

# Music: Rock, World & Jazz

The scene might be a muddle, but music matters in Berlin.



Knaack. See p219.

Berlin is a city of musical paradox. For decades there was little innovation in the eastern half of the city, while on the western side there was almost too much. West Berlin tried to make the most of skewed demographics, encouraging youth culture and effectively subsidising rock bands. Many of those drawn to the city, at least in part because residency eliminated military service requirements, settled in Kreuzberg, and the effects of those inspired by Bowie, Iggy, Cave and Neubauten are felt to this day. So, on the one hand, low rents, makeshift clubs, active nightlife and a tradition of youthful dissent led to a density of musical activity – this is a city where music is important.

On the other hand, the continual paucity of disposable income among Berlin's younger residents means some of the lowest band guarantees in western Europe. Add that to the city's distance from other urban centres and you have a situation where big-name acts that might play Würzburg or Kiel often skip Berlin when touring the country. Also, somewhere in the techno-powered 1990s, Berlin managed to

get a reputation as an anti-rock city, something which has only recently begun to dissipate.

As well it might. Berlin audiences are some of the most enthusiastic in the world. Perhaps too enthusiastic. Normally mild-mannered Berliners will carry on demanding an encore long after the lights have been turned on. Yes, Berlin does rock, even if its signature sound for the time being remains a minimalist electro take on techno – as exemplified by DJs such as Kaos or bpitch control label head Ellen Allien.

In the past few years, however, just as the boundaries between East and West have blurred, so has there been a heavy overlap between live performance and dance venues, with many major clubs featuring a live act along with DJs on their most popular nights. Much of this has to do with Canadian settler Peaches, who broke biggish (her debut album on Berlin's Kitty-Yo label sold 50,000 copies in the USA alone). Since then there has been a glut of lascivious, 1980s-tinged, art-school playback singers hopping around to relatively primitive electronics, ranging from the leathery irony of

long-timers such as Boy from Brazil and Cobra Killer, to theatrical expats like Snax and Angie Reed. Add to this electro-cabaret the influx of club-influenced rock acts such as The Robocop Kraus, and in the end it's all about dancing. And Berliners do love to dance, even if they're not terribly good at it.

But all sorts of music get aired here, and once a trend starts, it never dies. Kreuzberg retains an anarcho-punk aesthetic. East German hippies strum Beatles songs in Friedrichshain. British post-punk has taken over Mitte. Hip hop dominates suburban working-class estates. And white rastas are all over the place. Sometimes everyone in this city appears to consider themselves a DJ, even if all they're doing is letting side two of Bowie's *Hunky Dory* play out while they're off in the toilets inhaling a line. Meanwhile, several major labels have moved their German or European headquarters to Berlin, and the city also hosts PopKomm (see p185), the German music industry's annual trade fair, talking shop and showcase.

As for the regular *Volk*, the likes of Chris De Burgh or A-Ha still have viable careers here (both played the Berlin Live8), and there's a strain of *Schlager* that can still be heard in a lot of mainstream music. This can make radio difficult for the non-initiated, though RadioEins (95.8 FM, www.radioeins.de), Radio Multikulti (96.3 FM, www.multikulti.de), RadioFritz (102.6 FM, www.fritz.de) and MotorFM (106.8 FM, www.motormusic.org/radio) are all above average, if middlebrow.

## Rock venues

The sports venues Max-Schmeling-Halle and Velodrom (for both, see p244) also host occasional music events.

### Arena Berlin

Eichenstrasse 4, Treptow (533 2030/www.arena-berlin.de). S6, S8, S9, S41, S42, S85 Treptower Park. Open Box office 10am-7.30pm Mon-Fri. Performances varies. No credit cards. Map p308 S9.

It's a former bus garage and often sounds like it, but Arena hosts A-list concerts by acts such as Bob Dylan or Björk, and its moveable stage also allows for some smaller acts. The surrounding entertainment complex includes the Badeschiff (see p253), a swimming pool popular with the gay crowd, and the party boat MS Hoppetosse (see p230).

