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[Dispatch: Wednesday Sled Island and Jazz Festival](#)

By [Halfstep](#) 06-25-2009 [Blade Runner](#)

Never take live music for granted. That's what my former roommate Mark used to say, back when I lived in Winnipeg and he ran the Blue Note Cafe with his ex-drummer brother Curtis.

You don't take live music for granted, he said, because on a certain fundamental level, it doesn't make a heck of a lot of economic sense--for club owners or musicians, many of whom toil for almost nothing, deep into their careers.

Mark would have been thrilled to be in downtown Calgary tonight, as there were a dozen different venues hopping with live music, from seven o'clock to the wee hours, thanks to the convergence of two major music fests, Sled Island and the 30th Calgary Jazz Festival, on the same week in late June.

4PM. JAZZ ALONG THE AVENUE. Sandwiched right onto Stephen Avenue, between a Sportchek and Winners, looking out at a Jugo Juice nestled in the cooling shade on a hot late June afternoon, the Hugh Fraser Quintet featuring Christine Ryan perform for all the lucky ducks enjoying a happy hour pint along the Stephen Avenue Mall.

The outdoor patios at the Trib Steakhouse, Divino Wine and Cheese Bistro, Blink, Original Joe's, and the James Joyce Pub are all full of people who have suddenly stumbled upon a jazz concert--and a ticket broker, as a homeless guy tries to peddle a half-price ticket to the women's golf tournament in town to anyone who's got \$6.

5:30pm. Bamboo on 1st SW. This is where Sled Island central is. You come here to pick up media credentials. They are giving out free Pilsner tall boys, so why not sit a minute or 20 and enjoy the Sled Island program, which is quite a bit of fun, as far as programs go?

IE. It is time to put my long-held prejudice against the trumpet to rest -- The Yells have effectively proven that theory wrong (my long held belief that no band could ever have a trumpet and not suck). This Edmonton four piece play energetic garage rock, have trumpet all over their songs, and it sounds fresh and exciting and exactly like something that would kill live.

7pm. Central United Church. Fond of Tigers are opening. The church is located right on the C train line. I like that. It's about two-thirds full when Fond of Tigers, a seven piece band, come on.

That includes two (2!) drummers and a violinist. I sit in the back row of the church and try not to think about how much it costs to fly seven guys from Vancouver--and this is just one band!--but there you have it. I just don't get the two drummers.

Fond of Tigers play a kind of grungy jazzy music that wouldn't sound out of place at the Jazz Festival, which is going on just up the street at the Jack Singer Hall (Jimmy Cobb), and also over at Cantos, on 11th Avenue.

The church is full of the usual Sled Island suspects. There's a guy in a green toque and matching green flannel shirt, even though it's 23 degrees C outside; a short guy with hobbit hair, wearing shorts, walking around with his blonde girlfriend, and a tall, skinny, shy guy wearing a Sloan t-shirt, nervously trying to spot his pals. Everyone seems to want to videotape everything.

8pm, Cantos Music Room. Steve Hudson's Outer Bridge Ensemble is onstage playing. About 35 people are here, enjoying the five piece band play. There are lots of beards at jazz festivals, usually worn by fiftysomething guys who come to these shows. Why the beards? I don't know. You tell me.

The music sounds good. They are selling beers for \$5. The Cantos Music Room is air-conditioned and comfortable to sit in. I am sweating from rollerblading all over downtown. Now, I can not only feel cool because I'm at a jazz concert, but I can cool off in it, too.

The band plays a song called Paris of the Prairies. Or a tune. Or a number.

There is a drum solo. The drummer makes all those jazz facial contortions. Jazz drummers could develop a side business teaching facercise, which is the new botox.

There is the solo by the standup bass player, who invariably looks like a PGA golfer such as US Open champ Lucas Glover--a bit bland, as if he were the love child of two really well-organized people. It's a cool instrument, though, the standup bass.

There is a searing tenor sax solo, which is quite great. Jazz musicians are fun because they get really into what they're doing, usually way more than everyone listening to them.

8:30PM. Central United Church. Back at the church, after a brief jazz interlude. It's all located within about four blocks of each other. I passed

by Beat Nq, which was full for a concert by Gary Wolfe. I heard from Andrew McDonald, a Herald colleague, that there were a couple of the most expensive tickets left for Jimmy Cobb at the Jack Singer, but that was it. Over at the Marquee Room at the Uptown Theatre, there's a sold-out Factory Party featuring a bunch of different bands and a fashion show, and back here, I discover that Central United's All-Ages show is now packed, a sold-out house of about 700.

Onstage, a neo-rockabilly (I just made that category up) band called Slim Twig are playing. They are two of the skinniest guys I have ever laid eyes upon.

9:30 pm. Final Fantasy. A one-man band (Owen Pallett) who plays the violin and loop pedal. The church is jammed now, hot and full of anticipation for the guy who won the 2006 Polaris Prize for an album called He Poos Clouds.

The violin sounds great, and I am standing too far back in the church to tell whether or not Owen makes any of those jazz drummer facial contortions, although really, why would he?

And while live music doesn't make a lot of economic sense, it makes perfect emotional sense on a gorgeous June night. Why these two festivals felt compelled to shoehorn themselves into the same week on the calendar is beyond me--but all our ears are that much better for the experience.

Sled Island and the Jazz Festival both continue through the weekend at various venues throughout downtown.

Here's the link to the Sled Island website:

<http://sledisland-news.tumblr.com/>

Here's the link to the Jazz Festival website:

<http://www.calgaryjazz.com/2007/Festival/cjazzfestival.htm>

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