

Rolling Stone, July 2005

Schools that Rock

The RS guide to the best colleges -- if you want to learn about music or just live it

JENNY ELISCU

When you're deciding which college to attend, there are plenty of important factors to consider: which school has the best academics, is the most affordable, has a favorable student-faculty ratio, a wide array of extracurriculars and so on. But what good will those perks do you if there's not a good student-rock ratio? You don't want to arrive on campus and discover that there's nowhere in town for a music geek such as yourself to get your ya-ya's out. With this scenario in mind, *Schools That Rock: The Rolling Stone College Guide* (Wenner Books) was born. The book, on shelves now, aims to help both college-bound music students and fans decide not only which schools offer esteemed and/or innovative courses but also which college towns have a thriving rock scene.

Schools That Rock covers more than fifty cities. The U.S. is full of great rock scenes beyond the obvious ones in New York and L.A. Below is a list of the ten best -- places where you're not just a face in the crowd at a Franz Ferdinand show, and that encourage you to indulge your passions, see shows, buy records and forget for a moment what the hell you're gonna do when you graduate. You might find that the cutie in your Psych class likes the Strokes as much as you do. That's the kind of thing you have to leave campus to learn.

1 SEATTLE

In Nirvana and Pearl Jam's hometown, you don't need to be enrolled in one of the programs at the University of Washington or Cornish College of the Arts to get an education in all things rock. Your studies, instead, will be conducted at the city's abundance of venues and record stores, or with the tutelage of independent labels such as Sub Pop and Barsuk. Plus, Seattle's Experience Music Project houses memorabilia from artists spanning rock, country, blues and punk.

Venues The Crocodile Cafe has long been a cornerstone of the Northwest music scene. The venue's popularity stems from a mix of indie-friendly bookings and its relative proximity to popular dive bars dotting Second Avenue. One of Seattle's larger midsize venues, the Showbox puts on general-admission shows by the likes of PJ Harvey. And the bi-level Neumo's Crystal Ball Reading Room brings in cult favorites from Iron and Wine to the Locust. If you're under twenty-one in Seattle, you'll quickly become familiar with the Vera Project, an all-ages nonsmoking, alcohol-free space.

Record Stores When your parents' credit card is burning a hole in your pocket, head to one of the city's three main music shops. Bop Street stocks half a million vinyl LPs and 100,000 7-inch singles and offers trade if you're worried about breaking the bank. There's also the three-store indie chain Sonic Boom, which has frequent in-store appearances. And, even in a town where DIY is the norm, Singles Going Steady is one of the best local resources for indie musicians.

Radio KEXP is the best station Seattle -- and really the entire Northwest -- has to offer. Commercial station the End, meanwhile, broadcasts "classic alternative."

Best Fests The End also sponsors and throws a number of concerts, including the summer's Endfest and the holiday Deck the Hall Ball. But the best rock festival in Seattle is Bumbershoot, held annually over Labor Day weekend. It has featured everyone from Nas to the Pixies. Earlier in the summer, there's the more indie-rockcentric, weekend-long Sas-quatch! Music Festival at the Gorge Amphitheatre.

2 CHAPEL HILL/RALEIGH/DURHAM, NC

It should take only two words to sell you on Durham's Duke University: free iPod. In 2004, Duke made that unbelievable perk available to all incoming freshmen. If that's not reason enough to consider applying here, consider the fact that the university, unofficially dubbed "the Harvard of the South," allows music majors to study everything from composition and theory to ethnomusicology and music history.

Venues Even nonmusic students get to enjoy regular on-campus concerts from headliners like Kanye West and Wilco. And students at both Duke and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill needn't wait for on-campus events to get their dose of live music. Just down the road from UNC, the area's best-known club, the Cat's Cradle, consistently draws the perfect mix of low-fi rock, punk and singer-songwriters. record stores Schoolkids Records has a wide enough selection to appeal to hipsters and mainstream shoppers alike. While it's hard for any store to compete with School-kids, CD Alley does an admirable job of it. This smallish shop is packed with CDs, vinyl and DJ platters, all from underground favorites, broken down into highly specific subgenres like Japanese punk and kraut rock.

