

Jeff Hammarlund takes us on a musical tour of the weird and wonderful city of Portland, Oregon

KeeP Portland Weird! The slogan appears on bumper stickers, store fronts, and walls. It first appeared over a decade ago to encourage residents to support local independent businesses, but it has since taken on a life of its own. Portland is a little weird, but in a sweet and goofy way – we don't take our town, or ourselves, too seriously.

Cut out of dense evergreen forests, Portland is not a large city. It has less than 600,000 people, 28 micro-breweries, and a coffee culture that competes with Seattle. It's a quirky city that takes environmental issues seriously and has a remarkable restaurant culture.

Musically, Portland may be best known for the recent labels various rock magazines have bestowed on it: *Indie City*, *America's Indie Rock Mecca*, and the like. All of this is quite startling to those who remember Portland in the 1950s and 60s as a strikingly dull city. Its reputation as a hipster mecca grew with the arrival of bands and musicians such as The

Decemberists, The Shins and M Ward. Portlanders tend to scoff at these pronouncements of grandeur. It does not fit their quirky self-image. But I suspect most are secretly pleased.

Proud of their city's role in early folk and rock history, a few old-timers still tell the story of how folk-singer Woody Guthrie wrote some of his most famous songs in Portland. Locals will also tell you that Portland's boundary-pushing music scene extends far beyond indie-rock, including great bluegrass, blues, jazz, world, and world-fusion music.

According to the musicians themselves, what most distinguishes Portland's music scene is the exceptional level of support and collaboration among the musicians and fans. Artists cross-pollinate by sharing instruments, backing each other up, and playing in each other's bands. This camaraderie is best exemplified in the organisation known as PDX Pop Now. It began as a simple mailing list and now consists of hundreds of young volunteers who have committed themselves to

'celebrating, promoting and sustaining Portland's vital and diverse music community'. Every July, a free festival showcases up to 50 of Portland's best up-and-coming bands from every musical tradition imaginable and some that have yet to be imagined.

Several professional music critics have noted that Portland's music scene lacks a distinctive and unifying 'sound'. It is this very melding of eclectic sounds from different musical traditions and eras that make Portland's music so surprising and fun. The genre-defying and eclectic nature of Portland's music scene is epitomised by Pink Martini, a once struggling Portland big band that now performs its wildly diverse multilingual repertoire on concert stages and with symphony orchestras around the world. As bandleader and pianist Thomas Lauderdale explains: "Pink Martini is a rollicking around-the-world musical adventure... if the United Nations had a house band in 1962, hopefully we'd be that band." Now wouldn't that be a welcome sight.



RECORDED MUSIC STORES

Portland has two wonderful independent music stores that deserve special mention.

Music Millennium

Launched in 1969, this is the oldest record store in the Pacific north-west. As soon as you walk in, you will see why it is consistently ranked as one of best record stores in the country. They take their logo

'A Place Where Music and People Still Matter' very seriously. Many of the staff members are also top-notch local musicians who are passionate and knowledgeable. Don't be surprised if you run into a famous musician or two.

3158 East Burnside,
www.buymusicere.net/stores/musicmillennium



Timbuktones, Music of the World

Owner Andy Hosch seems to know as much about world music as anyone on the planet. He gets to know the taste of his regular

customers so he can suggest music they might enjoy.

4726 SE Hawthorne Boulevard,
www.timbuktunes.com

FESTIVALS

MusicFestNW (MFNW)

The largest Portland festival, which takes over the main square downtown and virtually every music venue in town for a week in September. Although heavy on the indie-rock scene for which Portland is best known, MFNW does not shy away from other musical styles.
September 7-11, 2011, various venues,
musicfestnw.com

PDX Pop Now!

A more grass-roots and low-key approach offered each July. This free, three-day festival is known for its efforts to celebrate, promote and sustain Portland's diverse music community and showcases Portland's best up-and-coming bands and draws audiences in the thousands.
July 22-24, 2011, various venues,
www.pdxpopnow.com

Portland Waterfront Blues Festival

One of the largest and best blues festivals anywhere. The festival attracts more than 100,000 blues fans from around the world. Many of the world's greatest blues and zydeco artists give it their all in more than 135

performances on four stages. The price of admission is by donation and two tins of healthy food.

