

Go-Go Gallery Walk

AUDIENCE

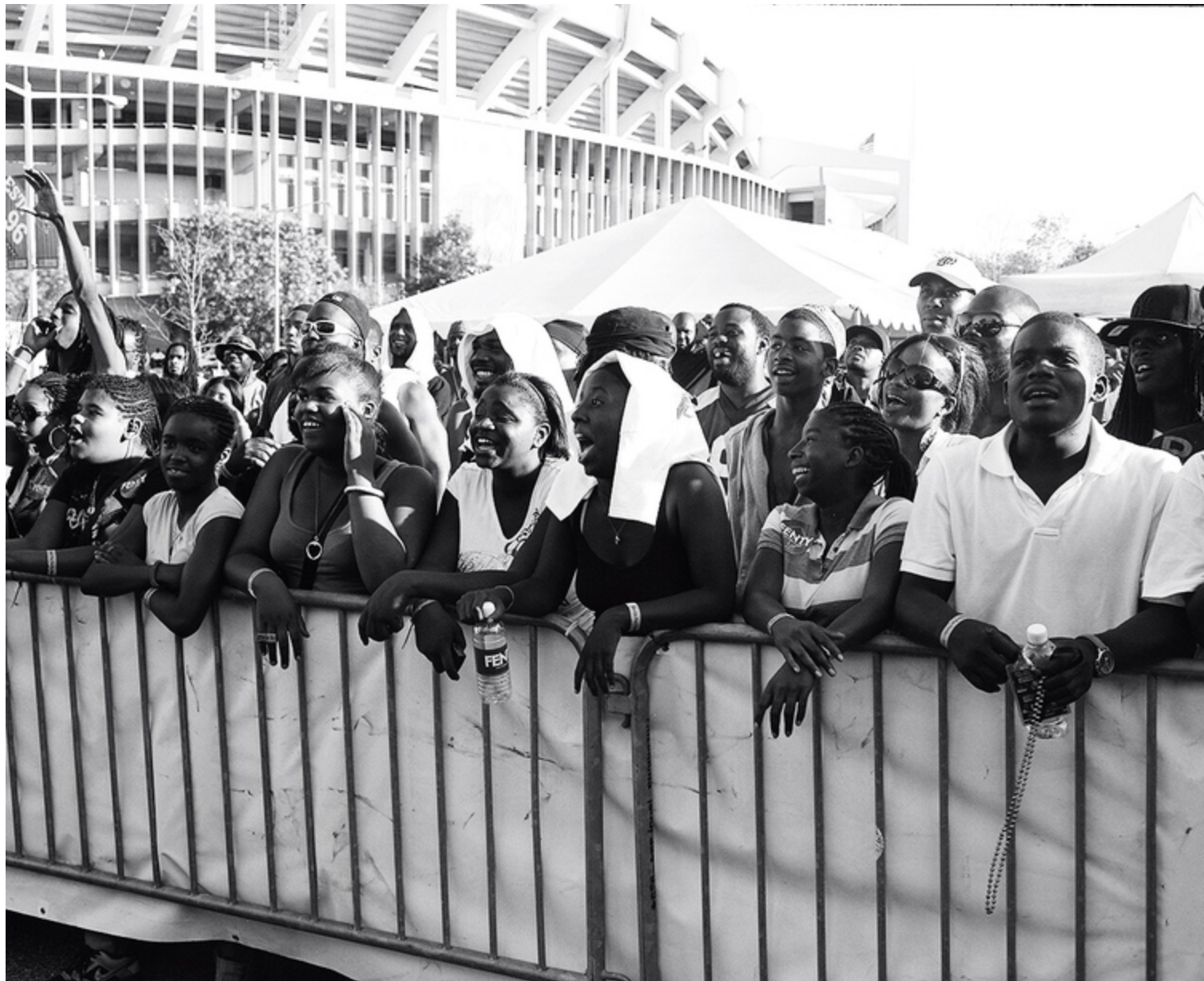
Go-go is not only non-stop, but also largely improvisatory with only the hint of a play list established at the beginning of any performance. A go go proceeds largely on gut instinct as the band reacts to and interacts with the crowd. Make no mistake about it- at a go-go the distinction between the crown and the band is very narrow indeed. There is an ongoing dialogue (much like in a good marriage or any other close cooperative venture) with give and take and call and response helping to establish the communication necessary for an intimate and satisfying experience.

