

Geoff Hoyle as St. George battling a mouse in the 'San Francisco Bay Revels'

San Francisco Chronicle

"O Come All Ye Faithful" are audience sing-alongs.

deeper roots than Christmas for some local audiences: Garbed in an enormous

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CLUB Crawl



NIGHT 6 North Beach

REDISCOVERING BROADWAY AND COLUMBUS

The cradle of San Francisco nightlife has recaptured the pizzazz of its fabled heyday

BY JESSE HAMLIN

Chronicle Staff Writer



fter a decade in decline, North Beach nightlife is popping

again.

Since the fabled days of the Barbary Coast, North Beach has been the heart of San Francisco entertainment. In the 1950s and '60s, jazz clubs and cabarets lit up Broadway, upper Grant and Columbus Avenue. You could catch Miles Davis at the Jazz Workshop, Lenny Bruce at the hungry i, George Shearing at El Matorador, Lou Rawls at Basin Street West.

But by the mid-'70s, the club scene had shriveled and the strip joints and porn shops had taken over much of Broadway. The Mabuhay Gardens punk palace shut down in the '80s. Restaurants folded and the street turned darker and dirtier.

In the past year or so, though, the scene has come back to life. Broadway is now buzzing with new clubs, crowds and energy.

On Friday nights, the

A User's Guide To the North Beach Club Scene
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streets of North Beach are awash with people pouring into trendy new clubs, restaurants and venerable old bars. The crisp night is filled with flashing neon, the smell of garlic, the hum of a thousand conversations and live music.

"North Beach has really come back," says Ed Moose, a North Beach denizen since the early '60s and the padrone of the elegant eatery on Washington Square Park that bears



BY LIZ HAFALIA/THE CHRONICLE

Waiter Giulano Guerrini, with Mirko Angiolelli, was kind to customer Yannoula Koliatsis at Steps of Rome on Columbus

his name.

"There's less sleaze on Broadway, and a new generation of tourists and locals are out on the town," says Moose. "It's a lively bunch. The loss of the Broadway exit (on the demolished Embarcadero Freeway) after the '89 quake was bad for business. But there's been a recovery in the past few years. Last year was good; this year is great."

A Friday night jaunt, undertaken as part of The Chronicle's six-part Club Crawl '96 series, reveals a cornucopia of sounds and scenes. For jazz fans in particular, there's a lot of live action: bebop at Pearl's on Columbus, Dixieland at Enrico's on Broadway, retro-swing across the street at the Hi-Ball.

The tiny Gathering Caffe on upper Grant, catering to a neo-beatnik

crowd, features bebop and Brazilian bands. At Moose's on Stockton Street, there's bebop and boogie-woogie from pianist Chris Huson and bassist Gary Lillard; across Washington Square Park at the venerable Washington Square Bar & Grill, pianist Jeanne Hoffman and bassist Don Bennett play jazz standards.

North Beach is small enough to club-hop on foot. But first you have to find a place to park, always a challenge. Lucky souls might land a spot at the city-owned garage on Vallejo Street next to the police station. Others can try one of the more expensive lots or the nerve-wracking cruise for street parking.

Once rid of the car, you can stroll hither and yon, letting your eyes and ears be your guide. You might step

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THE CHRONICLE'S CLUB CRAWL '96

- Monday:** San Jose's growing SoFA district
- Tuesday:** Throngs around Palo Alto's University Avenue
- Wednesday:** The city's swinging Mission district
- Thursday:** S.F.'s South of Market still jumps
- Yesterday:** Where the Tenderloin and Nob Hill meet
- Today:** North Beach bounces back

Check out the complete series on The Gate's EGuide, www.sfgate.com/eguide



DANCE REVIEW

Oakland's 'Nutcracker' Sparkles

Guidi's witty revival touches all the bases

BY OCTAVIO ROCA

Chronicle Dance Critic

Ronn Guidi's "Nutcracker" is back at the Paramount Theatre, and a lot of people are smiling all over the East Bay. The Oakland Ballet revival opened to a packed house Thursday night, and the news is happy indeed.

