



Willy-nilly in Philly

There's jazz here, but it's all over the map.

By David R. Adler

SURE, JAZZ IN PHILADELPHIA HAS CHANGED since John Coltrane, Jimmy Heath, Lee Morgan, and other stars-to-be roamed the streets. It's fair, and yet not quite fair, to say the Philly scene has declined. We're in a different historical period, with different prevailing tastes and economic pressures. Things are tough all over.

Despite a shrinking club circuit and a fickle public, Philadelphia remains home to a dedicated and motley jazz community, with fertile interchange between veteran masters and developing artists. Mickey Roker, Pat Martino, Bootsie Barnes, Trudy Pitts, and Larry McKenna are still in the game. Recent Philly success stories include Christian McBride, Orrin Evans, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Ari Hoenig, and Jaleel Shaw.

If Philadelphia has its pitfalls, you wouldn't know from talking to noted saxophonist and piece of work Byard Lancaster, who calls himself "Pennsylvania's first jazz lobbyist" and is one of a very few to look at the music as a get-rich proposition. "Jazz is oil," Lancaster declares. "It's the only thing we make that sells in every major city in the world. We're in a magic zone now."

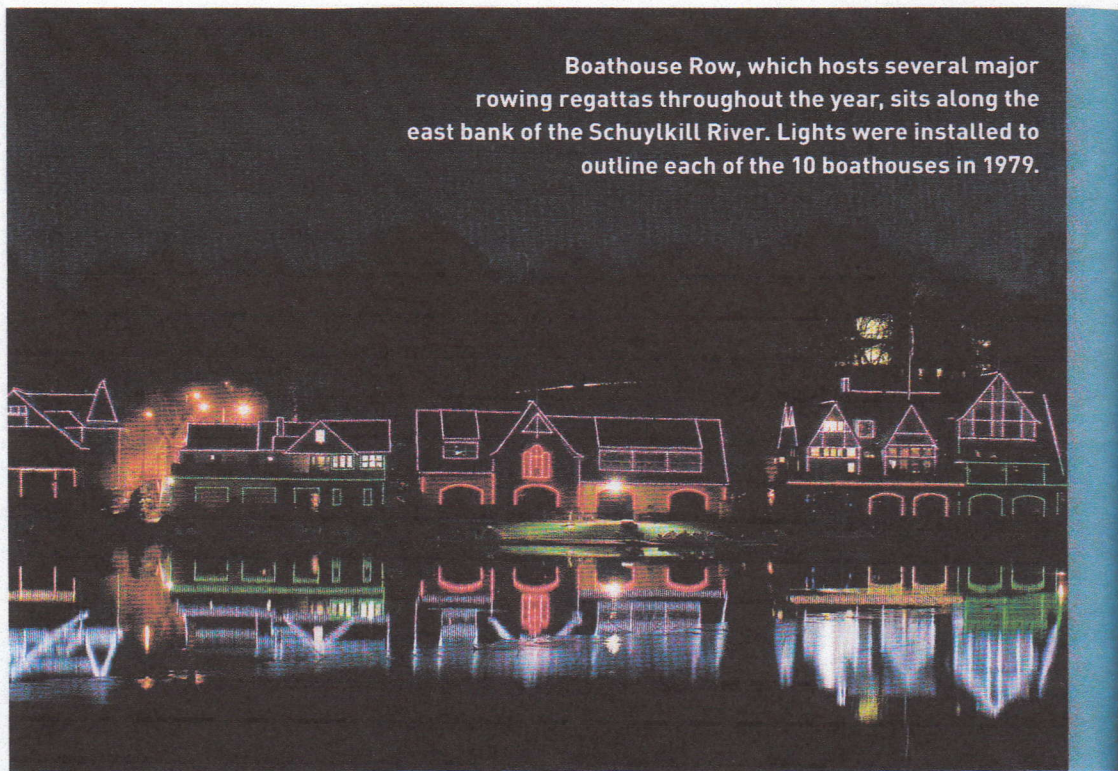
Perhaps, but there are challenges. The 2007 shuttering of Zanzibar Blue, downtown's big draw, has left only two

full-time jazz clubs in Center City: **Chris' Jazz Café** and **Ortlieb's Jazzhaus**. Both play a vital role, as does the big-ticket **Kimmel Center**, whose artistic advisor for jazz is Danilo Pérez. Chris' owners plan

jazzmatazz.home.att.net/phillyjazz for current listings.)

