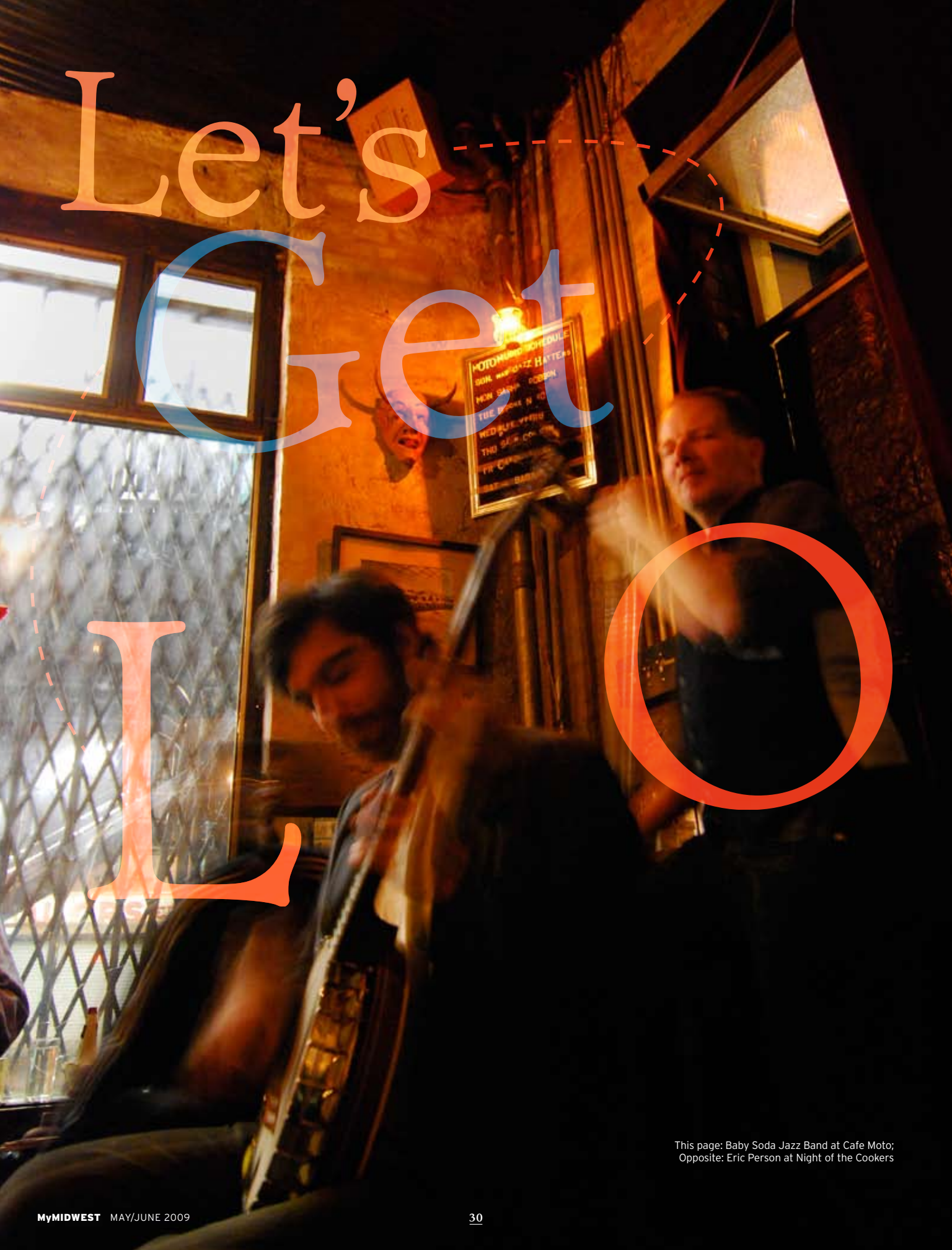


# Let's Get

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This page: Baby Soda Jazz Band at Cafe Moto;  
Opposite: Eric Person at Night of the Cookers