AUDIENCE

In strong contrast to a performance by a folk-pop artist like Jackson Browne or Tracy Chapman, where the audience is warmly appreciative and enthusiastic but rarely overbearing, go-go crowds are always “in your face” while interacting with the band. Because the go-go community is largely racially segregated and most of its adherents reside in close proximity, the members often know one another well, so go-gos tend to be social as well as musical events. The fans let you know what they want to hear and how good a job the band is doing; they express themselves vigorously and loudly, in no uncertain terms. Go-go fans, in short, are demonstrative, not at all shy, and overwhelmingly black.



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis



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Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis

INSTRUMENTS

If you go back far enough, go-go's fundamental musical roots can be ultimately traced back to West Africa. First and most profoundly, it is the beat that characterizes and distinguishes go-go's utterly distinctive rhythmic drive, the essential element that keeps the troopers on the dance floor. The complex syncopated beat underpinning go go represents a trait brought to Western culture in general and to America in particular by way of the interlocking percussion ensembles of the savanna.

INSTRUMENTS

The sounds of drums spice nearly all of the music heard in the villages and small towns that fleck the hot, often dry and dusty savannas of present-day Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Senegal. In West Africa, drums of different shapes and pitches form the core of most musical experiences and their complex, interlocking polyrhythm's are essential. The percussion instruments so well known to fans of go-go – differently pitched drums, timbales, and various cymbals – have their counterparts in west-central African rattles, gongs, and xylophones, in addition to drums.



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis

DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In the 1960's the rivalry between the city's high schools really heated up, particularly on the athletic field. In the District of Columbia, marching bands are as much a part of the football field as the team itself. Go-go benefited from this phenomenon because so many of the students were involved with marching bands, which employed many drummers performing on a variety of percussion instruments.

DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This background provided many future go-go percussionists, such as Junk Yard's Heavy One or T-Bone from Trouble Funk, with a solid Foundation and prepared them for a career that their high school band director almost certainly had not anticipated. The role of D.C. public schools did not cease there. The junior and senior high school marching bands at Taft, Woodson, Coolidge, Cardozo, Dunbar, McKinley, and others included horn and reed players, of course, and many of the first generation of go-go bands utilized saxophones and trumpet players (part of the soul and funk legacy).



Source: ©Elvert Barnes



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis

COMMUNITIES

Because Washington, D.C. is in many ways a city divided, go-go helps to promote a sense of unity within the African American community. It helps to demarcate physical as well a psychological space. For example, upper Northwest (above the National Cathedral) is a “white” section of town while the extreme Southeast (across the Sousa Bridge) is distinctly “black.” Go-go provides many young (and increasingly middle aged) black residents with both a rallying cry and a common point for musical and cultural references. In ways similar to a church especially Pentecostal (“holiness”) sects -- go-go provides a place for like minded people to gather.

COMMUNITIES

The distinctive sound of go-go provides aural evidence of blackness: if you don't appreciate the music (whether its' old – or new-school is of little consequence), can't tell the difference between Chuck Brown or Northeast Groovers, or believe that Chuck Brown is found in a comic strip -- then you aren't black. But race is only part of it. You have to be from the city or P.G. County in order to “represent” for the music because go go is a D.C. thing. The chances are good that if you are a black man or Woman from San Diego or San Antonio, you are not part of the go-go community. In short, if you understand go-go you're marked as both and African American and a Washingtonian.



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis

BANDS

Group names further reflect go-go's democratic presentation. With exceptions such as Chuck Brown, who leads the Soul Searchers, Little Benny (Harley) and the Legends, go-go band names tend to downplay the individual in favor of group identity. A Few of the bands, such as Northeast Groovers, Northwest Younguns, and Petworth --have chosen D.C.-specific names. The majority of them, however, have stuck with less distinctive and more generic names such as Experience Unlimited, Proper Utensils, Physical Wonders, Backyard, Ayre Rayde, and Huck-A Bucks. This doesn't mean that posters for individual programs don't remind folks that such go-go stalwarts as Sugar Bear will be present or a DJ like Kool will be performing. But the fact remains: go-go bands generally bill themselves above the individual talents.