July 1-4, 2011, Tom McCall Waterfront Park,
www.waterfrontbluesfest.org

Oregon Zoo Summer Concert Series

Offers 20 performances in a lovely grassy bowl near the corner of the zoo. The promoter loves world music and has brought in many of the best artists over the years. There's room for dancing up front, but should you find yourself towards the back of the bowl, you can still watch the elephants sway back and forth if they like the music.

June 23-August 27, 2011,
www.oregonzoo.org/Concerts

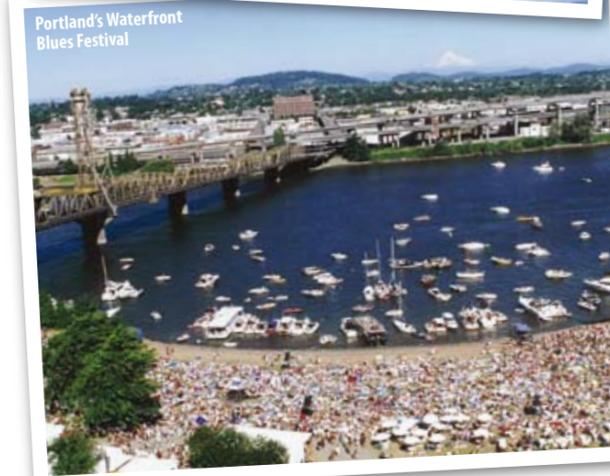
Kalakendra, Society for the Performing Arts of India

The Society offers an annual concert series designed to enhance Portland's awareness of performing arts from the Indian subcontinent. Over the years, it has featured top-tier artists as Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, Zakir Hussain, Tibetan monks, and John McLaughlin.

kalakendra.org



Portland-based band Pink Martini



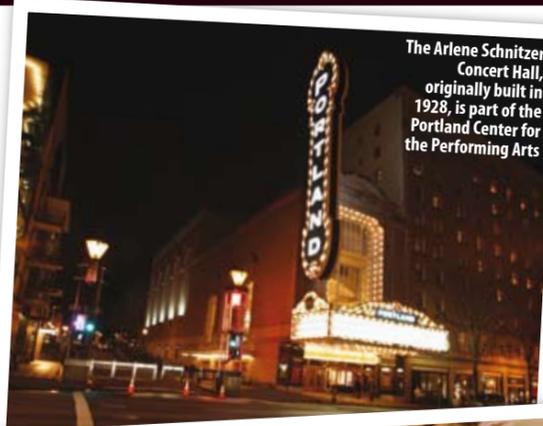
Portland's Waterfront Blues Festival

VENUES

Portland Center for the Performing Arts

Located in the city's Cultural District and considered one of the nation's top ten performing arts centres. It is home to the city's symphony, opera, ballet, and hosts tours of Broadway musicals. It is here that such world music stars as *fado* diva Mariza, Béla Fleck, Zakir Hussain and Edgar Meyer have performed.

1111 SW Broadway, www.pcpa.com



The Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, originally built in 1928, is part of the Portland Center for the Performing Arts

Aladdin Theater

Launched as a vaudeville house in the 1920s, it was renovated in 1993 into the award-winning music venue it is today. It was no coincidence that the first musical group to take the stage after this renovation was the Throat Singers of Tuva. Aladdin is often chosen by acts that might normally play larger concert halls, but want a more intimate environment. In addition to world music, it features jazz, blues, world music, pop, bluegrass, roots and everything in between.

3017 SE Milwauke Ave, 503-234-2694,
www.aladdin-theater.com



The theatrical interior of the Crystal Ballroom

Crystal Ballroom

One of the few remaining ballrooms to feature a 'floating' dance floor. In the 60s, the Crystal was the ultimate rock palace. Old-timers claim it was here that Little Richard fired Jimi Hendrix in the middle of a performance. It now features major touring acts. Just one floor below the Crystal is Lola's Room, frequented by groups and audiences that prefer more intimate seated performances.

1332 W. Burnside,
www.mcmenamins.com/425-crystal-ballroom-home

Mississippi Studios

A venue built by local musicians and music lovers. The club offers live music nightly. It features over a thousand bands a year, including musicians from all over the world.

3939 N Mississippi,
www.mississippistudios.com

The Goodfoot

If dancing to live music until you find yourself in a pool of sweat is your thing, you can't beat The Goodfoot. The food and pool upstairs are fine, but the real action is on the dance floor downstairs where groups such as Jujuba play a funky, style of Nigerian Juju and Afro-beat music.

2845 SE Stark Street, thegoodfoot.com