

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012 Key West Bar
Boondoggle
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 32:

Grunts Bar

409 Caroline Street

www.facebook.com/gruntskeywest

Saturday 8/17, 9:30 pm



Dogfish Head 60-Minute IPA (draft)

Grunts is another of those small places that can be really enjoyable. Their official seating total is deceptively high because they have several outdoor tables: in the front yard, in the back yard, and even in the side yard/alley. At night, the up-lit palms look awesome.

Inside, there are about 10-12 stools at the bar, so the room can go from empty to half-full in blink. Being an off-Duval place, it doesn't get a high number of people who were just walkin' on by, saw it, and followed the impulse to check it out. Grunts is not hidden, either, but Duval is a strange animal. Tourists will walk a half-mile or more up that straight street, but will not go a couple hundred yards down a side street. The blocks of Duval have an odd allure. With each crossing street, there is a beckoning: *hey, check out what's on this block, it might be even better*. Better shops, better galleries, better eateries, better *bars*, all might lie just across this road. And then the next, and the next.



Venturing down a side street, a plucky explorer might pass one or two uneventful lots in a row, conclude that there is nothing of interest down here, and scurry back to Duval. Eaton Street has a pull, with the Tropic and the Marilyn statue. Greene Street and Front Street do too, of course, being in the heart of the party zone. You look down those streets and you see those neon beer signs in the windows, hear the music, and ya gotta give it a shot.

Caroline Street is a quiet street, though. Nothing too quiet about having The Bull on the corner, but the stately manor that houses The Porch seems like the front edge of a non-commercial zone. Braza Lena doesn't leap out at you, despite the torches, and there is something a tad forbidding about Telegraph Lane, that back-alley street with its dumpsters and shadows. That public parking lot beyond it -- surrounded by the tall, rusted, chain-link-fence -- looks ghetto. With no bright lights visible ahead, it becomes a *let's head back to Duval* point.

So Grunts, like Kelly's across the street, is more of a destination. Even when you get there, it's not immediately obvious that it's a bar and restaurant. I remember when I first noticed it years ago, before they did the big clean-up, I thought it was someone's private abode.

Having several tables in the brick front yard, though, puts paid to that notion, even if you don't see the wooden sign right away.



I came here tonight with a purpose. Word of a band had spread through the land, and I was eager to catch their vibe. There were three other customers inside when I strolled in. I took the stool in the middle of the bar, between them. The solo moved to the end of the bar immediately. WTF, dude? I just got here. At least give me time to prove I'm an asshole.

As luck would have it, Bubba System was just settling in for their opening set. The barkeep was young, pretty, and named Brittany. That may be spelled differently – it's one of those names that parents often try to be clever with and end up dooming their child to a lifetime of spelling and respelling her name for confused clerks, merchants, educators, and law enforcement personnel.

I once asked Terence if he knew why his parents went with one R instead of the more common double-R. His sad reply was, *Well, we were poor...*

My Dog-60 arrived in a frossssssty beer mug, with a green cloth napkin as a coaster and a little bowl of trailmix munchies. The napkin was a smart

touch. The frost was destined to melt, and no flimsy cardboard coaster would have contained the flood.



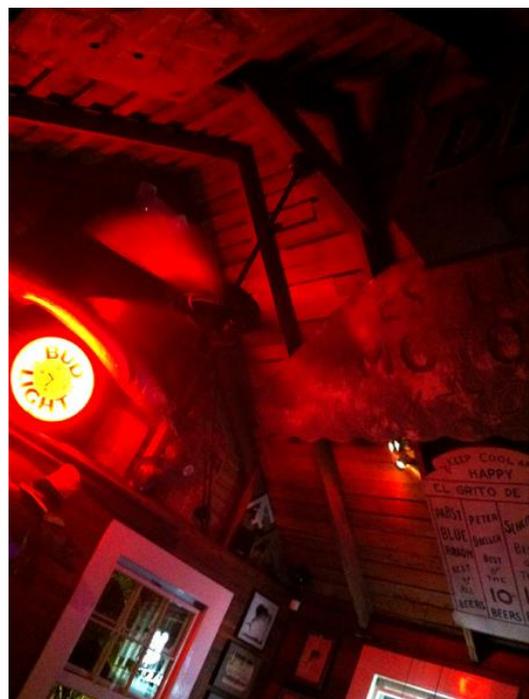
The Bubba System started out nice and mellow, and stayed that way. They flowed through some familiar old tunes, but put their own touch in too. With no conversation to distract me, I found myself almost hypnotically staring at the keyboardist's hands. It is a lifelong envy of mine to be able to play the keyboards.