Radio One of the country's most cutting-edge college stations, UNC's student-run WXYC proved how forward-thinking it is in 1994, when it became the first station ever to simulcast its signal over the Internet. WXYC hires new DJs at the beginning of each semester.

3 DETROIT

The Motor City certainly isn't the prettiest town, but who said rock & roll is supposed to be pretty? Perhaps thanks to all the urban squalor, Detroit has churned out some of the grittiest rock, hip-hop, soul and techno acts of the past forty years. As for the city's academic offerings, Wayne State University has a music-management program that introduces students to the study of marketing and promotion but also includes course work in independent record production and grant writing.

Venues To see tomorrow's garage heroes today, spend time at the Magic Stick, located in the Magestic Theater Center, a true rock landmark -- it's part rock club, bowling alley, pizzeria and art gallery.

Record Stores Located near Wayne State in downtown Detroit, Young Soul Rebels stocks the hippest of the hip because its owners, Dave Buick and Dion Fischer, are former members of garage pioneers the Go (trivia: Jack White was briefly the Go's guitarist). Also check out the Record Graveyard, the place where "great records never go out of style."

4 AUSTIN

A relatively affordable public institution, the University of Texas is worth the cost of tuition just to be in Austin every March, when the South by Southwest music and film festival brings hundreds of up-and-coming artists to town for four nights of rock & roll. Though its music department isn't especially distinguished, UT does include a Center for American Music. Founded in 2002, the Center already has big plans to start up new programs in recording technology and the music business and to launch a UT record label.

Venues Austin has loads of venues, big and small, but it's hard to top Emo's, the two-stage spot where local legends Spoon got their start. Around the block, Stubbs doubles as an outdoor venue and Austin's most tourist-friendly BBQ joint. During SXSW, this is where the biggest and best parties usually happen. To see roots artists such as Lucinda Williams, head over to Antone's. Austin is also home to one of the country's great independent record stores, Waterloo Records, which employs unusually accommodating clerks to help you navigate its vast selection.

5 NASHVILLE

Nashville isn't just the town where aspiring country singers hope to get discovered; it's also one of the best places to study for a job behind the scenes in the music industry. Middle Tennessee State University -- located in the surprisingly hip Murfreesboro, Tennessee -- boasts one of the pre-eminent recording-industry management programs in the country. In Nashville proper, Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music offers a dual-degree program that allows students to graduate in five years with both a bachelor of music degree and a master of education degree. But the most worthwhile music program in Nashville is offered by Belmont University's Mike Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business. Students who graduate receive a BBA (bachelor of business administration) with a concentration in entertainment and music business. Belmont, whose alumni include Lee Ann Womack and *American Idol* contestant Kimberly Locke, offers extensive internship-placement programs.

Venues To get a country-music education off campus, head to Ryman Auditorium; the 113-year-old venue has hosted concerts by everyone from Dolly Parton to James Brown. Nashville also has a strong rock scene, and most of the best shows are at the Belcourt Theatre. The historic building doubles as the city's reigning independent music house. And Exit/In has survived numerous

closings and reopenings in its thirty-four-year history -- and, in the process, become one of Nashville's top venues.

Record Stores Though the Great Escape -- which is a stone's throw from the infamous Music Row -- stocks a reliable selection of vinyl, the best shop in town is Grimey's record store, a paradigm of indie and vintage goodness.

6 ST. LOUIS

Washington University's location just minutes away from St. Louis' hip commercial district, the Loop, is hard to beat, but its music program ain't too shabby either. Music majors at Wash U have the benefit of a school that believes in teaching music as "one of humanity's central creative and communicative activities, rather than as an isolated, separate subject."

