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[Dispatch: Sled Island at Olympic Plaza and Jazz Fest at Beat Niq](#)

By [Halfstep](#) 06-27-2009 [Blade Runner](#)

Mark, the ex-roommate who ran the Blue Note in Winnipeg and later a club called Spectrum, used to go on and on about the importance of the room. The room was absolutely crucial to a club. The room had to be intimate, but not claustrophobic. The room had to have clean sightlines. The room had to be an acoustic marvel. The room made the club--not the name, or the menu, or the happy hour specials.

Which brings us to Friday in a week full of music festivals.

On the one hand, you have Sled Island going all stadium rock, with a concert in Olympic Plaza featuring the Breeders, the Liars, Holy F---, Anvil, and others.

Not a terrible idea.

When I arrive, Malajube, are playing. It's pretty much happy hour. The band sounds good, but the crowd is sparse. There are about 80 people standing in front of the stage on the concrete where the wading pool in Olympic Plaza usually is. There are a few dozen others lounging on the steps of the Plaza in the shade, enjoying a summer day. There are a few more tucked away in the beer garden, up at street level.

With each successive band, the crowd grows a little larger and a little feistier--for Biz Markie, an old school rapper, M5, a band from the Congo, Anvil, a metal band who have been together 36 years and released 13 albums, all the way through Holy F---, a kind of jam band for ravers, all the way through (I'm guessing now as I got diverted) Liars and the Breeders, the final two acts of the evening.

Once the concert hits the evening portion of the program, the crowd isn't too listless or lethargic. They're in a good mood, and game for one of the more diverse musical lineups you will ever come across. During Holy F--'s set, people start dancing, and there's a mad game of multiple frisbee going on, featuring tweener guys with fauxhawks playing frisbee with their dads.

And even the late-afternoon bands give it their all--even Anvil, who stare out at the largely empty concrete concourse when they come on about 6:15pm, with the sun beating down on them, and ask, "Is this it? Is this the whole Calgary heavy metal scene?"

It isn't (I'm guessing), but that isn't the point. It's just the wrong room for these bands. They all have a following, but somehow it all gets diluted at Olympic Plaza instead of coalescing into some sort of magical musical event.

On the other hand, one of Jazz Fest's venues is the Beat Niq Jazz and Social Club. It's in the basement of a small restaurant on 1st SW, right across from the Palliser Hotel.

You walk off a Calgary street on a bright summer night in June, descend some steps and land right in the middle of some New York City 52nd Street jazz club fantasy sequence, circa about 1947.

You halfway expect to be seated by a young Frank Sinatra.

It's small, dark, with red lights hanging from a low ceiling. There's a long bar right across the room people sit at, in front of which are a dozen small tables, and behind it there are elevated banquette seats for people to sit at.

And on this particular Friday night, the joint is absolutely jumping. It's jammed. There's nowhere to sit. Cocktail waitresses are charging back and forth across the room to the bar. People are pouring down the stairs, trying to muscle their way into the room, a room that holds about 150 tops, when it's absolutely bursting, which it was Friday night.

It's simple.Clean. Dark. An acoustic dream.

Perfect room.

The band, the Brennan Brothers come on. Two of them are Brennan brothers. One plays the trombone, the other plays tenor sax. They also have a piano player, a standup bassist and a drummer, and they tear into a set that has the room rivetted. Or are we simply rivetted to the room, because it's so exactly what you want your Friday night jazz club scene to look like, even if you don't really know much about jazz and really wouldn't miss the jazz drum solo if they decided to outlaw them?

Over at Olympic Plaza, there are 3,500 people and it hardly feels as if anyone showed up.

At the Beat Niq, 165 people feel like 165,000.

That's what a great room will do for you.

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