Back in the day of Rick Wakeman (Yes) and Keith Emerson (ELP), keyboards were HOT. Those two dudes could tickle the ivories like none I had ever seen – or seen since. How the hell can anyone play one keyboard and melody with the right hand, and then a different keyboard and melody with the left?! At the same time! And with lightning speed!

I put strips of white and black tape on the dashboard of Sally, my '69 Mustang, and imitated them the best I could, but I shuddered inwardly to think what sounds my fingers would actually be making on real keys.

It still dazzles me to watch fingers flick and sweep across the keyboard – far moreso than guitar. With a guitar, both hands combine to make one note or one chord, and it *is* exciting to watch a master coax music from his strings. But a keyboardist plays lead with one hand *and* rhythm with the other, and maybe even more with his feet.

So I lost myself in his fingers for a good while. I think he knew it, because there seemed to be a little extra flair in there as he went along.



Brian and Jan arrived and pulled me back from my fit of Key Envy. We dug the groovy tunes for a while. We had been at Gecko earlier, but I had veered off to White Tarpon while they went someplace that was not White Tarpon. (You have no idea how tempted my finger is to type an M instead of an R every time I come that name.)



The band closed out their set with a nice long version of *Wooden Ships*, a real blast from the past. Jefferson Airplane's 1969 *Volunteers* LP was one of my most-played albums of all-time. (Yes, *all-time*, even Ming Dynasty and Pleistocene Era.) I was a long-haired high school kid at the time, full of the prevailing anti-war sentiment and a fondness for a type of plant that I had recently discovered, so that record really nailed me. Crosby, Stills & Nash played it at a famous rock festival in upstate New York that year and made it extra famous.

As Bubba System eased out of the song, I said towards the band – we were about 15 feet away, so it was easy to just talk with them – *You know, Woodstock was 43 years ago this week.* The keyboardist gave an appreciative nod and said with a whimsical smile, *I was there.*

They happened to be going on break right then, so he came over and he told us tales from the Great Event. His name is Jay, and he was a high school kid himself when he and a friend made the trek to Bethel NY a day or two before this highly-touted show. He talked about Folk Night, the first night of the show and who played. When he got into the weather, there was no fond musing in his voice, no recalling the fun in the mud: *It was wet, and miserable, and cold.* But having arrived a day or so early, they had been able to park fairly close behind the stage, so they could retreat to the roomy confines of their compact car, as opposed to a soggy tent, or the shreds of a cardboard box.

Jay also described the crowd as seeming to gradually group into communities, where common types just seemed to gravitate together. It

didn't seem like he meant by race or creed or social means; he seemed to be referring to wavelengths, or some internal vibe that transcended typical lines. Mighta been the drugs, too, though.

He also mentioned the trash! That must have been amazing and gross. A half-million soggy, partying people would create a *staggering* pile of crap. I felt sorry for the ones who had to clean it all up. (Yeah, like my sympathy does them any good.)

Jay also confessed that reading music is not his strong point, and that he plays kinda oddly because of a habit of curling his right index finger. So I'm thinking, *How the hell do you play keyboards without using your right index finger??* Given how intently I had been watching him play, I'm amazed that I hadn't picked up on that.



They went back to work, and we grooved to few more tunes. I watched for the finger action. We'll catch them again, I'm sure.

Trouble with that is, I still have 68 bars to hit up. I keep going to all these places and saying, *Hey, yeah, coolo place, I gotta get back here*, but I reckon I'll have to back-burner a lot of them till the Tour is completed. Ahhh, the sacrifices one makes in the name of a Quest.