

Orlando's JAMBANDO A Musical Thrill Ride!

by Toni Brown; photos courtesy Jambando

Toni Brown, former publisher of Relix magazine and a performing musician, has fronted her own band for several years. From stints in San Francisco and New York City, Toni is now involved in the burgeoning musical landscape that is developing around the Orlando area. You can check it out at www.jambando.com. As you will read, it isn't all mouse ears and theme parks in central Florida - catch the latest thrill ride as a new musical scene makes itself known, once all the children have gone to bed!

September 11, 2001: the horror that occurred five miles from my house in Brooklyn gave me the shove I needed to get out of New York City permanently. Visiting Disney theme parks was always a family passion, so, with ominous concern and the realization that life was way too short and far too precious, we high-tailed it south to where those chilly winds don't blow, at least not too often! By that November, we were living in Orlando.

It took some time to settle in, and when I discovered the area's musical wealth, I was more than ready to jump into the fray with both feet. The extended family of musicians I uncovered embraced my work and encouraged my move back into the live arena. Inspired again to perform full time, it was easy to fit into Orlando's diverse music scene.

Discovering a vibrantly active musical enclave hidden beneath the glow of theme park lights was a bright contrast to the regurgitated pop-inspired pabulum Orlando had previously been famous for. Under the glittering surface of the commercially-fed music marketplace exists a wealth of talented, distinctive performers, and the available space to showcase them.

The first local musician I met was Dave Mann, founder and coordinator of Orlando's Jambando and lead guitarist with funkUs. Mann's continuing vision is to define and expose Orlando's eclectic improvisational music scene, and expand Jambando to showcase local independent bands. Ultimately, the collective intends to unite the regional jam band audience, developing a local market that can support and connect to the national scene.

Due to the constant influx of tourists, Orlando is steeped in entertainment possibilities. There is a healthy variety of clubs dotting the landscape, and it is possible to catch a quality band performing on almost any night. From supper clubs to Irish pubs, it's easy to find live music in this town.

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jazz, blues, bluegrass, R&B, funk, rock, folk - Orlando is establishing itself as home to more musical options than anywhere else I've been, and that's saying a lot. In the early San Francisco days, the local musicians turned out in support of one another, and often used those opportunities to share the stage, creating historically significant musical magic. The emergence of the psychedelic movement was built on the solid basis of the music that was blossoming - Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin and Big Brother, and an endless parade of musicians experimenting with sound (and other things). Things wound down in the late '70s, but the Bay Area was still ripe with excitement - Jerry Garcia playing in Berkeley, Hot Tuna at a club in San Francisco, the Tubes appearing at a theater in town - there was always something happening.

During the late '60s through the '70s, New York City was an amazing place to be - Dylan, Hendrix - a constant tapestry of sound being woven nightly. The Fillmore East brought a tidal wave



of cultural alternatives, linking groups that otherwise would not have had the opportunity to share the stage due to their divergent sounds. In the late '80s, New York's Wetlands Preserve became a Mecca for music. Tuesday was Dead Head Night, and free-flowing jams often ensued. Many bands got their first recognition in that hallowed hall: Phish, Blues Traveler, Warren Haynes and Gov't Mule, Spin Doctors, moe., Widespread Panic, Dave Matthews, Joan Osborne, Disco Biscuits, ekoostik hookah, Jerry Joseph (with Woody Harrelson) - you get the idea. Members of the Grateful Dead, the Allman Brothers, Hot Tuna, and hundreds of other legends found their way onto that stage.

Seattle, Burlington, Athens - musical havens that birthed so many bands, styles, and scenes. These past examples are similar to what I see happening in Orlando now. The Jambando phenomenon is evident through the growth of its tight-knit, loyal fan base. A large, intimate familial atmosphere is ever-present at shows and the bands support each other, coming out to enjoy each other's performances and sharing stages frequently. As the musicians merge material and styles, the artistic expansion is obvious, and the momentum is compelling. Having spent most of my life around the Grateful Dead, my enthusiasm for the new generations emerging from the Dead's inspiration is renewed.

While mainstream music struggles, it is interesting to watch our own little market continue to mature. Having never relied on commercial trappings - such as radio airplay, CD sales, or publici-

ty blitzes - the broad-scoped tribe of jam bands continues to tour when everything else in the music industry has virtually fallen flat.

With the same organic drive and determination that has propelled underground music for decades, Jambando is caught up in the evolution. Recognizing the continuing momentum of independent music, promoters have acknowledged the importance of keeping live music thriving in their venues. Large-scale local events and festivals are in the works. Orlando's musicians are as busy as they've ever been.

Last year, Hard Rock Live Orlando at Universal's City Walk decided to take a chance on Jambando and provided them with a monthly showcase. A rotating lineup of local talent continues to bring in a growing audience.

As central Florida's music scene develops, Jambando is becoming a beacon. One of its goals is to attract regional and national touring bands that have historically bypassed the area. Recent shows have been tapping into the area's vast tourist trade as word of Orlando's music scene expands nationally. Another good sign of the word getting out is the activity on a national level of local live music being traded among interested fans.

You can spend a day enjoying surreal rides and attractions, eating popcorn, and walking in the Florida sun. But when you're in Orlando, don't forget to save some energy for kicking up your heels when night comes. This town is more than a theme park destination; it's a musical thrill ride! ☺