

## SAN FRANCISCO

SOUNDING OUT

JENNY SOLOMON/FOTOLIA.COM; MELA SOGONO; COURTESY OF THEATRE BAY AREA

## Jeff Kaliss takes us on a musical mystery tour of this majestic city

The City by the Bay has long been a desired destination for the rest of the globe. On a relatively small peninsula – between the brisk ocean to the west, the breathtaking Golden Gate Bridge to the north, the placid skyscraper-clad bay to the east, and the quiet majesty of San Bruno Mountain to the south – the diversity of San Francisco is as apparent in its musical offerings as in its world-famous restaurants. Its relatively benign climate, in which fog and sun are gentle competitors, allows for some amount of open-air dining and outdoor festivals in plentiful parkland.

Indoor music venues range from the historical and contemporary concert halls of the Civic Center to the hospitable clubs of the city's many distinct neighbourhoods. There's a large Asian population, principally Chinese, which also contributes to the musical and cultural variety. The greater San Francisco Bay Area is a haven for global traditions and a dynamic centre in which these traditions can evolve. Ali Akbar Khan came here in 1968, a year after the so-called Summer of Love, to fulfill the mission given to him by his father and teacher, Baba Allauddhin Khan: to bring North Indian classical music to "the right people."

The Indian-born *sarod* master chose the northern reaches of the Bay Area as the ideal setting for his Ali Akbar College of Music because of "the atmosphere, the sun, and the mountain [Mount Tamalpais], and the people, who are sincere." Like Nubian *oud*-player Hamza El Din, Akbar found his own world widened by his relocation to this eclectic locale. He counted among his students rock stars and classical virtuosi, and himself performed and recorded with jazz saxophonist John Handy. Now, more than two years after Ali Akbar's passing, his college is still thriving and contributing to the Bay Area's fertile musical scene.



## VENUES

**Freight & Salvage**

A trio of Berkeley clubs have stayed true to the mission of providing roots music in comfortable environments at affordable prices. But the nonprofit community arts organisation Freight & Salvage Coffeehouse has moved into Berkeley's newly refurbished performing arts district. It is now much closer to the campus, the underground station, good restaurants, and has also doubled its seating capacity.  
**2020 Addison Street, Berkeley, +1 510 644 2020, [www.freightandsalvage.org](http://www.freightandsalvage.org)**

**Ashkenaz**

Berkeley's Ashkenaz Music & Dance Community Center offers Cajun, Zydeco, Balkan, Turkish, reggae and Brazilian music, often with pre-show dance lessons, open mic sessions and kids' programmes.  
**1317 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, +1 510 525 5054, [www.ashkenaz.com](http://www.ashkenaz.com)**

**Yoshi's**

Yoshi's in Oakland is a world class Japanese restaurant and jazz venue, but recently they have featured more world music acts including Baaba Maal, Ladysmith Black

Mambazo and Hugh Masekela. Its younger sister across the Bay, Yoshi's in San Francisco, was opened in 2007 in what's become known as the Fillmore Jazz District but bookings have been even more eclectic, including, aside from the top-drawer jazz: Latin American and Brazilian, Caribbean, African, Hawaiian, and a variety catering to a sizeable local Iranian community, as well as occasional rock and funk.  
**510 Embarcadero West, Oakland, +1 510 238 9200, [www.yoshis.com/oakland](http://www.yoshis.com/oakland)**  
**1330 Fillmore Street, San Francisco, +1 415 655 5600, [www.yoshis.com/sanfrancisco](http://www.yoshis.com/sanfrancisco)**

## FESTIVALS

### SFJAZZ

Master percussionist Zakir Hussain, former director of percussion for the Ali Akbar College, has sometimes been engaged by SFJAZZ, which makes use of several venues and a sizeable budget to showcase world music stars alongside jazz luminaries in its fall and spring seasons. **Various Bay Area venues, +1 866 920 5299, www.sfjazz.org**

### Cal Performances

The Cal Performances series brings a broad range of performers to the impressive stages of the campus of the University of California at Berkeley, including jazz, classical, theatre and dance. **October-May, various campus venues, +1 510 642 0212, www.calperfs.berkeley.edu**

### SF World Music Festival

This year saw the 12th edition of this three-day event which brings international artists from the Bay Area and from around the globe (see Festival Profile in #32). **Autumn, various venues, www.sfworldmusicfestival.org**

### Hardly Strictly Bluegrass

More than 90 acts perform for hundreds of thousands of fans at this free festival (whose 11th edition was featured in #80). The

festival's focus on bluegrass has expanded to other American roots music including classic and contemporary country singer-songwriters such as Abigail Washburn. **Late September-early October, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, www.strictlybluegrass.com**

### Jewish Music Festival

The annual Jewish Music Festival (running 27 years) might feature anything from liturgical music to Israeli hip-hop. **March, various East Bay venues, www.jewishmusicfestival.org**

### Cherry Blossom Festival

The delicacy of flower arrangement will contrast with the throbbing roar of *taiko* drums and singing, under the aegis of the San Francisco Taiko Dojo, during the Cherry Blossom Festival in Japantown. **April, Post Street, San Francisco, www.nccbf.org**

