

The Rhythm of Hill Heights

According to musicologists deep in Nashlanta's Hill Heights neighborhood one can find present day examples of the live music culture that once flourished throughout this region of the country. Music scholar Jill Hannervend says that Hill Heights is "the place" for "xylophone enthusiasts".

The xylophone scene in Hill Heights revolves around the cafés and since, at least, the late 60's Ned's Café has been the neighborhood's most prestigious venue (according to xylophonists in the know.)

The dress code at Ned's today is casual but the atmosphere retains a formal vibe. Musicians walk stiffly to the stage when it is their turn to play; and the audience listens attentively.

"Musicians come, and go, but the level of musicality is always first rate," said Peter Volner who is one of Ned's regular customers. "Why would I go anywhere else?", he asks with a smile.

Despite the dignified air the polychromatic mismatched chairs give a touch of whimsy to the place. Scarlett orange mauve and chartreuse; they are nearly as colorful as the music.

The opportunity to play at Ned's makes a deep lasting impression on musicians.

"The first time I was invited to play at Ned's I slapped myself, I was that happy", said Celeste Strandweather, a xylophonist from Buffalo N.Y.

July 14, 1971 was her debut and she recalls the day vividly. The audience member, who made the biggest impression on her, was Ned himself.

"Ned came up to me and calmly said I 'could play like Cal Tjader!'"