BANDS

The bands are quite happy to call attention to themselves in other ways, one of which is in the packaging of compact discs. The aforementioned Junk Yard Reunion release reminds that the band was once a “Def Jam Recording Artist” as well as of its participation in the WAMMIES (the Washington Area Music Awards). It also clearly states that Junk Yard has appeared at such diverse venues as Wolf Trap Park, the Capital Centre, and Black College Weekend Tour.



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis

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THE MEDIA

From its inception, go-go has enjoyed an uneasy relationship with mass media. Locally, the *Washington Post* and the *Washington City Paper* have not only devoted space to the music, but Chuck Brown and the making of the film *Good to Go*, for example, have been the subjects of upbeat profiles in the *Post* by Richard Harrington and Alona Wartofsky. With the exception of pieces focused on the mid '80s commercial interest in go-go, Wartofsky's thoughtful 1990 article "The Indestructible Beat of the District," and Ta Nehisi Coates's fine oral history of go-go ("Dropping the Bomb") in the January 14-20, 2000, issue of the *Washington City Paper*, this weekly paper has tended to focus on record reviews and concert information.

THE MEDIA

But they can't (nor should they) over look the associations between go-go and drugs or the attempts to use violence at go gos as an excuse for curfews in the late 1980's. The weekly Afrocentric papers, such as *Washington Afro American*, the *Capitol Spotlight*, the *Washington Informer*, and the *Advocate*, occasionally run stories as well, though usually of a less provocative nature. *The Washington Times*, on the other hand has all but ignored this music. In short, the print media's overall coverage has been a very mixed bag.

Listings are compiled on the Friday before publication by Danny Jones, Lesi Mebler, Kristen Walls, Kathleen Rippe, Lisa Goldberg and Alison Wainright. Posts are compiled and written by Alison Wainright. Daily listings do not include listings of continuing gallery or museum shows, continuing gallery or museum shows, continuing films or theatre productions—these are usually combined in separate sections at the end of daily listings. All times listed are subject to change, so call ahead for information. For addresses and phone numbers, please refer to the City Lights Index that follows.

CITY LIGHTS

July 12, 1985

July 18, 1985



Trouble Funk Drops the Bomb

"Welcome To The Go-Go" July 12

Washington's go-go scene has received oodles of publicity recently, leading one observer to comment that the only publication that *hasn't* done a go-go story is *Popular Mechanics*. But after

Space Week in Baltimore July 15-July 20

Here's your chance to get completely spaced-out in Mobtown, aka beautiful Baltimore, Maryland, as our northern cousins celebrate Space Week in commemoration of the first manned landing on the moon. Science teacher and science fiction writer Hal Clements discusses "Teaching Space"; 7 pm, Mon., Pratt Central, 400 Cathedral St.; "Space Development" is the theme for Mor-

years of being virtually ignored by the Washington music community, go-go deserves all the attention it's been getting and more. Friday offers an excellent opportunity for the chicken-thighed (most of the shows take place in "bosky" neighborhoods) to check out some of D.C.'s finest. Headlining is Trouble Funk, probably the best-known of the go-go bands, for songs like "Drop the Bomb" and "Pump Me Up"—powerful, rhythmic funk. Plus, the incredible Experience Unlimited, an outfit that plays what is best described as rock-influenced go-go,

with rough bass and lead guitar. They did "Party Time" with Kurtis Blow, as well as "Cranking at the Go-Go," a live record; and the Class Band, a younger group that has been designated the innovators of the go-go scene—they invented the "wop" (a dance step) and just released a new ep *Welcome to the Go-Gos* by Inspector Gadget. Starts at 8 pm, at George Washington University's Lerner Auditorium, 21st & H St., NW. Ticket are \$10, available through Ticketron. For more info call 387-0455.



Sci-fi writer Hal Clements.

ris Hornik, from the Space Studies Institute; 8 pm, Tue., Baltimore Science Fiction Society, 2233 St. Paul St., 990-3290. Then it's back to

the BSFS at 8 pm for a film and free-form conversation, "Apollo Digged." Ashok Saxena, from the Fairchild Space Co., elucidates "Expert Systems for Space Applications"; 7:30, Thu., Waverly Library, 400 E. 33rd St. "Nuclear Power in Space" gets a going-over from Gary L. Bennett of the U.S. Dept. of Energy; 8 pm, Fri., Loch Raven Baptist Church, 8600 Loch Raven Blvd. A slew of speakers address "A Peace Activist's View of Space Development," "Air on Other Worlds," and other topics; 1 am-4:30, Sat., Waverly Library. Space Week is the brain child of the Baltimore Metropolitan LS Society, who can fill in the blanks at 764-0678 & 747-2728. All events are free.