Venues While exploring the Loop, catch a show at Blueberry Hill, which consumes an entire city block and contains two venues: the Elvis Room, where hilarious karaoke action occurs four nights a week, and the Duck Room, which on Fridays hosts a grand hip-hop party called the Science. Area DJs, breakers and freestylers throw down and the whole shebang is broadcast live on community station KDHX. Frederick's Music Lounge is an integral part of the city's alt-country scene. The South City venue's specialty drink is a mix of whiskey and chicken broth called Cock Soup. Cicero's, meanwhile, used to be an alt-country standby; nowadays, the club sticks mostly to booking jam bands. Impervious to change, however, is punk venue the Creepy Crawl. It books up to ten bands a night for a crowd anxious to mosh to tunes by the likes of Motion City Soundtrack. For those anxious to sit down, there's the Pageant, a 1,500-capacity, balconied theater that welcomes acts like Elvis Costello.

Record Stores Unless you insist on shopping at Euclid Records in the St. Louis suburb of Webster Groves, you'll likely bulk up your CD collection at Vintage Vinyl. The name is misleading: It's mainly a CD store, but it's one of the country's best, employing the kind of obsessive geeks equally well-versed in Keith Richards and Kool Keith.

7 SAN FRANCISCO

This city's music lovers have limitless options for how and where to get their fix, whether by checking out buzz bands at the annual Noise Pop festival, tuning in to San Francisco State University's cutting-edge station, KUSF, to hear local underground artists such as Deerhoof and Devendra Banhart, or enrolling in one of the West Coast's most esteemed programs, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Venues The stuff of rock & roll legend, the Fillmore has been a beloved space for renowned players since producer Bill Graham took over in 1966. Still appointed with a tub of red apples at its entrance, the Fillmore retains an intimate feel despite its 1,200 capacity. Bottom of the Hill, meanwhile, attracts eclectically minded indie-rock fans who pack the 300-capacity venue to check out local and touring art rockers. Boasting some of the best sound in the city (so good that Built to

Spill allegedly will play nowhere else), Slim's offers two or three bands almost five nights a week. Recently purchased by the owners of Slim's, the Great American Music Hall brings in a variety of underground acts, including the Rapture and Hot Hot Heat. Record Stores San Francisco's mammoth Amoeba Music is unbeatable. The store has also put out compilations of its favorite local music under its Home Grown banner. If it's vinyl you want, try Grooves -- it's filled to the brim with more records than any sensible person would bother to count.

8 ATHENS, GA

The consummate rock town that, back in the Eighties, birthed two of the first college rock bands: R.E.M. and the B-52's. In the years since, the city has churned out a string of noteworthy acts. And it's home to one University of Georgia campus.

Venues Athens offers plenty of worthwhile diversions for when you're not too busy studying or doing bong hits. The 40 Watt Club consistently catches bands on their way up and puts them in front of audiences small enough to feel like they're privy to a truly special event. Clubs move around a lot in Athens, but thankfully the good ones, like the Caledonia Lounge, survive the shuffle. The space is where R.E.M. filmed their video for "Turn You Inside Out" in 1988 and is still the spot to catch artists just making inroads on college radio. And fans of roots rock will clock quite a bit of time at the Georgia Theatre.

Record Stores There are two stellar mom-and-pops, most notably Schoolkids, which is staffed primarily by local musicians such as Glands frontman Ross Shapiro. There's also Wuxtry, where Michael Stipe first met Peter Buck back in the day. Locals know it's the best place to find the record of a band whose show you caught last night. Ask about Extra Records, where they sell vinyl by the pound. And check out Wuxtry's Athens Music Museum on the corner to ogle vintage posters of the town's legends.

9 MINNEAPOLIS

Regardless of the course of study you pursue at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, you'll find it hard not to be distracted by all the rock & roll happening off campus. For live music, there's the 400 Bar, whose co-owner, Bill Sullivan, spent years on the road with the Replacements. And at the First Avenue and 7th St Entry, a converted Greyhound station where Purple Rain's finale was filmed, you'll have the best sightlines in town. Punk-rock fans, meanwhile, will adore Dillinger Four guitarist Erik Funk's Triple Rock Social Club.

