

Go Scat

By Tiffany Figueiredo Photos by Ralph Lauer

Go!

To get there, you turn off into a well-lit alley and head for the door illuminated by the neon. You're leaving the backward-ball-cap crowd behind. Punch the button and a quick elevator ride takes you down into chilled air and the sound of tinkling glasses.



Scat Jazz Lounge

111 W. 4th St. at Houston Street in downtown Fort Worth. Hours are 5 p.m.-2 a.m. Tuesday-Friday, 6 p.m.-2 a.m. Saturday and 7 p.m.-1 a.m. Sunday; closed Monday. 817-870-9100; www.scatjazzlounge.com

The best joints are always underground; speakeasy style, down some alley and hidden away, save for an old-school neon sign pointing the way to where hipsters hang out listening to jazz. New York has its share, as do cities like Chicago, and while it may not have much history behind it, Fort Worth's Scat Jazz Lounge has quickly made its mark as one of the best, and coolest, nightspots in the country.

In February, *DownBeat* magazine, the 75-year-old chronicler of all things jazz, named Scat one of the 100 best jazz clubs in the world, along with icons such as Birdland, Blue Note and the Village Vanguard. Not bad for a club opened little more than a year ago in a town known mostly for its honky-tonks.

"Fort Worth has a lot of true jazz aficionados, who haven't had a place to go since Caravan of Dreams closed, although even Caravan wasn't dedicated solely to jazz acts," says co-owner Cary Ray, who also has a stake in downtown seafood restaurant Daddy Jack's. "We're not just giving a nod to jazz here, we're all about jazz."

By focusing exclusively on the genre in all its forms, from Latin to swing to traditional to bebop, and creating a sophisticated space that lets the performers shine, Scat owners Cary Ray, Neal Connell and Ricki Derek



At the Scat, the crowd is there to listen, to have a cocktail or two and dance. The room is cozy and the lights are dim and the vibe is very, very cool. Left, the club's name is projected onto a velvet curtain in the foyer.



(a fantastic Sinatra-style singer in his own right who headlines a monthly Big Band Tuesday) have managed to bring in national acts like Curtis Fuller, Kimberly



Johnny Reno and his band hold court on Thursdays at the Scat.

Gordon and Nnenna Freelon. Local favorites, including Derek, Johnny Reno (see Page 82), Tatiana Mayfield, Shelley Carrol and Pete Gallio make regular appearances as well.

Ray says that when he and his partners signed the lease with Sundance Square in 2007 for the basement level of the 1920s Woolworth Building, they were blessed with a blank canvas on which to paint their vision of

a sophisticated, classy music venue. By year's end, with the help of Scotty Dennett of Scott Dennett Construction, the space was finished out with great sightlines and a versatile stage.

A swanky feel was achieved with dark-red velvet, curvy Deco-style booths, low lighting and an expensive, high-tech ventilation system that allows for smoking (but still allows nonsmokers to breathe easy). There's a dance floor, albeit a small one, and those who want to move to the

groove make do with what they have.

With no televisions or neon beer signs behind the bar, it's the type of place that makes you want to get all dolled up and order an extra-dry martini. Or

maybe you're in the mood for a sidecar, gin rickey or a stinger. The Scat always seems the right place for a retro cocktail.

Although no food is served, with so many good restaurants within walking distance and most of the performances starting around 9 p.m., it doesn't matter. This is a place for people who want to stay up late, enjoy the music and dance.

It's dark, it's cozy and, of course, it's cool.



The neon sign, designed by Lewisville artist Don Dolzschuh, points the way to the downstairs club.