The Oakland East Bay Symphony sparkled through Tchaikovsky's score, under the direction of Jean-Louis Le Roux. Ron Steger's sumptuous sets — a hearth's warm sepia tones for Act 1, a fauvist feast of lace and candy for Act 2 — more than ever look ideal beside Guidi's witty, often ravishing choreography.

Happiest of all was the dancing. "Nutcracker" caps one of Oakland Ballet's most satisfying seasons, with the troupe going from strength to strength and the audience emerging the clear winner.

After Oakland's recent successes in ballets by Antony Tudor and Bronislava Nijinska — and after the dancers' immersion in the sweet storytelling of Guidi's new "The Secret Garden" — perhaps it is only natural that everyone from principals to corps be more than up to the theatrical and technical challenges of this country's most popular ballet. This "Nutcracker" will delight everyone, from jaded dance fans to giggling tots.

It is still, of course, the tale of the girl Marie and her fabulous dream on Christmas Eve. Guidi has tailored that dream to Oakland Ballet's resources, replacing the Stahlbaums' big holiday party with a small

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Symphony Strike Talks Continue

BY JOSHUA KOSMAN

Chronicle Music Critic

CLUB Crawl '96



PHOTOS BY LIZ HAFALIA/THE CHRONICLE

Specs, namesake of Specs' 12 Adler Museum, hung out with sketch artist Kirstin Wetterhahn (right) and bartender Christine Barnett

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into the lively Steps of Rome cafe on Columbus, where young Roman waiters sing along to tapes of Pino Daniele and other Italian crooners to the counterpoint of hissing espresso machines.

Swinging around onto Broadway brings you to Enrico's, the famous North Beach eatery where people of all ages dine, drink at the bar and dig the jaunty sounds of trombonist Mal Sharpe's Big Money in Dixieland band.

Across Broadway, on the east side of Kearny, is the Hi-Ball, a packed little lounge that's red and black and retro all over. The young cocktail crowd — you haven't seen this many porkpie hats and suspenders since "Guys and Dolls" — sips martinis, smokes cigarettes and dances to the swing music of Blue Plate Special or Lavay Smith and Her Red Hot Skillet Lickers.

To the east on Broadway at the old Off-Broadway (where the Mabuhay was) is Frankie's Bohemian, a big, barnlike joint that's heaven for those who savor brews on tap and rock 'n' roll thumping over the sound system. For '70s disco action, check out Studio 435, a dance club on top of Frankie's.

Rounding the corner onto Montgomery, the enterprising might try to get into the upscale Essex, formerly Ernie's. The three-story supper club draws a



Liz Sepe kicked up her heels with dance partner Mateo Reichlin at the retro jazz Hi-Ball Lounge

TALK TO US

Do you hang out in San Francisco's North Beach area? We'd like to hear your best nightlife story. Send it to Club Crawl '96, San Francisco Chronicle, 901 Mission St., San Francisco, Calif. 94103. FAX: (415) 495-2067. E-mail: Datebook@sfgate.com

well-heeled 30ish clientele to its plush red velvet Victorian rooms. The Bacchus Cellar Room features cigars and billiards, the upstairs Scarlet Room live New Age, jazz and R&B.

Looping up Pacific Avenue and walking back up Columbus, you'll find two of the greatest bars in San Francisco: Spec's 12 Adler Museum and Tosca. At Specs, old and young bohemians drink and converse in the funky splendor of a bar whose astonishing clutter of objects includes

antlers and toilet seats, frayed newspaper clippings, flags, masks and a walrus penis bone.

The elegant Tosca, with its red banquettes and operatic murals, is famous for its tasty brandy-chocolate (and coffeeless) "cappuccino" and a juke box that plays Sinatra, Callas, Ellington and Louis Jordan.

Twenty feet up Columbus is Pearl's, where some of the best jazz musicians in town can be heard for the price of two drinks.

If your taste runs to blues-rock and you want to boogie, cross Broadway and head up Grant Avenue. In a two-block stretch you'll find three funky old bars that feature rocking live music for a \$3 or \$4 cover charge: the Saloon, the Lost & Found Saloon and the Grant & Green Blues Bar. They've all got a loose beat-hippie vibe. And they're all jumping on Friday night.