### Ausland

Lychener Strasse 60, Prenzlauer Berg (447 7008/www.ausland-berlin.de). U2 Eberswalder Strasse/bus N2. Open varies. Admission €3-€5. No credit cards. Map p303/p312 P2.

A tiny basement space run by nutty bohos offering experimental music—noise, free jazz, avant-folk and

live electronica—plus film and installations. It can get packed when a top act, such as Acid Mothers Temple, stops by. Note that concerts begin one hour later than the time posted—on principle, apparently. There's usually a DJ after the show, though he or she may not be concerned with making you dance.

### Bastard@Prater

Kastanienallee 7-9, Prenzlauer Berg (247 6772/www.praterteam.de). U2 Eberswalder Strasse/bus N52. Open Box office noon-6pm Tue-Fri (& 1hr before show). Performances varies. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p303/p312 O3. Connected to the Prater theatre (see p238) and Prater beer garden (see p149), this many-chandeliered spot veers between first-rate indie rock, over-the-hill and up-and-coming underground hip hop, and DJ nights that favour hardcore gabba, ragga and jungle.

### Café Zapata in Tacheles

Oranienburgerstrasse 54-6A, Mitte (281 6109/www.cafe-zapata.de). U6 Oranienburger Tor. Open varies. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p302/p310 M5.

Though part of the squatted Tacheles complex, Café Zapata stands on its own, booking top-flight folk and indie from Joanna Newsom to local heroes such as Bruno Adams. It's a small space, but opens up into a beer garden in summer.

### Columbiacub

Columbiadamm 9-11, Tempelhof (Trinity Ticketing 7809 9810/www.columbiacub.de). U6 Platz der Luftbrücke. Open Box office 10am-7pm Mon-Fri; 12.30-6pm Sat. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p307 N11.

This former US Forces cinema is a little impersonal once you get past the old-fashioned box office, but showcases mid-size acts of every genre, from John Cale to Morgan Heritage. There's been less on here of late as RadioFritz, which used to run it, has moved its shows to the Postbahnhof (see p219).

### Columbiahalle

Columbiadamm 13-21, Tempelhof (tickets 6110 1313/www.columbiahalle.de). U6 Platz der Luftbrücke. Open 9am-7pm Mon-Fri; 10am-2pm Sat. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p307 N11.

Next door to Columbiacub, this unappealing, roomy venue with a reputation for the best sound in town hosts larger acts that haven't made it to stadium status, such as Moby, the White Stripes or Goldfrapp. Drinks cost too much, but it's a good place to see superstar hip hop acts, such as Jay-Z and Eminem, that would be playing amphitheatres in other cities.

### Festsaal Kreuzberg

Skalitzer Strasse 130, Kreuzberg (6165 6003/www.festsaal-kreuzberg.de). U1, U8 Kottbusser Tor. Open varies. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p307 P9.

It looks an unlikely place to go raving, but, thanks to a westward-moving scene and an eclectic booking policy, this has become one of Kreuzberg's most

Kulturbrauerei: always something brewing.



popular venues, featuring indie acts and DJs from Wolf Eyes to Miss Kittin and all over the map.

### Frannz Club

Schönhauser Allee 36, Prenzlauer Berg (7262 7930/www.frannz.de). U2 Eberswalder Strasse. Open 9pm, 11pm Wed; 10pm Fri, Sat; 3pm, 8pm Sun. Tickets free-€8. No credit cards. Map p303/p312 O3.

A former GDR youth club, Frannz has reopened as an anonymous black box with decent sound, pricey drinks and overzealous doormen. Musically, it lacks an identity, and is heavy on German acts that don't really translate culturally, though they have booked some rockabilly stars such as Wanda Jackson.

