

Music Around Town

By Michelle Weisblat-Dane

Whether your interests range from country to rock or even heavy metal, there is no need to look any further than your own backyard for some of the best music in Colorado. From the *Organic Earth Café*, on the Northwest end of Manitou Ave to *Benny's* on Colorado Ave. just West of I-25 (Manitou Avenue becomes Colorado Avenue on the Colorado Springs border) your ears will be more than pleased by the high quality of live music. The "West Side" has something for any and every one, you just have to know where to look. On any Friday or Saturday night, a simple stroll through Manitou and Old Colorado City affords you the opportunity to listen to top notch live music.

We begin our stroll, and our "West Side Story," with the *Organic Earth Café* on the West end of Manitou Ave. Friday nights you can hear cool, and hot, jazz bands. Saturday nights they present Reggae and what can only be described as "Tantric Hip-Hop ably performed by a local couple." Both are interesting and, in theme with the *Organic Earth*, slightly out of the ordinary. The restaurant, as is evidenced by its name, relies heavily on fresh and organic foods, delicacies, and complete meals. The quality, even for the non-vegan, is quite good.

A long block down East on Manitou Ave is *The Ancient Mariner*, well (and popularly) known as "The birthplace of Shakedown Street" (a Grateful Dead style rock band). *The Mariner* hosts many other live rock and blues bands on Friday and Saturday nights. These include local bands such as *The Old Dog Band* (who host *The Ancient Mariner's* Thursday night "open mic") and *Peter Burg and The Blue Suburban* (who play a blend of original heavy and cool blues).

Speaking of Shakedown Street, they recently went on a national tour with members of the Grateful Dead. Currently on hiatus from traveling, we are fortunate to be able to catch the band playing special "day gigs" at places like *Sugar Magnolia's*. Look for them, and their followers, around town. If you've ever been, or wanted to be, a "Dead Head" (and even if not) you won't be disappointed.

Continuing our stroll down Manitou Avenue we find ourselves at *The Town House Lounge*, a replica of an Old-West bar, without the dirty saw dust on the floor. *The Town House* plays country and blue-grass music with "a slight touch of rock". Bands and performers with names like *The Joe Six Pack* band and *C. W. Handy* can be seen and heard playing there. Some of the shows have a minimal entrance or cover charge and require "21 or Over".

Further East is *Sugar Magnolia's*, an ice cream shop, which also serves light meals, and sports an old-fashioned "ice cream bar." It is an ideal spot for that family looking for some good acoustic music. The performers, shows, times and days vary, but it's always "family fare with no fare required." Remember to enjoy some of their hand-packed ice cream and custom fountain drinks.

Across the street, and slightly West on Cañon Ave., is the *Adams Café*, offering solo acoustic acts from classic to folk. On Fridays you can catch their music with lunch. The music is fresh, unobtrusive, and makes both a pleasant background and an act worth actively watching and hearing. Their food is freshly prepared, can be customized to taste, and features styles from Thai to Italian to American with an emphasis on fish, vegetables and whole grains.

A hop across the border into Old Colorado City we find *Meadow Muffins*. Recently remodeled after a major fire, it now offers one of the area's largest musical arenas with plenty of seating at tables and the bar. Fridays, and some Saturdays, is the time to catch the live shows with their house regulars Tempa and the Tantrums, Train Wreckers, and Joanne Taylor. Good local rock and blues bands can also regularly be heard there. Their menu is limited, but freshly prepared. Prices and quality are more than good enough to go there without entertainment.

A block down on 21st street, just off Colorado Avenue, is *Thirsty's* (formerly the *Olde Town Tavern*). A small but friendly place, it is the home to That Band and The Nocturnal Tomatoes.

Recently the featured band in Colorado Springs New Years Eve Party (aka "The Glitter Ball"), That Band outlasted negative wind chill factors and kept the downtown streets literally jumping until after midnight. They play everything from rock to blues to beach and surf music. Watch out for them, and be prepared to say "Hey, I've heard That Band!" The Nocturnal Tomatoes, recently back from a state-wide tour, plays rock cover tunes as well as some really good originals. They also have their very own light and stage show, something not very common these days. Try to catch them at *Thirsty's* before they leave for their national tour mid summer.

By the way, *Thirsty's* is a bar. Evenings are "over 21 only" and expect to "mingle" as seating and space is limited. Still, say "Hi" to Fred (the bartender), who works as hard as many of the bands do. Tell him we sent you (You won't get anything special; well, other than a friendly, if hurried, smile).

Just before you reach the Interstate you'll find Colorado Springs' *Benny's Bar*, the host to many national and local heavy metal and punk bands. Saturday nights will find bands such as Mansfield, Dipsomaniacs, and Jesus Murphy. Groups such as these are known for their gracious - and usually gratuitous - lyrics, high power, and truly electric performances. They are not for the easily shocked, but they will restart a failing pacemaker. Just to prove that it is not just for the "pierced and 'toed" crowd, most Fridays are Rock-A-Billy nights. *Benny's* is almost always crowded so be prepared to join the crush. There's no food in the evenings (they serve a "liquid breakfast" in the mornings, though), and if you find the scene boring, the "other room" has darts, pool and shuffleboard.

Finally, just two short blocks North on Bijou Street, is the *Le Baron Hotel*. Fridays will provide you with music styles of rock, country, folk and jazz. Some of the regular bands are Boomer Box - mostly custom-arranged cover music, Jim Young - country pop without the hardcore country, and Cherokee Rose and the Medicine Men - new and

different Indian pop, blues and a few covers just for fun. The only guarantee is good. Music at the *Le Baron* is in *Riley's Bar*.

Summertime in Manitou Springs is a special time for music and performances in general. During the day, and well into the warm evenings, you'll find Manitou's "Street Musicians" on corners, in the parks, in front of many of the downtown stores, almost anywhere. They will be playing most anything (guitar, clarinet, dulcimer, tambourine, bagpipes, drums...) in any style. Many of them are professionals, having fun and demonstrating talents, working only for tips. If you like what they are doing, or appreciate their work, let them know by adding to their tip containers. If you are looking for information as to where and what about Manitou Springs, most of them will willingly help out - but please wait for the end of their song before expecting an answer.

Also during the summer, Manitou Springs features concerts in the parks with music from rock to brass bands to country to mountain dulcimer. The Soda Springs Park pavilion hosts weekly band recitals (ask at the Manitou Chamber of Commerce, or check at the park for schedules).

There are a number of regular community events - with quality local and nationally known musicians and bands performing free. The Manitou Springs Festival of the Arts, Memorial Weekend presents arts, crafts, and a wide mix of music. The Fourth of July weekend sees the old-west themed "Days of '59 Buffalo Bar-B-Q" with food, booths, and western music, culminating in the annual fireworks show (presented by the Manitou Springs Fire Department) from the side Red Mountain.

For over twenty years, the Manitou Mountain Music Festival (the last full weekend in August) has presented dulcimer, bluegrass, country, folk, and other "mountain" music in a three day open and free concert. One of the last truly free festivals, musicians from around the United States - and sometimes places far more exotic - perform on stage in Soda Springs Park from morning until late evening. Classes in musicianship and dulcimer playing are also available.

Professional events, such as the Commonwheel Art Festival, over the Labor Day Weekend, exhibit some of the finest local and regional artwork, and feature fine musical performances as well. Add to these Manitou's annual wine and beer tasting festivals, all with live music, and you're still just touching the tip of the musical iceberg

Manitou Springs and Old Colorado City, the West side of town, has something for everyone's musical tastes, day and night, all year around. But now, summertime, the living - and the music - is easy; just follow your ears.