The **Painted Bride**, a comfortable black-box theater space, perseveres with a timely focus on jazz globalism. The **Philadelphia**

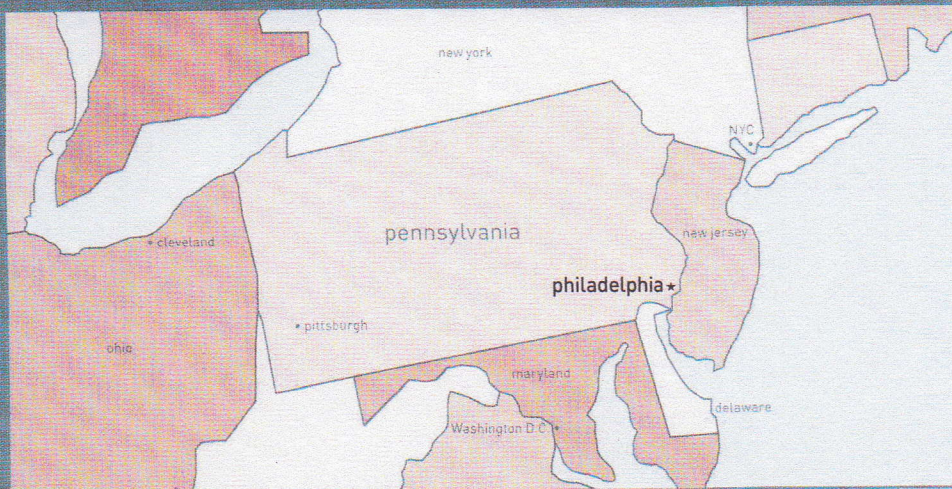
Boathouse Row, which hosts several major rowing regattas throughout the year, sits along the east bank of the Schuylkill River. Lights were installed to outline each of the 10 boathouses in 1979.



to open a second mid-size space in the coming months.

Venue scarcity has a silver lining — it forces people to get creative and make use of Philadelphia's unique environments. Look around and you'll find gigs happening in galleries, libraries, museums, schools, churches, lofts, historic landmarks and so forth. (Check www.

Museum of Art (with the famous front steps from *Rocky*) holds Friday jazz events with names on the order of Maria Schneider and Rudresh Mahanthappa. Mark Christman's **Ars Nova Workshop** hosts some of the world's leading avant-gardists at the International House hostel, the Art Alliance, and elsewhere. Dustin Hurt's **Bowerbird** series, which situates



Accommodations — Center City offers a great many options, like the French-owned **Sofitel** right near beautiful Rittenhouse Square (average \$225/night) or the historic **Alexander Inn** a bit further east (\$119-\$159/night). Just across the Schuylkill River, nearer to Drexel and the University of Pennsylvania, is the **Sheraton University City Hotel** (\$179-\$259/night). On the ground floor of **Loews Hotel** (average \$199/night), right near City Hall, you can hear the young jazz vocalist Joanna Pascale sing standards three nights a week. For more intimate settings, search Philadelphia at bedandbreakfast.com and you'll find plenty to choose from. (Note: all room rates quoted are subject to fluctuation.)