### Fritzclub im Postbahnhof

Strasse der Pariser Kommune 3-10, Friedrichshain (tickets 6110 1313/www.fritzclub.com). S3, S5, S7, S9, S75 Ostbahnhof. Open 9am-7pm Mon-Fri; 10am-2pm Sat. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p308 R7.

This restored industrial building is a newcomer, but its association with RadioFritz gives it the clout to book on-their-way indie acts such as Arcade Fire and Maximo Park, as well as mid-level names such as Luka Bloom and Fun Lovin' Criminals.

### Kalkscheune

Jannistrasse 2, Mitte (5900 4340/www.kalkscheune.de). U6 Oranienburger Tor. Open Box office noon-7pm Mon-Fri. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p302/p310 M5.

This elegantly restored 19th-century factory building is a popular venue for Schlager parties and cabaret acts, but also gets booked with a few interesting and offbeat bands, such as Devendra Banhart and Nouvelle Vague.

### Knaack

Greifswalder Strasse 224, Prenzlauer Berg (concerts 442 7061/club 442 7060/www.knaack-berlin.de). S8, S41, S42, S85 Greifswalder Strasse. Open Bar 6pm-late daily. Club 8pm-late Wed; 9pm-late Fri, Sat. Admission Club €1; €5 after 11pm. Concerts free-€18. No credit cards. Map p303 Q4.

Follow the Rammstein-ish bar to the back, enter a narrow hallway, and you'll find a dark, small and anonymous club. Knaack books an eclectic array of excellent acts, from the Rapture to RA the Rugged Man to Michael Hurley. It also hosts free nights of local bands, which are usually less impressive. There's an upstairs discotheque. Photo p217.

### Kulturbrauerei

Schönhauser Allee 35 (443 1515/www.kesselhaus-berlin.de). U2 Eberswalder Strasse. Open Box office noon-6pm Mon-Wed, Sun; noon-8pm Thur-Sat. Tickets €5-22. No credit cards. Map p302/p310 O3.

There is an assortment of different venues within this enormous former brewery which, with its outdoor bars and barbecues, can resemble a cross between a medieval fairground and a school disco. Kesselhaus, Maschinehaus and Palas are the three venues linked to the Kulturbrauerei proper (unlike nbi; see p220) and host diverse acts in a similar vein. Kesselhaus is the largest, drawing its biggest crowds for reggae concerts. Some jazz and German acts also show up, but booking is eclectic.

### Magnet

Greifswalder Strasse 212/3, Prenzlauer Berg (4400 8140/www.magnet-club.de). S8, S41, S42, S85 Greifswalder Strasse/tram M4, N54. Open 8pm-late daily. Admission €1-€14. No credit cards. Map p303/p312 Q4.

Once a jazz club, this venue has become one of the biggest bookers for the kind of up-and-coming indie bands featured in the *NME* – catch them here before they hit the stadium circuit. Recent renovations have improved the sight lines, though it can still be difficult to navigate a peek when the place fills up.

### Maria am Ostbahnhof

An der Schillingbrücke, Friedrichshain (2123 8190/[www.clubmaria.de](http://www.clubmaria.de)). S3, S5, S7, S9, S75 Ostbahnhof. Open 8pm-late daily. Admission €8-€15. No credit cards. Map p307 Q7.

The premier venue for hipper live acts not quite ready for Columbiahalle (see p218) also hosts dance nights that, although eclectically booked with top-notch DJs, don't come off very glam in the concrete bunker environs. Other attractions are the stylish post-industrial design and labyrinth of lounges that swell and shrink depending on the organisers' whim.

### Mudd Club

Grosse Hamburger Strasse 17, Mitte (4403 6299/[www.muddclub.de](http://www.muddclub.de)). S5, S7, S9, S75 Hackescher Markt. Open varies. Tickets varies. No credit cards. Map p303/p310 N5.