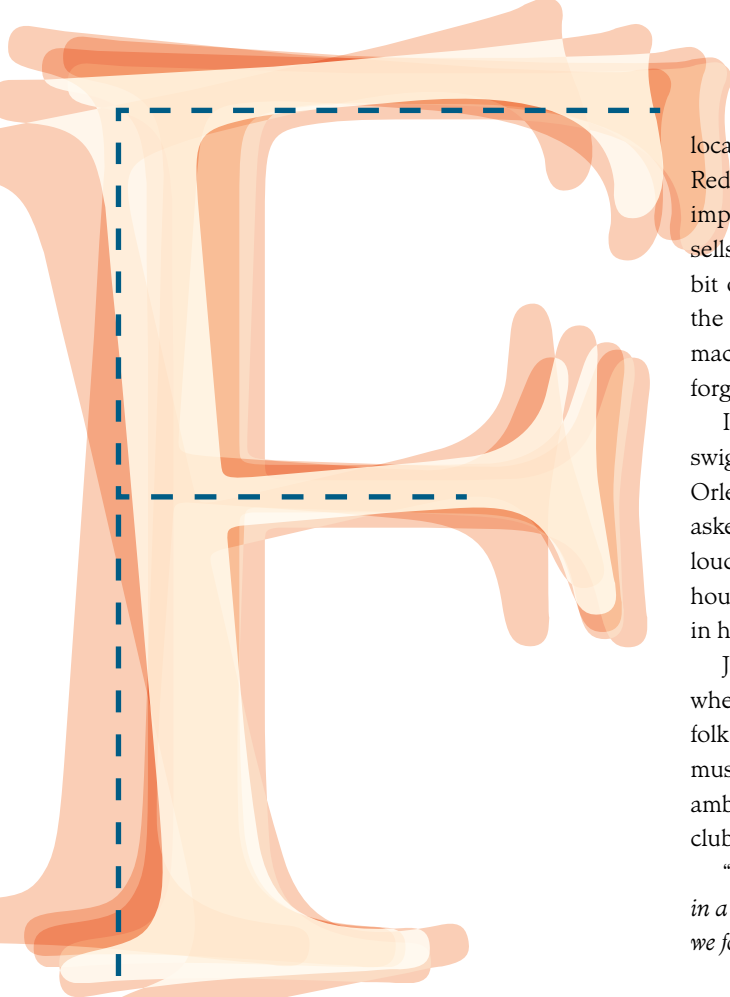
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Head off the beaten path to Brooklyn's  
live music spots and discover first-rate  
performances in casual settings.

Story and Photos by Sam Polcer





locals: Moonshine, next door to Jalopy, has two resident bulldogs; Red Hook Bait & Tackle, a bar down on Van Brundt Street, has an impressive taxidermy collection; and Steve's Authentic Key Lime Pies sells the Swingle, a frozen, chocolate-dipped key lime pie on a stick. It's a bit of country in one of the world's most impressive urban areas. It's the kind of place where Jalopy, with its vintage instruments, popcorn machine and vaudevillian stage, can suddenly appear and make you forget it wasn't there all along.

It is, in other words, the perfect place for a man like Schaap, who swigs beer onstage while hawking CDs, who has lived in Kentucky, New Orleans and France, and takes requests but rarely grants them. (When asked to describe his musical style, he says that he's "a folk singer—a loud one.") He has played at Jalopy four times, traveling almost three hours from Long Island for each performance—but given how well he fits in here, you wonder why he doesn't live upstairs.

Jalopy is one of a growing number of spots scattered around Brooklyn where, night after night, audiences eager to hear live jazz, country and folk can have a beer and listen to the sounds that defined American music. In many cases, performers play for little more than tips, and the ambience is decidedly more relaxed than at the bigger, more popular clubs across the river.

*"Let's get lost,"* sang legendary trumpet player Chet Baker. *"Let's defrost in a romantic mist/ Let's get crossed off everybody's list/ To celebrate this night we found each other, let's get lost..."* Brooklyn makes it easy to do just that.

Frank Schaap, donning a porkpie hat, tweed jacket and green button-down shirt, fingerpicks a resonator guitar and sings in a tone that brings to mind the gruff, whiskey-soaked melancholy of Tom Waits. He sits alone in the center of the stage at the **Jalopy Theatre** (718-395-3214; [jalopy.biz](http://jalopy.biz)), which itself sits in the center of a strange and lonely block in Brooklyn, N.Y., cut off from the rest of New York City by the East River, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel. No subway lines come anywhere close. Isolation is far and away the most important contributing factor to the area's distinctive character (though the new IKEA, looming and bright in the distance, has quickly become its most well-known feature). It is off the map, and acts like it.

While Brooklyn's influx of renovated townhouses filled with happy families and young professionals have crept to Jalopy's side of the BQE, developers seeking to rezone the nearby Red Hook waterfront for residential high rises had their hopes dashed by the stevedores at the piers who saw no reason to leave. Cruise ships dock occasionally, but passengers are whisked to more tested streets and attractions across the river in Manhattan.

Like any good port neighborhood, there are a few quirky bars and shops frequented by flannel-shirted



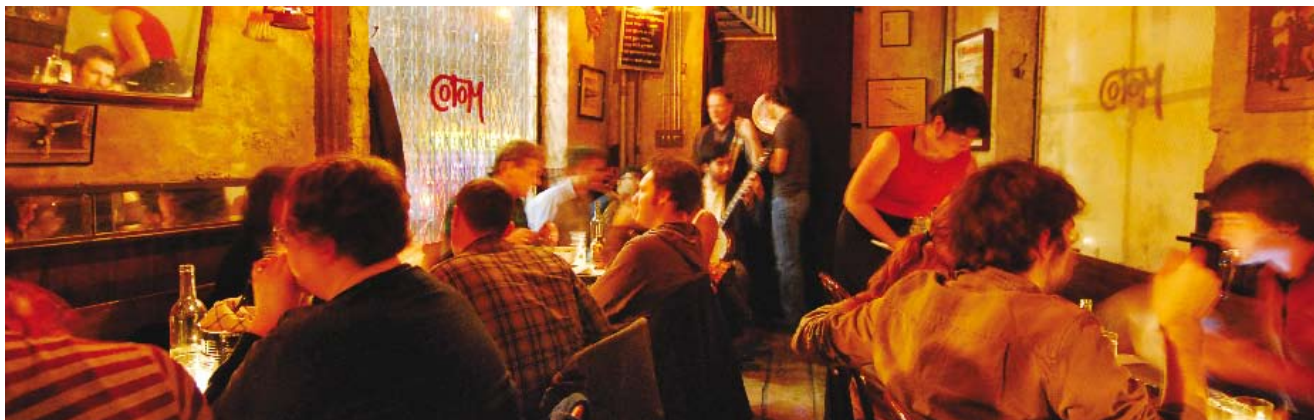
To walk into **Café Moto** (718-599-6895, *circa1938.com*), on the edge of the Williamsburg neighborhood in a triangular building hidden under