### San Francisco Carnaval

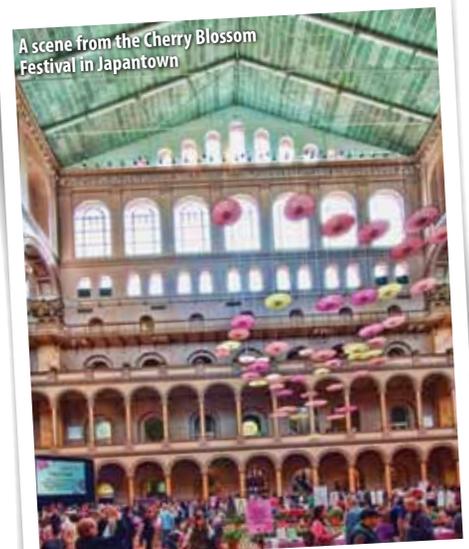
Rescheduled from the chill of February to the relative warmth of late May, the annual Carnaval Parade through the Mission District will feature a procession of synco-pated and sometimes scantily clad dancers, with particularly strong showings from the Bay Area's substantial Brazilian population. **May, Mission and adjoining streets, San Francisco, www.sfcarnaval.com**

### San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival

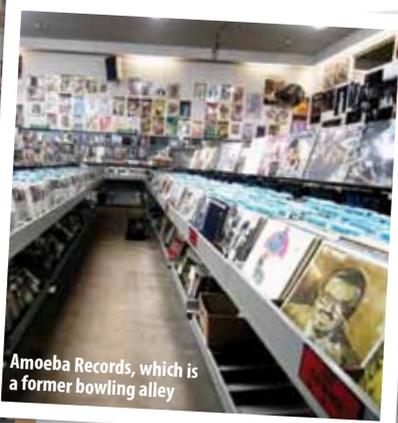
A tantalising variety of live musicians accompanying ritual, celebratory and artistic dances from around the globe. **June, various San Francisco venues, www.sfethnidancefestival.org**

### Stern Grove Festival

Enjoy a variety of music and dance performance under the trees of Stern Grove in the city's Sunset District while you picnic. Bring layers of clothing, in case of fog. **June-September, Stern Grove, Sloat Blvd. at 19th Avenue, San Francisco, www.sterngrove.org**



A scene from the Cherry Blossom Festival in Japantown



Amoeba Records, which is a former bowling alley

## RECORD STORES

### Amoeba Records

Many local record stores have gone under – from the giant Virgin and Tower emporiums to smaller neighbourhood delights like the Streetlight and Village Music stores. But this former bowling alley in the Haight-Ashbury still stocks everything you'd want; new and used and meticulously organised, with friendly and knowledgeable staff to back it up. **1855 Haight Street, San Francisco, +1 415 831 1200, www.amoeba.com**

### Down Home Music/ Arhoolie Records

In an unprepossessing edifice a few miles north of Berkeley, the revered Chris Strachwitz continues to promote roots music through his Down Home Music Store and, on the second floor of the same building, his Arhoolie Records label. The store has plenty of stock including music documentary DVDs produced by Les Blank. **10341 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito, +1 510 525 2129, www.downhomemusic.com, www.arhoolie.com**

### La Peña

La Peña Cultural Center, as its name implies, tends towards Latin American and Caribbean acts, some of them with a political activist agenda. **3105 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, +1 510 849 2568, www.lapena.org**

### The Plough and Stars

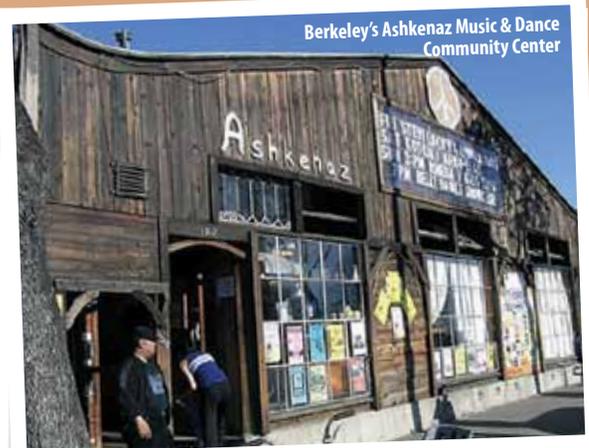
To the west, in the Richmond District, you'll find traditional Irish music, manifest in *seisiúns*, *ceilidh* dances, and contemporised forms, along with bluegrass (a distant Celtic cousin). The Plough and Stars also boasts

that it serves "the best pint of Guinness in San Francisco."

**116 Clement Street, San Francisco, +1 415 751 1122, www.theploughandstars.com**

### Peña Pachamama

The fun continues in this former North Beach speakeasy with Bolivian cuisine and cocktails and a menu of musical live shows five nights a week. Aside from an Andean house band, there's a range of Latin and other sounds, plus dancers. **1630 Powell Street, San Francisco, +1 415 646 0018, www.pachamamacenter.org**



Berkeley's Ashkenaz Music & Dance Community Center