and the occasional cover band. Over the past eight years, Brooklyn Bowl has also expanded to The Linq in Las Vegas. brooklynbowl.com



PREVIOUS SPREAD:
The band Escort playing at Brooklyn Bowl in November.
THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Beacon Theatre; Brooklyn Bowl; Baby's All Right; Brooklyn Bowl.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Mingus Big Band at Jazz Standard in November; Inside Carnegie Hall; The tUnE-yArDs at Baby's All Right. **OPPOSITE:** Smokey's Round Up plays at Sunny's Bar.



PETE'S CANDY STORE

BROOKLYN

As the name implies, this venue was once a candy store (and before that, a diner and a general store), but since 1999 it's been a fixture on the Williamsburg music scene. In a backroom past the kitschy bar area—where bartenders mix excellent cocktails served alongside grilled cheese sandwiches—is Pete's tiny, speakeasy-style music area. The narrow room is designed to look like a train car and seats about 30 people facing a stage that can comfortably squeeze in about three musicians with instruments—but sometimes more. Pete's never charges a cover (though donations are encouraged) and typically books unsigned artists, but the occasional big-name artist drops by. Norah Jones still shows up unannounced, and Clap Your Hands Say Yeah, Rufus Wainwright and Sufjan Stevens have all performed there. Pete's also has a long list of regular events, from a reading series every other Thursday to LGBTQ comedy the third Friday of every month—and some of us are still mourning the end of the adult spelling bee. petescandystore.com



JAZZ STANDARD

MANHATTAN

Like many of the city's famous jazz clubs—the Village Vanguard, Blue Note—Jazz Standard regularly attracts legendary artists and up-and-comers. But what sets it apart is its superb ambiance and food. With its red leather banquettes and long rows of tables that somehow never feel terribly cramped, Jazz Standard has unobstructed sight lines and good sound. This being the basement of restaurateur Danny Meyer's barbecue joint, Blue Smoke, the food is the best you can get at a jazz club. Try the deviled eggs, hand-cut barbecue potato chips and baby back ribs with Blue Smoke's own ale. Jazz Standard's covers can run higher than other venues, but the lack of a food or drink minimum usually evens things out. Don't miss Jazz Standard's Mingus Mondays, when either the Mingus Big Band, Mingus Dynasty combo or Mingus Orchestra plays tribute to the late bassist and composer. jazzstandard.com

SUNNY'S BAR

BROOKLYN

Since the Balzano family opened it around the turn of the last century, Sunny's Bar has been an institution in Red Hook—the coastal Brooklyn neighborhood that's evolved from a neglected industrial area to, most recently, one of Brooklyn's most expensive neighborhoods. But going to Sunny's is like stepping back in time to when Red Hook was a haven for artists and musicians. Regulars have been coming to it for decades, not only for cold pints but for late-night bluegrass and folk music. So beloved is this bar that when its colorful proprietor, Sunny, passed away in 2016 and his widow needed money to buy the building, patrons crowd-funded more than \$65,000 for the down payment (locals also raised \$100,000 after it was damaged by Hurricane Sandy). Go to Sunny's for the bluegrass nights every Saturday, starting around 9 p.m. Look for the vintage green pickup truck and you'll know you're in the right place. sunnysredhook.com

BABY'S ALL RIGHT

BROOKLYN

From the outside, under its blue and green awning steps from the Williamsburg Bridge, Baby's All Right looks just like a good weekend brunch spot, which it is. (Order the chilaquiles verdes with slow-braised pork and a Pacifico-and-orange juice Brass Monkey.) But in the back of this expansive restaurant and bar there's a 250-person live music space, complete with LED light wall behind the stage, that hosts shows and DJ sets nearly every night. It might look familiar if you've seen Aziz Ansari's first season of *Master of None*. The bookings run the gamut: A\$AP Rocky, the British rock band Wire and John Maus all played there last year. No matter the night of the week, there's usually something fun to listen to or dance to. It's worth getting food at Baby's before a show, too. The dinner menu, by the Korean restaurant Kichin, has rice balls, bibimbap and fried chicken. babysallright.com

