

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep On Hoppin' Tour
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar 208:

San Carlos Theater

516 Duval Street

Saturday, 6 March, 8:00 PM

Bud Light (bottle) \$0.00

This was a bar that you just can't hop whenever you want. San Carlos isn't open every night. It's open almost no nights. But this was a bona fide Special Occasion.

The high society affair was a celebration of the 64th birthday, thereabouts, of eight of so good friends in one of Key West's fairly-well-off social circles. George's birthday was the one that was actually being celebrated, but the scope of the party was such that it encompassed all of them who were turning 64 this year. In honor of that milestone, they rented the San Carlos, hired a Beatles tribute band called Let It Be, and gave out 350 invitations to the party.



I got one from George when I made some last-minute medallions to go along with the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band attire that he was planning on wearing. He urged me to come, bring a guest, and be sure to dress in some Beatles-era attire.

I extended the invitation to some friends, but everyone was either busy, or not into the Beatles revival thing, or just didn't feel like they'd know anyone there. Hey, douche, you'll know *me* -- let's go! But no takers. Sigh.

There was no mention on the ticket of an admission charge, but I was not totally sure there wouldn't be one. I brought some cash,

wore my best tie-dyed bell bottom pants and tie-dye rimmed sunglasses, and headed off to the shindig, hoping above all else, that a bar would be found inside.

I was still a block away when I began to sense that this was going to be a *fun* time. People were angling towards the theater from all directions, and in some outrageous, fabulous, and far-out groovy threads.

A nicely-dressed volunteer at the door checked my ticket but did not ask for any money, and I was welcomed in. Free admission. Cooool.

The lobby was packed. It was a nuts. I felt very underdressed. Key West sure does like to go costume crazy when opportunity arrives.

After about a minute of looking around in semi-stunned amusement at everybody all around me, I turned my focus to finding a bar. I saw an Afro-wigged hippie dude carrying two freshly-acquired cocktails, so I walked my eyes back to where he had come from. An open door on the left, near the theater entrance, had a line of thirsty-looking people, so I slid through the crowd and joined them.



When my turn finally came at the door, I chuckled that it was only a small folding table set up in the doorway of a small room. "It still counts," I proclaimed aloud, just as the table-tender looked my way. To his puzzled look, I smiled and asked, "What are my options?" He gestured towards a few handles of booze -- vodka, rum, gin, whisky -- and said, "or we have wine and beer." I had figured already that beer would be my beverage of choice for the evening. The available flavors -- Bub and Bud Light -- nearly made me change my tune, though. But with a shrug of the shoulders, and a glance back at how lonnnng the line had gotten, I procured what would be the first *twoof* many Bud Lights.

I stood there with money in my hands, waiting for the ax to fall --*that will be twelve dollars, sir* -- but the keeper merely gave a tilt of the head, and a *we're done* gesture with his hands. "You mean... it's **open bar?**" He smirked and nodded. I dropped a couple of bucks in his tip vase and walked away, giving a gleeful, "ohhhhhh groooooovy, baybee" right out loud.

The San Carlos is a beautiful building. It's old and it's classy. Javier tells me that it was actually slated for demolition years ago but nobody could find out who the owner was. Eventually it was determined that it had no real owner, so a group of KW people rescued it and gave it extensive renovation.

I was only halfway through BL #1 when Sam and a few others began to steer us all into the theater. There are 350 seats in the lower level, so this was a sellout. There were a some opening remarks, then with an *On With The Show* wave, they kicked the band into gear.



Their first set was the early-60's Beatles and they were dressed and groomed accordingly -- simple black suits and mophead hair. By the second song, people in the crowd were getting into Love-In mode already, joining hands and swaying back and forth. By the fourth song, a good number of people had abandoned their seats and were dancing in the aisle. That got

contagious real fast, and soon the place was *alive*. I was NOT expecting this! I'm thinking I was under the average age of the guests, but there was nothing geriatric about this crowd; they were in a rockin' mood. The Beatles were bringing them back to their collective youths.

The band was pretty good. I mean, come on, no band is the Beatles, and you can't expect a guy to be Lennon or McCartney, so you have to take it for what it is, but they did the music well and got the audience going.

