

Athens Clubland Shakedown 2010

Perri Pagonis

perripagonis@yahoo.com

Live rock and jazz music in the heart of the city, I ask you, what could be a more tasty activity to partake in on a crisp Autumn evening? In Athens, it helps to have some idea of what you want to see and where to go, as most clubs that are listed in the city guides simply have DJs who endlessly play Nirvana, and Pearl in the rockadikos or endlessly spin Miles's *Kind of Blue* in the jazz joints and demand to be respected as savants for their musical offerings to the laity.

Live music is still not terribly widespread in the city. The clubs aren't clustered together, and occasionally they are located on small streets. Bouzoukia music still stands like a colossus over the scene, but the bouzouki clubs are notoriously expensive and usually operate between the hours of midnight and seven in the morning for the hardcore drinkers and party crowd.

Rock Information You Should Know

In Athens, the English word "rock," can mean many number of things. When kids or 20-somethings gather at clubs or parties and ask "eisai rock;" or "are you rock?" It's almost like a question you'd find on a Myers-Briggs personality test. It's more of a statement/question of fashion, attitude and mentality more than musical preference. Unfortunately, almost the same gray-area criteria can be used to describe the Athens rock scene.

When one is in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles or London and one uses the word "rock", it means long hair, tattoos, loud guitars, songs about sex, drugs and cars, leather pants, boots and lots of little silver jewelry-things worn as accoutrements. In Athens it can mean anything from two nerdy kids with a Casio keyboard to a high school orchestra that plays the musical score from the rock opera *Tommy*. There are no nailed-down archetypal or ideological pre-conceptions that go along with this specific musical genre.

This sitch can be confusing for those who are in town for a short period of time and desire to see a good rock show. When one picks up any of the free weekly city guides there are many club/band options under the label rock/pop. One must have a keen eye for details or someone who knows the scene personally to be guided towards exactly what you'd like to hear. For those interested in rock music mostly with the aforementioned LA, London, New York-style characteristics, this short list has been created for your use.

One must remember, above all, that Athens is primarily a bouzoukia town, with the name pop/laika/rembetica singers filling the large clubs several nights a week. Bouzoukias rule everything in the city, and bouzoukia stars are like demigods to the people here. If you had mouth singers like Ellie Kokkino, Peggy Zina, Georgos Mazonakis or Antonis Remos, you better be prepared to back it up with some muscle.

Rock, although almost always having had a strong underground following, still remains somewhat outside the norm but with a very dedicated, fringe following. There simply aren't a lot of real rock clubs in Athens. This subjective list contains most of them.

After Dark Club- Didotou 31 & Ippokratous. 210-360-6460. The jewel in the crown of small rock bars. Owner/soundman Nikos supports every musical genre, from heavy funk to street punk at bargain prices. The emphasis is primarily on rock, rockabilly and blues. Bands such as Ducky Boys, Rockets and Dustbowl are regulars. Entrance fee is usually 5-8 Euros and shows begin around midnight. Best variety of bands and value for entertainment money in the city. Upcoming shows include: September 30- Super Puma (recommended show)

An Club- Solomou 13-15. 210-330-5056. For more than 20 years, An was/is the best known Greek rock club in the world. From its early days as pure-rock format, it has currently morphed into the place for Greek rap and very young metal bands to cut their teeth. They often feature battle-of-the-bands competitions and cluster shows which feature 5-6 baby rivet-head groups. Name bands still play occasionally but not as often as in previous years. A very good place to see the sub-sub culture of thrash/metal/rap. Upcoming shows include: October 1- Napalm Death, October 2- Lord 13, October 22- Pro-pain, November 13- Diamond Head, December 24- Nightstalker, Planet of Zeus.

