



Who's Bad Michael Jackson Tribute Friday 1an. 17 9:00 pm

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The beat goes on

■ Despite loss of Cafe Django, jazz remains alive and well in Bloomington



Hannah Alani | Herald-TimesCraig Brenner plays piano for

restaurant patrons at Cafe Django.

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By A.Jay Wagner Special to the H-T | ■ 0 comments

A black baby grand piano sat in the northwest corner of Cafe Django's main room for years. While there are perhaps finer pianos in Bloomington, there are few with such history and influence, as it has been played nearly nightly by aspiring teenagers, professors and students from the Jacobs School of Music, as well as nationally touring jazz pianists. It is of remarkable quality for its purpose.

And in a way, the Yamaha model had become a symbol of Bloomington jazz. Purchased by Jacobs alum and successful music publisher Jamey Aebersold and donated to Jazz from Bloomington, an organization formed to cultivate improvisational music in the area, the piano has traveled throughout town, starting with Jazz at the Station, a popular club in the space now occupied by The Rail. When Jazz at the Station closed its doors in 2009, the piano moved into the KRC Catering hall, largely as a place for safe storage. In September of 2011, it made a celebrated move to Cafe

Django, where it has remained a fixture of the scene. It has rested, unused, under a paint-spattered tarp since early December when the owners of Cafe Django, Adrian and Chana Eversoll, decided to sell the local

jazz institution to Nashville's Big Woods Brewing. The piano's future, along with that of Bloomington jazz community, seemed undecided.

Friday afternoon, it was moved from the restaurant on Grant Street, a former residence of jazz luminaries Jack Ost and Roger Pemberton, to its new home at Topo's 403, a year-old Greek and Mediterranean restaurant situated in a historic brick townhouse on Walnut Street. The piano was escorted by its owners, Jazz from Bloomington, who are hoping to establish a new base for local jazz.

Tom Walsh, a saxophonist and chairman of jazz studies in the Jacobs School of Music, suggested that any new home will have big shoes to fill.

"Cafe Django was a special place for jazz. It was intimate, all-ages and the music sounded good," he said.

What really made it stand out though was the ownership. The husband and wife operation was devoted to cultivating the Bloomington jazz scene. They booked exclusively jazz performances, hosted regular jam sessions for young players and frequently went out of their way to foster live jazz in Bloomington.

"Chana and Adrian really embraced the jazz community. The created a space that allowed for a flowering of activity. It gave students and professionals alike an opportunity to hear and play great jazz. It acted as a focal point," said Walsh.

"It will be really missed," said Pat Harbison, also a professor of Jazz Studies, co-founder of Jazz from Bloomington and a trumpeter. "Chana and Adrian were considered dear friends, and playing at Cafe Django felt like going to

For their part, the Eversolls remain grateful for the opportunity.





High 16°/Low 11°

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"We really enjoyed operating Cafe Django for the last four years and especially providing a great venue for Bloomington jazz. We feel that we owe much to the local jazz community and will always treasure our friendship with the musicians and our customers," the couple said in an email.

While the new owners of the building plan to offer jazz, including the continuation of the Grant Street Jazz Festival, they're also looking to expand the musical selection. Quaff ON! Bloomington, scheduled to open in February, will also switch focuses from an intimate jazz club to a craft beer destination, with 24 rotating taps, including eight of their own Big Woods brews, and a small plate menu.

"We have a great deal of respect for the tradition of Cafe Django, and we plan to have a lot of live music. Jazz will definitely be a component, but we'll probably open it up to more variety," said Jeff McCabe, a co-owner of Big Woods Brewing.

Stephanie Topolgus, managing and creative director at Topo's 403, is excited to adopt the piano. The restaurant is adjusting its menu to include lighter options for those coming for the music. And while the space won't be entirely dedicated to jazz, with plans for nights of classical and world, Topolgus said the music will be a welcome addition.

"We'd love to become the home of jazz in Bloomington. It really just fits our style and program, really adds to the atmosphere," she said.

And while Bloomington jazz has lost a home in Cafe Django, it, and the piano, has survived in the past. In addition to regular events being planned at Topo's 403, Players Pub and Bear's Place, both longtime supporters of Bloomington jazz, will continue to hold regular jazz nights. Fred Parker, the president of Jazz for Bloomington, said jazz nights at the Crazy Horse are also in the works.

"While it's a loss, Bloomington has gone through these cycles before. The jazz community is too strong to disappear," said Monika Herzig, a pianist and co-founder of Jazz from Bloomington.

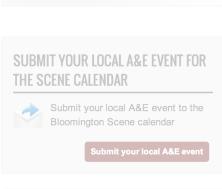
Harbison and Walsh agreed. The foundation for jazz is entrenched, largely due to the work of David Parker, David Miller and many others.

"Per capita, Bloomington offers more great musicians and a more enthusiastic audience than any other city. It's off the charts, really. Jazz as a music seems to appeal to Bloomington," Harbison said.

A local tradition and appreciation for the style has grown deep roots. It's this spirit that remains as durable and solid as that black baby grand piano.

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