They played the most famous early Beatles songs, of course, like *I Want To Hold Your Hand*, and *She Loves You*, but they also did some songs that you might not think about right away, like: *Paperback Writer*, *You've Got To Hide Your Love Away*, *Act Naturally*, *Baby's In Black*, *And Your Bird Can Sing*, and *Run For Your Life*. It was funnnn.

My second trip to the bar-table was just ahead of a wave, but on my third

trip, I faced a line about 30 people long. A moment after I took up my position at the end, a guy carrying four beer bottles came over and told me, "There's another bar upstairs, with no line at all."

Zoom. I was up those stairs before you could recite *The Cat In The Hat* (unabridged). The upstairs bar was a table set-up as well, but certainly functional enough for my purposes. And I know what all you crafty cacti are thinking: *Is he going to try to count this as two Hops?* Well, no he's not. I know it's been done where some places have had two bars -- Lazy Gecko (#2) and Back Bay (#180), for instance -- but there were enough differences in atmosphere, purpose, or whatever to justify the double-hop.

Other places, like Hard Rock Cafe (#79), have a second bar, but it's so similar that ya just can't call it its own bar. Likewise here. And, yeah, upstairs at Bagatelle (#60 downstairs and #179 upstairs) probably shouldn't have even counted, *based on our visit*. It was included more on reputation and potential than on the actual hop. That was probably the lamest of all 208 Hops so far. It wasn't the worst *bar* -- far from it -- but everything was just *so lame* about the twenty or so minutes of our lives that we wasted there.

But, no, there would be no double-hop at the San Carlos.

Let It Be performed till a bit after 11:00. They did three sets, with two intermissions for wardrobe changes: the Fab Four Beatles, the Sgt. Pepper's druggy set, and the white-suited 70's set.

There was one heart-stoppingtr on the wings, so they were not in the band's way, but I could see John and Paul eyeing them anxiously a few times. I



I didn't give it much thought and continued with my mingling/dancing. I had maneuvered just in front of the left wing of the stage when it happened.

Mid-song, with the whole place struttin' and squirmin', the long-haired woman in brown, who was all happy-dancin' with her man up on that wing, took that proverbial *one more step back* and her

foot met nothing but air.

Things really do go in slow motion at certain times. I reckon it's the adrenalin that sprints through your brain when something **IMPORTANT** leaps at your senses. That woman was falling backwards, still dancing. She began to realize that the world was off its axis, and her arms straightened, her hands open by her hips. And it was in that position that she hit the floor.

The frustrating thing is that, while the incident may seem slow-motion, a would-be rescuer also can only move in slow motion. I was a couple of steps too far away, and by the time I could react, any chance of breaking her fall was gone. Her body made a *thud* but not a *THUD* when she landed. No one part of her body hit first. She didn't land on her head, on her shoulders, on her arm, on her hips, on her ass, or on her leg. All of the above struck the floor at the exact same instant. It didn't even seem possible. That had to be what saved her.

I reached her a few tenths of a second after impact, thinking things like *dead woman* and *9-1-1* and *give her air!* My phone already was in my hand.

Then I looked at her face. I expected pain, agony, and *Oh my God, my baaaaaack!!!!* But her eyes opened, she looked straight up at the ceiling and her expression said, *Holy shit, I'm OK!!* It wasn't a smile, but it wasn't far from one.

I was crouching next to her at this point. I looked at her in disbelief, and asked, "You're *all right?!?*" She nodded, looking damn stunned about it herself. If she had been sober, she probably would have gotten hurt.

Right about then, her man arrived on the scene, having taken the safer route -- the steps. She was already into the getting-up process. He tried to hold her down, pleading, "don't move, don't move, don't get up." She looked at him sternly and said, "I'm *fine*," -- with the unmistakable vibe of *I don't want the attentionnnnnnn* -- and got back to her feet. Everyone who saw what happened breathed a huge sigh of relief. As I walked away, she and he were doing the Big Hug. I'm sure she was quite embarrassed, and she might have even been sobbing a tad.

Shortly thereafter, the singer made an announcement requesting that people stay off the stage. Seemed like a reasonable request.

About a half-hour later, the band finished off their night with *Hey Jude*. All

of us drunks were singing and swaying along with the *Lahh dah dah lada da dah's*. It was a good time.

Then we were invited upstairs for the birthday cake, more food than you could shake a stick at, and, yes, more cocktails.

A splendid time was had by all.

