By the time I get to boppin' Ann Arbor ...

A music lover's guide to A^2: everything you could ever want to know about this college town's music scene

by Scott Sterling

Sitting in the back of your parents car, as they gleefully barrel down the freeway to finally ship you of to the illustrious University Of Michigan, a plethora of questions run rampant through your brain. Will my roommate be a psycho? Who will I get to buy for me? How long 'til I cheat on my beloved high school sweetheart? But most importantly, how and where am I going to get my music fix??

Still high from that intoxicating day at Lollapalooza II, you're constantly jonesing for something new. Finally able to appreciate Ornette Coleman as much as Morrissey, (or vice-versa) your newly enlightened self is eager to check out the hip and happenin' local pubs and discover some stylin' new bands to lavish your alternateen affection upon.

Have no fear, because Ann ("The Jan") Arbor is bursting with a wealth of way cool bands, and a musical history second to none.

Iggy and the Stooges crawled out of our humble burg, taking their terrifying and gorgeously fractured fuzzbuzz to the world. If it wasn't for the Igster, we'd probably still be listening to Pat Boone. Along with his merry band of Stooges, he singlehandedly invented what todays is known as "alternative," "grunge," "modern rock," whatever the hell you wanna call it. Combining manic, trashed-out guitars, a psycho stage presence, with scary and sardonic lyrics, the Stooges smelled like teen spirit long before Nirvana wet their first pair of Huggies.

Ranging from Seattle-style grunge-o-rama rock, to the most "out there" cool ray jazz, Ann Arbor (now home to Dee Dee Ramone — If you see him on the street, go up and say hi. He's really cool!) will give you more than enough reasons to blow off studying and check 'em out. Here's a handy-dandy clip 'n' save short list of just who the hell's who in the musical mecca known as Ann Arbor. Of course, this is in no way a comprehensive list, but a good place to start. And as it goes in the wacky world of rock 'n' soul, bands come and go with the frequency of a cheap ham radio. By the time you read this, many of these groups may be long gone, replaced by a new batch of bands. So be bold, grab your roommate, bring along your older sibling's fake ID (Just kidding — Really!), and discover your own local favorites.

Big Chief — The torque-masters of crunch 'n' munch boom blast, these sonic messiahs have hit the big-time, with an album on Sub-Pop, and an opening slot on the Beastie Boys tour this past Summer. As heavy as Helmet, and gifted with the funk of 40,000 mega-watts, the Chief lays it down *hard*.

Destruction Ride — Straight-up, no chaser rock 'n' roll. Snot-nosed punk meets mid-'70s FM boogie with a kick. And girls, the singer's a dead ringer for Sebastian Bach!

Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band — Hip swaying roots rock reggae. Fire one up.

Slot — Bottom-heavy sonic jazzcore mindfuck cerebral rock, with a dope beat.

Roland B. — Gritty garage power pop trio that kicks it with the best of 'em. A thinking man's Material Issue.

Wig — These groovy grunge lovegods turn it up, lay it down, and look great doing it. Sonic as hell, with a side order of goth.

Tracy Science — Miles Davis meets Curtis Mayfield? This free-form jazz quartet is brilliant, and features Craig, one of the finest keyboard players you'll ever see.

Billy — More likely to play at a house party than a bar, this instrumental ensemble does hiisstrock headtrip pyschedelia like nobody's business. Ya like Ride, My Bloody Valentine, Lush, and such? Then you'll worship Billy.





Big Chief opened for the Beastie Boys, but still can't take a decent photo.

... your newly enlightened self is eager to ... discover some stylin' new bands ...

Culture Shock — Funky-butt Princesters that are on time 24-7. With hot sauce on top. And they can step too!

Holy Cows — Yee-ha! These Chelsea-bred cowpunks can out replace the Replacements, and have more soul Than Soul Asylum. THE good-time slam-bang fun boys around town.

Voodo Chili — Rip-roarin' rave-up rock that has a good beat, and you can dance to it. I'll give it an 85. Dick.

Harm's Way — Heavy metal speedcore with some thrash and trash for good measure.

Etch-A-Sketch — More ska than you can handle, these gals & guys turn on the sweat machine with their mosh 'n' skank mania.

Frank Allison & the Odd Sox — Eclectic, quirky, and gleefully goofy, singer-songwriter Allison and his cohorts just wanna have fun. And they've toured Russia twice!

Unfortunately, Ann Arbor's not as abundant with venues to check out these bands. Most of the bars that feature live bands are for those folks that are 21 and older, such as Rick's American Cafe.

Rick's is a jock/frat watering hole that hosts mostly cover bands, like Grateful Deadheads Assembly Required, but occasionally brings in original acts like Sun-60 and Miracle Legion.

The Blind Pig admits those 19 and over, but for national acts, usually lowers it to 18. The Pig is where you'll catch more of the "alternative" original acts, such as Urge Overkill, Cop Shoot Cop and L7, all of which have played there recently. Flannel shirts, long hair, and cooler-than-thou attitudes are welcome.

There's the Heidelberg, which varies its age limit on a nightly basis (Usually 18-19). They're quite adventurous with the bands that they'll book, so you'll catch lots of first-time bands honing their chops and paying their dues on this stage. Three and four band bills aren't unusual, so you're sure to get more bang for your buck.

So, there you have it, a teeny little nutshell that barely scratches the surface of all the cool bands and bars in and around glorious Ann Arbor.

The Michigan Theatre and Hill Auditorium play host to the bigger national and international bands, such as the Cowboy Junkies, Jesus Jones, and so on. No age limit, but often rather pricey. (Insiders tip: You can charge tickets at these two venues on your Entree Plus card — Catch your fave bands courtesy of mom and dad!)

Another bummer is that quite a few band tend to bypass ol' Ann Arbor all together, and instead play in the fine city of Detroit. (And no, it's not as scary as your folks have told you — You're just as likely to get mugged outside of your dorm as you are in "The City." Just be careful!)

If you're into most of the bands that frequent MTV's "120 Minutes," St. Andrews Hall in Detroit will be your second home. From Pearl Jam to KMFDM to Smashing Pumpkins, St. Andy's has seen 'em all. Right down the street, (sort of) is the larger State Theatre, which also pulls in some biggies. So if you don't have a car, make fast friends with someone who does.

Detroit also has a huge supply of great local bands, from the ska-crazy Gangster Fun, to the dreampop of Majesty Crush, to the sonic guitar rush of Tyrone's Power Wheel.

I should probably also mention that for those of you that would rather shake your booty to some techno tunes or hip-hop as spun by some pretty cool DJ's, the Nectarine Ballroom's the place for you. No live bands, but plenty of industrial dance and rave grooves to keep ya moving.

So, there you have it, a teeny little nutshell that barely scratches the surface of all the cool bands and bars in and around glorious Ann Arbor. There's LOTS to do around here, so don't let me catch you saying that you're bored. You can get out there and check out what's happening, or you could always go to the UGLI and study up on your calculus. The choice is yours.



Frank Allison and the Odd Sox. They're goofy and have toured Russia twice.

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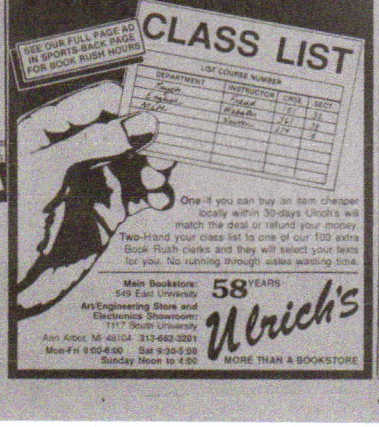
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