This brick-lined basement is owned by Steve Mass, who founded the original, NYC club of yore. He's more besotted by Russendisko than No Wave these days, with a self-conscious attempt to ape the success of Kaffee Burger (see p224), complete with Russian beer and DJs with moustaches. Band booking emphasises loveable losers such as Mark Lanegan or the Dirty Three.

### nbi

Kulturbrauerei, Schönhauser Allee 36, Prenzlauer Berg (4405 1681/[www.neueberlinerinitiative.de](http://www.neueberlinerinitiative.de)). U2 Eberswalder Strasse/bus N2. Open 6pm-late daily. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p302/p310 O3.

Recently moved to the Kulturbrauerei, the latest space for this electroclub pioneer is a pink box sprinkled with furniture in the current *Wohnzimmer* style. The bartenders can't stop talking about the excellent sound system, though, and several nights per month are given to labels and promoters such as Monika and RepeatRepeat, which leads to such surprises as Einstürzende Neubauten popping in. The space doesn't lend itself to dancing, so electronic music has been de-emphasised, but the booking remains interesting. Sometimes there's ping-pong.

### Passionskirche

Marheinekeplatz 1-2, Kreuzberg (tickets 6959 3624/6940 1241/[www.akanthus.de](http://www.akanthus.de)). U7 Gneisenaustrasse. Open varies. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p307 N10.

The likes of Beck, Ryan Adams and Marc Almond have graced the stage of this deconsecrated church – the best place for acts whose amplifiers don't go past 4. But get there early, as it's the only church in Berlin whose pews regularly overflow. And the only one where you can drink more than wine.

### SO36

Oranienstrasse 190, Kreuzberg (tickets 6110 1313/6140 1306/[www.so36.de](http://www.so36.de)). U1, U8 Kottbusser Tor. Open 9pm-late daily. Box office noon-4pm daily. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p307 P9.

Berlin's legendary punk club continues to book the biggest names in DIY, from Bolt Thrower to Killing Joke, as well as edgy up-and-comers such as The Streets. Also hosts reggae nights, gay parties (see p208) and more.

### Volksbühne/Roter Salon

Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Mitte (tickets 4171 7512/4401 7400/[www.rotter-salon.de](http://www.rotter-salon.de)). U2 Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. Open Box office noon-6pm Fri. Admission €5-€8. No credit cards. Map p303/p310 O5.

Two to three times a month the main stage at east Berlin's premier avant-garde theatre hosts arty acts such as Animal Collective or Tom Ze. And sometimes they open up the wood-panelled stage to such curator-approved DJs as Aphex Twin. The same complex contains the likeable Roter Salon, where you can hear a wide-ranging array of DJs and see indie-style live acts.

### Wabe

Danziger Strasse 101, Prenzlauer Berg (902 953 850/[www.wabe-berlin.de](http://www.wabe-berlin.de)). S8, S41, S42, S85 Greifswalder Strasse. Open varies. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p303 Q3.

A GDR-era community centre in Ernst-Thälmann-Park, this octagonal space provides young local bands with an opportunity to perform live – partly by hosting its own 'battle of the bands' contest and co-operating with MTV.

### World music

It only takes a few minutes' listening to Radio Multikulti (note new frequency: 96.3 FM) to get an aural impression of Berlin's global music scene. From indie pop to Brazilian acoustic, Klezmer remix to oriental crossover, the palette of worldbeat offerings seems to be shrinking and expanding at the same time. While big-name performers made fewer appearances in Berlin in 2005 (recent concerts included Amadou & Mariam from Mali, New York-based Richard Bona from Cameroon, and the legendary Skatalites from Jamaica), a profusion of lesser-known hybrid acts fills Berlin's cultural calendar with dizzying diversity.

Anyone visiting in late spring shouldn't miss the *Karnival der Kulturen* (see p182), a four-day festival of multiculturalism. Just outside of Berlin, Potsdam's *Afrika Festival* in early July is growing in popularity and quality.

