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Jazz in Key West: A Musical Version of Build It and They Will Come

Ken Franckling digs the jazz scene in Key West

If you look for jazz you can find it, sometimes even in most unexpected places and at unusual times. In this case, it was while honeymooning in Key West, a tropical party town that rivals New Orleans for its partying spirit, but not the depth and breadth of its music. At least that's the perception of some outsiders.



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Kathie and I found it a block from Key West's so-called Duval crawl – the stretch of bars and clubs along Duval Street, which crosses downtown from the Gulf of Mexico a dozen blocks or so to the Atlantic.

"Jazz in the Garden" is a Sunday evening series that runs from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. amid the lush tropical flora at the Gardens Hotel, a 17-suite former estate at the corner of Angela and Simonton Streets.

On May 1, singer-pianist Lenore Troia was featured in a trio format with saxophonist Marty Stonely and drummer Richie Ciavolino. The music was laid back more often than not, with a tropical and Brazilian flair as Troia blended originals, a few Jobim tunes and some standards. Her clever originals included "Sand Dancing," "Symptoms of Love" and "Point Me South I-95." There was also a spirited jazz cover of The Doobie Brothers' "Takin' it to the Streets."

This is a free hang for the area's jazz cognoscenti who no doubt appreciate its lack of cover, its homey ambience, innovative wine bar and, for at least one woman, a chance to cool off in the hotel pool a few steps away.

Troia, who was raised in Connecticut, has called Key West home since the early 1990s. In addition to performing regularly at Jazz in the Garden – and many other

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About Ken Franckling

Ken Franckling is a veteran arts writer and freelance photographer specializing in music photography. Since the early 1980s, he has covered the jazz scene throughout the Northeast with occasional journeys to other regions in pursuit of essential musical...


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clubs in various contexts, she also books the Gardens Hotel series.

“I get the cats in here who can really play,” she said between sets.

Troia and others who play or dig jazz can also be found most Monday nights for a weekly jam at the nearby Green Parrot Bar on Whitehead Street. The Green Parrot also features the blues on Sunday nights.

Keep both venues in mind next time you're in the area.

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