BEACON THEATRE

MANHATTAN

The 2,800-seat Beacon Theatre may share the same owner as Madison Square Garden, but the similarities end there. This Upper West Side theater on Broadway and 74th Street opened in 1929 as a vaudeville theater before evolving into a movie theater and later becoming a concert venue. It's known for its ornate, art deco design by Chicago architect Walter AhlSchlager (earning it historic landmark status from the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1979), standout acoustics and the many rock legends who have taken to its Greek goddess sculpture-flanked stage. Not only has it welcomed the Rolling Stones, the Allman Brothers Band, Bob Dylan and Radiohead, but also comedians such as Jerry Seinfeld and George Carlin. Today, the Beacon is also the occasional site of the Tony Awards, as well as talks with important figures including the Dalai Lama. msg.com/beacon-theatre



FOREST HILLS STADIUM QUEENS

Intimate is not the first word people think of when they picture a stadium concert (frankly, “intimate stadium concert” sounds like an oxymoron). But you can’t help but describe Forest Hills Stadium in this way. With a capacity of about 14,000 seats and a location deep in Queens, about 30 minutes from Midtown by subway, Forest Hills feels special, especially compared to the stadium’s larger cousins—the 19,000-seat Barclays Center in Brooklyn and the 21,000-seat Madison Square Garden in Manhattan. When it was first built in 1923, the stadium was used mostly for tennis and held the US Open until 1977. Forest Hills began to add more musical programming, bringing in, among others, the Beatles (for two sold-out shows in 1964), Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, Barbra Streisand and the Rolling Stones. After its music programming waned in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Forest Hills was renovated and reopened in 2013. In the four seasons since it opened, the stadium has packed its summer schedule with everyone from the late Tom Petty to Mumford & Sons. foresthillsstadium.com

ELSEWHERE BROOKLYN

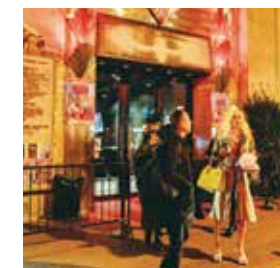
The city’s most ambitious new venue, Elsewhere, opened on Halloween night in a converted warehouse off Flushing Avenue in Brooklyn’s Bushwick neighborhood. The owners—production and promotion company PopGun Presents—previously ran Glasslands, a sorely missed DIY venue in Williamsburg that closed at the end of 2014. This massive, 24,000-square-foot spot has two music spaces—The Hall for up to 700 people and Zone One for up to 200—that host concerts and art performances, plus an art installation space, a gallery and a café for coffee during the day and drinks at night. A rooftop bar will open in the spring. Gigwise, Elsewhere’s shows tend toward indie musicians, rappers and DJs. In its first few months, PopGun has brought in, among others, Bruno Major, Anamanaguchi, P.O.S and Humans. elsewherebrooklyn.com

CARNEGIE HALL MANHATTAN

When most people think of classical music in New York, they think of Andrew Carnegie’s namesake hall on 57th Street and Seventh Avenue, not far from Central Park. Since it opened in 1891, Carnegie Hall has attracted music lovers and architecture buffs alike. The brick Italian Renaissance-style building designed by William Tuthill houses the iconic Stern Auditorium with its five levels, near-perfect acoustics (even in the “cheap seats”) and 2,804 red seats, but also, for smaller gigs, the Weill Recital Hall and Zankel Hall. Over the hall’s 125-plus years, notable composers and conductors including George Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein and Gustav Mahler have graced Carnegie’s stage. Today, you can catch the popular Oratorio Society of New York, which has been affiliated with the hall since its founding, plus visiting national and international orchestras and The New York Pops. carnegiehall.org

(LE) POISSON ROUGE MANHATTAN

Billing itself as a multimedia art cabaret, (Le) Poisson Rouge, which most New Yorkers call simply LPR, was founded by two musicians in the basement of the former Village Gate, an influential nightclub that hosted the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Ella Fitzgerald until it shuttered in the 1990s. The flexible room—with black and red accents and a cutting-edge sound system—is ever-changing, depending on who’s playing. Some nights, 700 people stand to watch big names such as Jessie Ware, Beck and Lady Gaga; other nights, the theater is set up in the round to seat about 300 people for music performances. Right now through January 29, LPR is hosting the New York premiere of Maximum Company Entertainment’s *Cruel Intentions: The Musical*. Along with its eclectic mix of performances, LPR highlights fine art in its gallery. lpr.com