World music acts are often also booked at the Kesselhaus or Maschinehaus in the Kulturbrauerei complex (see p219).

### Haus der Kulturen der Welt

John-Foster-Dulles Allee 10, Tiergarten (397 870/[www.hkw.de](http://www.hkw.de)). S5, S7, S9 S75 Bellevue. Open 10am-9pm Tue-Sun. Admission varies. No credit cards. Map p302 K6.

Berlin's largest world music venue, a sort of global cultural centre, houses several auditoriums and exhibition spaces. See p101.

### Havanna Club

Hauptstrasse 30, Schöneberg (784 8565/[www.havanna-berlin.de](http://www.havanna-berlin.de)). U7 Eisenacher Strasse. Open 9pm-late Wed; 10pm-late Fri, Sat. Admission €2.50 Wed; €6.50 Fri; €7 Sat. No credit cards. Map p306 J11.

Three dancefloors with salsa, merengue and R&B. It's a popular place with expatriate South Americans and Cubans. One hour before opening, there's a salsa class for €4, which is reckoned to be a good place to meet people, as well as learn a few steps.

### Werkstatt der Kulturen

Wissmannstrasse 32, Neukölln (609 7700). U7, U8 Hermannplatz. Open 9am-6pm Mon; 9am-6pm Tue-Fri. Admission €12; €8 concessions. Price varies for special concerts. No credit cards. Map p307 P11.

This intimate venue usually presents traditionally ethnic music acts or local collaborations that blend jazz, trance or folk elements.

## So far so Gut

Musician, producer, label-owner and DJ, **Gudrun Gut** (pictured) has been a prime mover on the Berlin scene for over 20 years. She arrived from West Germany at 17, attracted by the 'breath of freedom' Berlin promised. After enrolling in art school, she played with an early incarnation of Einstürzende Neubauten and co-founded the all-female band Malaria! with Bettina Köster. Despite (or because of) the band's severe, very German aesthetic, it gained international notice, including support gigs with New Order and John Cage. Gut describes 1980s Berlin as 'a city of young people and pensioners', and says it has always attracted misfits.

After Malaria!, Gut began exploring electronic music technology with the band Matador and numerous other projects. In the mid 1990s she started the Ocean Club ([www.oceanclub.de](http://www.oceanclub.de)), a loose collective of like-minded artists. Gut and collaborator Thomas Fehlmann also began hosting and producing a weekly radio programme of the same name on RadioEins (Friday 11pm-1am, repeated Sunday 1-3am; 95.8 FM) to showcase an eclectic selection of music. And she founded the label Monika Enterprise ([www.monika-enterprise.de](http://www.monika-enterprise.de)), whose excellent releases by artists such as Barbara Morgenstern, Quarks and Contriva she describes as 'poppy electronica with an edge'.

When asked what makes the Berlin scene unique, Gut describes the city as a 'grey oasis', pointing to its relative affordability and

tolerance as factors in attracting artists. That tolerance, she says, has helped create a multi-layered musical culture that offers 'many niches to be filled'. But rather than having a typical sound or genre, Berlin's music scene is distinguished more by a subversive attitude, a Berlin tradition she sees as dating back to at least the 1920s.

Perhaps that attitude feeds what Gut sees as the rigorous criticism musicians in Berlin can expect from their peers. Artists get feedback quickly and directly. For that reason, Berlin musicians tend to start tours elsewhere, wanting the set to be perfect before it reaches the hometown crowd. But that, says Gut, doesn't mean there's no sense of community. While every label does its own thing, there's a sense of co-operation rather than competition. 'There's still that communist perspective, where you say,

"Together we're stronger than on our own." Gut regards the creeping yuppification of Berlin and the recent closings of illegal clubs with concern, pointing out that the renegade spirit of those places is part of what makes the city's scene what it is. But in general her view of the future is positive: the crisis in the music business appears to have been overcome, with major labels and independents now each doing their own thing. And she's unfazed by Berlin's financial crisis, saying she's 'never experienced a prosperous Berlin'. After more than 20 years helping to shape Berlin music, she's not about to let budget cuts get in the way.