Gagarin 205 Live Music Space- Liossion 205 (Attikh Metro) 210-854-7600(2). Thank God, every city in the world has something like a Gagarin club: a former industrial warehouse, retro-fitted with stage and PA, painted flat black from floor to ceiling. It's the best mid-level club in town. Gagarin is bigger than a good-sized rock bar and smaller than an arena. It holds many shows for older metal bands who continue to have die-hard fan clubs, alternative name bands and cult foreign acts with enough name to pull-in decent numbers of fans. Good sound, good prices, nice bartenders. Upcoming shows include: October 9- New Model Army and Deus Ex Machina, November 12- Fuzztones, December 11- GBH and January 8, 2011, Rotting Christ.

Music House Diavlos- Drakou 9, Koukaki (Syngrou-Fix Metro). These guys tend toward the arty stuff, having brought in acts like Baby Dee, Lydia Lunch and Scarlet's Well. Good sound, great atmosphere, as it really is an old house turned into a club, and really nice bartenders and waitresses. Tickets usually 20-30 Euros. Excellent place to take Humanities Division college girls, open-minded nurses or Greenpeace activist-babes on a date.

Fuzz Music Club- Patriarchou Ioakeim 1, Tavros. 6985 555081. The boutique mid-level club in Athens. Remarkably clean for a music club and sound system that practically ululates with

digital clarity. Many cult metal bands like Haunted, Lamb of God, WASP and Uli Roth have played there. They also showcase name DJs, world beat, rap and Greek music. The prettiest rock club in town, by far. Most shows cost around 30-40 Euros. Worth it just for sound quality. Upcoming shows include WASP on October 29, Einsturzende Neubauten on October 30.

Rodeo Club- Heyden 34, Victoria Square (Victoria Train Station) 210-881-4702. After An club, Rodeo is the local legend rock club in town. It tends towards the grimy side of the rock culture, with shows by rock, metal and visiting anemic dinosaur bands. Sound has always been a bit dicey, as bass EQ sometimes flubs out and mids can sometimes get muddy. All in all, not a bad night out, but don't expect high glam.

Sin City- AKA the former Underworld club, AKA the former Texas Necropolis Club- Themistokleous and Gambetta 5 (Omonia Metro) 697-280-2171. Excellent dark, industrial, EBM, metal and goth club in the heart of downtown. The decor is Clive Barker/Hellraiser/HR Giger. Good place for gothlings to get their first taste of pure anti-culture as the crowd usually looks like cast extras from the films *Escape from New York* and *Blade Runner*. Nice bartenders, good DJs. Live music until midnight-1 a.m. Afterwards it's the heart-of-the-heart of the goth scene until the early morning. If you meet your future mate there, your children will look like Keith Richards or Courtney Love. I'm not kidding.

Jazz stuff you should know and a couple of clubs worth checking out:

Jazz bars are few and far between in Athens. There are a couple of live music local spots worth visiting, but when big names come to town like Herbie Hancock or any of the Marsalis people, they invariably go to play at the Megaro Moussikis (Palace of Music) in the city center. The best tickets can go for upwards of three hundred Euros. My first car cost three hundred dollars. There are however, a couple of alternatives that don't cost nearly as much and you can enjoy your cocktail while the band is playing, and not be exiled to the foyer area mini- bar.

Half note Jazz club

Tribonianou 17, Metz

210 9213 360

The absolute best jazz club in the city. The Half Note is an institution in Athens, and it is the only club which has enough room for a full band of ten or more musicians to really wail and not slam into each other. The sitting distance from the stage is ample enough where you don't get bombarded by the music, but can hear and see minutia of what's happening live.

Half Note features an outstanding sound system, table and side seating, and friendly wait staff. Undoubtedly, the club features the best variety of international jazz names. Whether established legends or the hot new name in world jazz, when in Athens, they'll be at the Half Note.

Dizzy Miles

Athanasias 4 & Eutihidou, Pangrati 210 364 0614

The up and coming “in” spot in the city for live Jazz, funk and blues music. Situated in a side street, neoclassical building, the setting is perfect for intimate live jazz, with plenty of chill-out space and an open garden area for the spring and fall months. Dizzy Miles features low prices, an incredibly well stocked bar, the friendliest bartenders in town, and live classical chamber music on Sunday afternoons.