Food and drink — Philadelphia is famous for its cheesesteaks, so try **Ishkabibble's Eatery** (\$7-\$10) on South Street. But this is also a top restaurant town, with about every ethnic cuisine you can think of. The highest-ranked spots include two named for the chef: **Vetri** for top-of-the-line Italian (pastas \$19, venison with bitter chocolate sauce \$45); and **Morimoto** for world-class sushi (from \$3) and Japanese fusion (entrees \$23-\$49). **Meritage** offers brunch, dinner (including four-course tasting menu at \$55), a lower-priced bar menu, and good neighborhood vibes. For drinks, the mojitos at **Alma de Cuba** are hard to beat — and so is the beer selection at tiny **Grace Tavern**. At **Reading Terminal Market**, a teeming indoor space near Chinatown, you can get lost as you shop for everything fresh, including meat, seafood, organic juices, and soft Amish pretzels straight from the oven, with your pick of butter and mustard.

Sights — While visiting the birthplace of America, you shouldn't miss **Independence Hall**, the **Liberty Bell**, and many other historic sites sprinkled throughout Old City. Take your time and survey it all on foot. Car trips to **Valley Forge** and **Pennsylvania Dutch Country** are also worth pursuing. The **Philadelphia Museum of Art** and the **Franklin Institute Science Museum** carry fascinating exhibits year-round. You can also visit the Delaware River waterfront at **Penn's Landing**, or stroll down Benjamin Franklin Parkway to the majestic fountain at **Logan Square**. At the end of the Broad Street subway line you'll reach the sprawling **Sports Complex**, home of the Phillies, Eagles, and Flyers.

Transportation — Street parking in Philly is a bit hectic, but there are numerous public lots downtown. Taxis are generally plentiful (\$2.70 flag drop, \$.30 per 1/7 mile). Subway and trolley lines (\$2 per ride) are well kept, but the routes aren't as extensive as New York's. Buses (also \$2) will take you nearly everywhere, but maps and schedules aren't posted at the stops, so check www.septa.org (for the trains as well). Lots of residents get around via scooter, bike, and on foot — nice options in good weather, when Center City's parks and leafy residential streets can be heavenly. The bike and pedestrian path along the Schuylkill River and through Fairmount Park is also a pleasure.

jazz within a radical mix of electronics, far-out chamber works and other fringe music, presents concerts in offbeat spots all over town, including the beautifully preserved 18th-century houses in Philly's Old City district.

It's a sign of the times that downtown Philadelphia lacks a big brand-name summer jazz fest. However, the **West Oak Lane Jazz & Arts Festival**, a new grassroots event held every June in nearby Mt. Airy, showcases everyone from Jamaaladeen Tacuma and Orrin Evans to War and the Ohio Players. In terms of jazz outreach to African-American audiences, it's one of the most significant developments in years, and a good place to catch Philadelphia's hottest working groups, including the Sun Ra Arkestra, the Odean Pope Saxophone Choir, and Bobby Zankel's Warriors of the Wonderful Sound, a progressive big band.

For local players, there are few rooms offering accessible and consistent work, but the ones that do are worth visiting. **Tritone**, a bare-bones rock club on South Street, sets time aside monthly for the Warriors as well as guitarist Matt Davis' Aerial Photograph, a wildly imaginative chamber-jazz ensemble. And thanks to the members of the young exploratory quartet Shot x Shot, there are new stirrings at **Gojjo**, an Ethiopian restaurant in West Philly that hosts Science Fiction Sessions: New Music Sundays. Along with good chow and cheap pitchers, you can take in left-of-center musings by saxophonist/poet Elliott Levin, electronics guru Charles Cohen, violinist Katt Hernandez and many others.

Philly's reputation as a great music town goes beyond jazz, of course, encompassing soul and R&B, hip-hop, indie rock, and classical music. Within the scene you'll find a lively synergy of styles, all in a kind of dialogue. "It seems to me that's the Philadelphia journey, to come through all the legendary roots of music," says Levin, and he should know — he's worked with everyone from Cecil Taylor to Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes. "It's a meeting place," he adds. "A lot of things come together here, and grow out of here." ▲