**B-Flat:** Jam with everything.

## Jazz

After a post-Wall upswing in activity, many of the city's better jazzfolk have joined forces with their experimental or electronic brethren. Berlin has never been big on genre purity. That said, a rule of thumb for clubs here is jazz+blues = mouldy, jazz+weird = fun. World-class musicians such as avant-gardist Peter Brötzmann and Australian drummer Tony Buck make their homes here, and each autumn boasts two fantastic, overlapping jazz festivals, the larger **Berlin JazzFest** (see p185), and the more free-rooted **Total Music Meeting**.

Rather than sticking to the jazz clubs, search out galleries, artist-run venues, social clubs and cultural houses. The famed GDR-era **JazzKeller Treptow** ([www.jazzkeller69.de](http://www.jazzkeller69.de)) continues to promote many interesting shows in a variety of small spaces. Berlin also features Germany's only 24-hour jazz radio (101.9 FM) but bean counters and bureaucrats have rendered it sadly inoffensive.

### A-Trane

*Bleibtreustrasse 1, Charlottenburg (313 2550/[www.a-trane.de](http://www.a-trane.de)). S5, S7, S9, S75 Savignyplatz. Open 9pm-2am Mon-Thur, Sun; 9pm-late Fri, Sat. Performances 10pm daily. Admission €6-€25. Credit AmEx, DC, MC. Map p305/p312 E8.* A bit ostentatious, but the place usually gets at least one top-flight act a month for an extended stay.

### B-Flat

*Rosenthaler Strasse 13, Mitte (283 3123/[www.b-flat-berlin.de](http://www.b-flat-berlin.de)). U8 Rosenthaler Platz. Open from 9pm daily. Admission €4-€12; €4-€8 concessions. No credit cards. Map p303/p310 N5.*

Maintaining a large piano-bar feel, B-Flat manages to get a decent local hero in once in a while, but its strongest nights tend to feature singers. Free Wednesday night jam session from 9pm.

### Quasimodo

*Kantstrasse 12A, Charlottenburg (312 8086/[www.quasimodo.de](http://www.quasimodo.de)). U2, U9, S5, S7, S9, S75 Zoologischer Garten. Open Performances 10pm Tue-Sun (doors open 1hr before show). Admission €5-€25. No credit cards. Map p305/p312 F8.*

This basement spot appears close to severing its connections to jazz entirely, preferring the 'jazzy'. It still gets some good acts, both local and international, as well as heroic singers such as Terry Callier.

### Tränenpalast

*Reichstagsufer 17, Mitte (office 206 100/tickets 2061 0011/[www traenenpalast.de](http://www traenenpalast.de)). U6, S1, S2, S5, S7, S9, S75 Friedrichstrasse. Open Box office 6pm-performance begins. Performances varies. No credit cards. Map p303/p311 M6.*

This roomy, fascinating location – it's the building people passed through when leaving East Berlin – mostly books comedy and cabaret (see p242), but sometimes also hosts jazz greats such as Pharoah Sanders, Don Byron and Nils Petter Molvaer.

### Yorckschlösschen

*Yorckstrasse 15, Kreuzberg (215 8070/[www.yorckschloesschen.de](http://www.yorckschloesschen.de)). U6, U7 Mehringdamm. Open 9am-3am Mon-Thur, Sun; 9am-4am Fri, Sat. Admission free. Credit AmEx, DC, MC, V. Map p306 L10.*

The music at this century-old *Eck-Kneipe* is a faintly ridiculous mix of German Dixieland and long-in-the-tooth beat music. But in the old-world environment (and after several *Weizenbiere*) it can actually get pretty groovy.