the elevated JMZ subway line, is to step into a 1930s Parisian café. As small as it is, a couple of swing dancers will occasionally kick up their heels by the band playing right in front of the door—be careful when you enter or you might bump into a tuba or a one-string bass—and the sepia decorating scheme is lit by an assortment of hanging Edison-style bulbs. The rotating weekly lineup of lively jazz acts, along with enticing menu items like Gruyere fondue and deviled eggs with anchovies, complete the experience.

"It's such a great setting for our music. It feels like home base," says Jared Engel, the banjo player for the Baby Soda Jazz Band, whose combination of early New Orleans jazz, gospel and gypsy jazz can

Frank Schaap at the Jalopy Theatre





Inside Café Moto

be heard at Moto almost every Saturday night. “This allows us to stretch out and try new songs and new musical ideas.”

Experiments with new sounds are something that jazz fans can also expect to hear on Wednesday and Sunday nights at the **Brooklyn Lyceum** (718-857-4816; [brooklynlyceum.com](http://brooklynlyceum.com)). “The weekly jazz series isn’t set up like a lot of clubs, where there are five or six bands booked in one night, each playing a hurried 45 minute set,” says Josh Rutner, saxophonist for the Respect Sextet, who plays the venue regularly.

“It’s down-to-earth.  
You don’t have to  
have a certain look.”

“Instead, we get to stretch out and play two long sets, which is a format in which we thrive.” Studied musicians like those in Rutner’s group, which was formed in Rochester, N.Y., in 2001, attract knowledgeable jazz fans to this café at a former bathhouse on the border between the Gowanus and Park Slope neighborhoods. The place itself feels like a cavernous living room, with large area rugs, black café tables, a corrugated metal ceiling and the scent of popcorn (bags come with the \$10 cover) wafting in from the entryway. No waiters, no pretension—just reasonably priced bottled beer and first-rate musical improvisation.

A 15-minute walk from the Brooklyn Lyceum through Park Slope brings music lovers to an enchanting spot named **Barbés** (347-422-0248; [barbesbrooklyn.com](http://barbesbrooklyn.com)), where acts playing everything from Django Reinhardt tunes (don’t miss French guitarist Stephane Wrembel on Sunday nights) to Peruvian-inspired surf music (courtesy of one of the two owner’s groups, Chicha Libre) can be found every night of the week. The venue has developed a solid reputation for its emphasis on eclectic lineups in its intimate back room performance space.

“I think there’s an authenticity in places like this that is appreciated,” says Bill Carney, whose 10-piece ensemble—Bill Carney’s Jug Addicts—

seems to swallow the room whole with their raucous ragtime/string band performances. “Thank goodness they’re here, these places that foster this kind of music that you can feel and have a good time with.” Like many of these hidden music haunts, Barbés offers an excellent drink menu to help set the mood. It’s named after a neighborhood in north Paris—try one of their classic pastis cocktails.

Decades ago, Brooklyn was a hotbed of accomplished jazz musicians, particularly in the Central Brooklyn neighborhoods of Fort Greene, Clinton Hill and Bedford-Stuyvesant, where Max Roach, the famous bebop drummer, grew up. Today, you can hear jazz in these areas at places like **Sugar Hill Supper Club** (718-797-1727), **Sistas’ Place** (718-398-1766; [sistasplace.org](http://sistasplace.org)), **BAMcafé** (718-636-4100; [bam.org](http://bam.org)) and **Night of the Cookers** (718-797-1197; [nightofthecookers.com](http://nightofthecookers.com)), a soul food restaurant/bar named after a ’60s jazz record by greats Freddie Hubbard and Lee Morgan. Eric Person and his quartet (the “Meta-Four”) have been performing at this popular Fort Greene spot for more than four years. “It’s a one-of-a-kind place,” Person says. “Many restaurants don’t feature music, but the owner is aware of its appeal. People like the vibe. Every night is different, but on many nights, folks are listening closely and responding wildly.”

As distinctive as the venues are, it may just be the patrons at these casual spots that set Brooklyn’s live music scene apart from that of its island neighbor. When asked whether he prefers playing in Manhattan or Brooklyn, Schaap responds that he prefers the latter. “It’s down-to-earth, more laidback. You don’t have to have a certain look. You can just come as you are,” he says, and takes a swig before adding, “and for some reason, people tip better in Brooklyn.” ■

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