Loretta Lynn July 18 & 19

The Kennedy Center inaugurates its first summer festival of concerts by popular artists with two nights of performances by the incomparable Lynn. A singer, composer and band leader,

Lynn has accrued nominations and awards in virtually every poll covering the country music field. She was immortalized in the 1980 film *Coal Miner's Daughter*, which was based on Lynn's autobiography. This is a rare opportunity to see her in something other than a down-home setting, and she's sure to warm up the frigid Kennedy Center Concert Hall. Shows are 8 pm and tickets are \$18-24.

12

FRIDAY

► PICKS

Adam Morgan's The Dance Place holds a fundraiser tonight with performances by Manuwa, a traditional African music and dance troupe led by great Dizzy Konyate. Konyate plays the ancient kora, the great's venerable harp, and his vocals delineate the group's original arrangements of African music. The line-up includes crack professional Steve Bloom on congas, so you're sure to be moving. Shows are at 8 & 10:30 pm at the Dance Place, 2424 18th St. NW. Admission is \$7; for information call 462-1321.

Excellent reggae is town tonight, as the Killians presents the first D.C. appearance of Awad, currently one of the hottest rasta outfits in England. With songs like "It's Not Our Wish" and "Back to Africa" and tours with Rock Against Racism, Awad has taken an active role in the fight for black equality. Opening is the equally impressive Burning Spear (a.k.a. Winston Rodney). With slick, hypnotic reggae beats, Burning Spear was influential to such bands as the Police, Talking Heads and the Clash. So check 'em out, too. Starts at 8 pm, at the Warner Theatre, 513 13th St., NW. Tickets are \$15; call 328-3838.

► CLUBS

Abhey Road, DJ (sincro/rop 40). Afterwards Cafe, M.F.G. Trio. MFO's, Joe Fritzsche Trio.

American Cafe, Larry Hamlet (piano). Annie's, DJ (pop). Apple of Eve, J.C. Authority. The Armadillo, Alberto Rio (marachi). Birchmere, Vassar Clements. Black Horse Tavern, Biddy Glavin (piano). Black Rooster, DJ. Blues Alley, Tony Bennett. Bojangles, Video DJ. Bravo Elephants, DJ. Breichsheller, DJ. Brick Street Saloon, DJ. Brocco Rilly's, Darlene Meade. Brown's Magic Farm, David Willis Kohl & Co., Gerald Rowen. Bullhooter's, DJ (teen disco). Cafe Du Port, Mary Blankenship Quartet. Cafe Lafayette, Jean Cushing (comedy). Cafe Med, DJ (disco). Cafe Mozart, Ferris Reich (piano). Gagner's, Video DJ (new music). Carlton Lounge, Vince DiNapoli (piano). Cates, Herb Ellis. Cates Cellular Pub, Jeanie Lewis. Champions, DJ (top 40). Charly's Cafe, Helen Fenton (piano). Cheers, DJ. The Classics, Video DJ (disco). Club Soda, Dr. Mauer. Club Zambesi, DJ (top 40). Comedy Cafe, Glenn Farrington, John Buzze, Fat Doctor. Cornerstone, DJ. Cornerstone's, DJ. Crystal Underground, DJ. de space, A Payne Zhe Colores (7:30 pm); The Electric, Lenny. Eubank's, Pat Garvey. El Atresca, Evlison (Latin). El Tazumal, DJ (disco). The Exchange, DJ (pop). Federal Bar, Michael Terrence (piano).

MUSICAL INFLUENCES

Funk is the most immediate predecessor of go-go and its closest musical and emotional cousin. Funk is also difficult to define. In his colorful book on the subject, *Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One*, Rickey Vincent struggles with this dilemma: “Funk is impossible to completely describe in words, yet we know the funk vibe when we see [hear] it. Funk is that low-down dirty dog feeling that pops up...and you get off your ass and jam...it’s the earthy essence, the bass elements.