Record Stores Indie record store the Electric Fetus is probably the only place in town where, if you bring a new CD up to the register, the clerk will alert you of a used copy for less. For collectors, Let It Be stocks so many subgenres that it's hard to keep track of them all: gabber, Goa trance, illbient, blip-hop, you name it. If you prefer your hop with hip rather than blip, head to Fifth Element. Radio Minneapolis radio actually doesn't suck, thanks to two local frequencies with remarkably adventurous playlists. The U of Minnesota's KUOM was once called "the best college

radio station imaginable" by Greil Marcus. The community station KFAI, meanwhile, plays even weirder stuff -- everything from East African pop to transgendered cabaret music.

10 PORTLAND, OR

Lewis and Clark University's Department of Music prides itself on a curriculum that caters both to serious music students and dabblers. And though Reed College doesn't require students to get letter grades, it is one of the most intellectually ambitious colleges in the U.S., where you're guaranteed to find a few fellow music geeks. This unpretentious city has long been home to influential indie acts that generate cult rather than Top Forty followings.

Venues The Crystal Ballroom is the music flagship in the McMenaminbrothers' empire. The brothers are known for taking beat-up spaces and retrofitting them into venues that appear to have more history than they do. Still, it's hard to fault the bookings at the 1,500-capacity Crystal, which includes weeklong residencies by the likes of Modest Mouse. Before they play the Crystal, most acts will have passed through Berbati's Pan, a 500-capacity stronghold that juggles a diverse array of talent. This is often the last stop before graduating to big theaters; Berbati's gave Portlanders their last intimate looks at the White Stripes, Rufus Wainwright and Franz Ferdinand.

Record Stores With two locations, Jackpot Records sells a variety representing every imaginable genre. Clerks at both shops are well-informed and helpful. Mississippi Records and Repair is a mom-and-pop that stocks truckloads of affordable vinyl. Locals say that the bulletin board is a good place to find out about underpublicized shows at houses and small clubs.

BEST MUSIC PROGRAMS

Berklee College of Music Boston

With alumni including Quincy Jones and Melissa Etheridge, Berklee is hard to beat when it comes to educating performers.

Oberlin College Oberlin, OH

Home to one of the best music conservatories in the U.S. Learn studio-recording techniques and beat-making here.

Juilliard School New York

One of the top performing-arts schools, it also hosts more than 700 dance and music events each year.

Full Sail Real World Education Orlando, FL

The college trains students for careers as producer-engineers and even roadies.

University of Southern California Los Angeles

Offers courses in a dizzying array of instruments and is home to the entertaining Trojan Marching Band.

BEST LIL' COLLEGE TOWNS

New Brunswick, NJ

Rutgers' campus is close to a number of cool venues and the fabulous Vintage Vinyl record store, and is home to a long-running punk-rock scene.

Lawrence, KS

The country's most underrated college town, Lawrence has a music scene that's churned out indie bands, including the Get Up Kids.

Burlington, VT

Burlington brings together the best qualities of small-town life and big-city cosmo-politanism. Its music scene was already thriving when members of Phish arrived at the University of Vermont in the early 1980s.

Ithaca, NY

Both Cornell University and Ithaca College reside here. The town has a decent music scene despite being surrounded by miles of farmland.

State College, PA

Home to Penn State University, which offers a degree in both performance and composition as well as one in music education. State College is a regular tour stop for bands big and small.

Posted Jul 28, 2005 12:00 AM

[HTTP://ROLLINGSTONE.COM/NEWS/STORY/7504881/SCHOOLS_THAT_ROCK](http://rollingstone.com/news/story/7504881/schools_that_rock)

©RealNetworks, Inc. All rights reserved.

©Copyright 2006 Rolling Stone