THE BOWERY BALLROOM MANHATTAN

New York’s Lower East Side is known for its music venues, and The Bowery Ballroom is arguably the neighborhood’s crowning jewel—beloved by musicians, concertgoers and reviewers alike. The Delancey Street venue—once a department store called Tree-Mark Shoe Stores—has a two-story ballroom with consistently excellent sound that fits up to 600 people. The basement lounge with its horseshoe-shaped mahogany bar is perfect for pre- or postshow cocktails. Bowery Ballroom’s bookings were formerly overseen by the concert promotion company Bowery Presents—which also runs the Music Hall of Williamsburg, Terminal 5 and Webster Hall (currently closed for renovations)—and skewed toward on-the-rise musicians. Nick Mulvey, H.E.R., and Greta Van Fleet played at the end of last year. However, Bowery Presents ended its partnership with Bowery’s owner, Michael Swier (who also owns NYC’s Mercury Lounge), after the concert promoter was purchased by AEG last year. boweryballroom.com

THE BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC BROOKLYN

Better known as BAM, the Brooklyn Academy of Music dates back to 1861, when it was founded as a venue for the Philharmonic Society of Brooklyn—making it the oldest performing arts center in the country. The current complex in the Fort Green neighborhood, steps from the Atlantic Avenue subway hub, was built in 1908 (the original center burned to the ground in 1903) and is as multifaceted as BAM’s programming. In addition to the four-screen BAM Rose Cinemas, there’s the 2,109-seat Howard Gilman Opera House and the Hillman Attic Studio in the Peter Jay Sharp Building. Nearby, BAM also owns the smaller Fisher Building and Harvey Theater. BAM arranges contemporary music and dance performances in the fall as part of its Next Wave Festival, then features international opera, theater and classical music during the fall/winter season. It’s also a popular venue for podcast tapings, book readings (from David Sedaris to Dan Rather) and standup comedy. bam.org

ROUGH TRADE BROOKLYN

Vinyl obsessives love this 15,000-square-foot independent Williamsburg record store not only because it sells some 25,000 records at any given time, but also for the near-nightly shows in its 250-person performance space, complete with a bar and balcony seats (there’s also a coffee shop and a listening room with Sonos products). The concert promoter Bowery Presents handles tickets and bookings, bringing in a wide range of acts, from Lee Ann Womack to We Are Scientists, for concerts and vinyl release parties. Rough Trade opened in 2013 as an offshoot of the successful West London shop of the same name, which dates back to 1976 and played an important role in the city’s punk scene in the late 1970s and 1980s. At the time Rough Trade was expanding across the pond, much was being written about the decline of record sales and rise of digital downloads. But four years later, the shop and venue—much like the New York City music scene itself—are still thriving and hosting sold-out shows. roughtradenyc.com

SMALLS JAZZ CLUB MANHATTAN

As its name implies, this West Village institution is tiny. But what it lacks in seats and breathing room it makes up for in innovative programming and a standout roster. You’ll find emerging and experimental musicians (think Alex Sipiagin, Teodross Avery, Joe Martin) playing in the cozy space decorated with oriental rugs and an eclectic mix of artwork on its brick walls. And for the past decade, the Smalls team has recorded every show, first in audio format and later in video, and now broadcasts each one online as part of its SmallsLIVE subscription service (free to watch live, \$10 a month for anytime access). In a nod to Smalls’ beginnings as an artist-friendly venue in the 1990s—when you could bring your own beer and it wasn’t unusual to hear that a musician had slept there overnight—Smalls shares 50 percent of the subscription profits with the featured artists. Its archive now contains more than 15,000 performances. smallslive.com



LEFT: The Carnegie Hall facade. RIGHT: Pianist Michael Cochrane with Lines of Reason at Smalls.