MUSICAL INFLUENCES

More specifically and tangibly, funk is African American and post-modern, and it projects the sound of a bass-heavy polymetered band playing in cold sweat. Its most immediate musical references are to contemporary pop culture (movies like *Superfly*, peach-colored suits, big afro hairstyles), but funk pays homage to its secular and sacred forebearers: gospel, soul, blues, jazz, and Afro-Cuban music. A wide range of bands come under this musical umbrella, from Kool & the Gang to Cameo to Con Funk Shun. In D.C., Parliament Funkadelic was arguably the local favorite national band to play funk, but there is no doubt that James Brown is the godfather of funk.





ALBUMS

Most of the go-go record action has happened on small and mostly underfunded labels, and the majority of these recordings are now collector's items. Day in and year out, D.C.- or Maryland based labels have provided local bands with a chance to record. Aside from P.A. tapes (which are fully discussed in chapter 5), all of the local bands have strived to record their music to be released either as a single or as part of an album, audio cassette, or compact disc. It is an impulse driven by the desire to not only document the band's music, but also to give the band "product" to sell and something for their fans to remember until the next show at the Black Hole or the Icebox.

ALBUMS

Since most go-go product is locally produced and consumed, how well do commercially issued compact discs and tapes sell? According to Tom Goldfogle of Liason Records, go-go sales represent a solid niche market in the mid-Atlantic states. A self produced CD by a new local group might sell several thousand copies, while an established act like Trouble Funk or rare Essence might sell in the 30,000 to 40,000 range. Compact disc sales are also greatly affected by a number of factors, most notably airplay on WPGC-FM means that sales of the disc will also increase.



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GENDER

The lack of women participating in the performance, promotion, and management of go-go is painfully visible. For example, nearly all of the contributors to the TMOTTGoGo Web site, run by Kevin Hammond, are male. Most message posters on its active bulletin board are also male, with the exception of Rene Dickerson, who is a very regular contributor. Excluding Ms. Mack who managed Rare Essence in their first few years, women are all but absent from the ranks of managers. Cheri Mitchell handles the keyboards for the Hip Huggers and women occasionally sit in on percussion instruments at local gigs, but once you get Pleasure out of the way, it's simply not possible to name a truly significant female go-go band. To paraphrase James Brown, go-go is man's world.

Source: The Beat: Go-Go Music from Washington, D.C.

GENDER

It's not that women have no interest in go-go; you see plenty of women attending go-gos, and they also purchase their share of P.A. tapes and commercially issued compact discs. But while women consume go-go in various ways, few participate in its presentation or in its business end. "Honies" is the colloquial term for women, and some honies do very public and positive community work with members of their crew. Female crews are not only territorial, but also provide a social network through which women attend go-go events.



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis

CLUBS

Washington, D.C., is a city divided along very distinctive geographical, economic, and racial lines. Public events like go-gos are subject to people's perceptions about them and the musicians who perform at them. The fact is, many people simply do not find the idea of a go-go event very inviting. If people outside the go-go community think about go-go at all, they perceive it as a "black thing." For one thing, the bands play at clubs in less than savory parts of the city. More to the point, these musical events are not part of D.C.'s cultural mainstream – the clubs do not advertise in the Washington Post, you don't hear about go-go events on local television spots, and go-go flyers are not usually tacked up on telephone poles in upscale Chevy Chase.

CLUBS

The bands would love to have a more racially diverse (and larger) audience, of course. But the truth is that most non-black Americans rarely venture into the parts of the city where go-go clubs are located. Furthermore, most go-go bands begin playing late at night and many of the clubs let out between 2:00AM and 6:00AM. These factors lead to the perception that go-go events represent a “closed space” to the non-black population.



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis



Source: ©Thomas Sayers Ellis

POLITICS

Always the street-smart and wily politician, Mayor Marion Barry was vitally aware of the importance of go-go. He made certain that bands like Junk Yard were part of the D.C. Department of Recreation's Summer in the Parks programming, which brought music and other entertainment to citizens of Washington, D.C. This ploy not only brought go-go to the city's youth in a safe, daytime format, it also helped them to equate go-go with Marion Barry. At election time, this association doubtless helped to gain the Mayor some added support. At the same time, the not so subtle legal and extra-legal curfews instituted in the late 80's did nothing but further ghettoize go-go and reinforce its complex role in D.C.'s black community.



Source: Kyle Gustafson



Source: Teaching for Change