

ARTS

JAZZ JUNKIES GET FIX AT DOWNTOWN BOOKSTORE

House band The Dangerous Kitchen jams out every Sunday at Read All Over Bookstore

By [Michelle Habel](#) | January 16, 2011

The Dangerous Kitchen: from left to right, Ed Prokop, Nate Masters, Mike Barker and Ron Knobler (not pictured, Chris Fink) Credit [Michelle Habel](#)



Enter [Read All Over Bookstore](#) on any given Sunday and you will get much more than a wide selection of bestsellers, paperbacks and memoirs.

This funky alcove off William Street is the venue for local jazz ensemble The Dangerous Kitchen's weekly Jazz Jam Session, happening every Sunday from 2:30 to 4:30pm. Here, jazz junkies spend their afternoon jamming out and swapping solos as they bebop and toe-tap their way across an intimate stage.

The [Jazz Jam](#) is the work of five local Jazz musicians. The founders of the jam also invite jazz musicians of all ages and experience to join the house band on stage for their two-hour session.

In their novel approach to classical jazz standards, [The Dangerous Kitchen](#) delivers a dynamic and innovative performance, which features a symphony of brass, percussion and stringed instruments. This jazz group strives to uphold, what they refer to as, the spirit of "original bebop jazz".

About a year and a half ago, saxophonist Nate Masters began playing solo jam sessions at the University Cafe, which was once located a block north of the bookstore.

“It was a little shaky at first,” Masters said. “But these guys started coming in, and we began to really develop a solid house band.”

Masters, along with bassist Ron Knobler and drummer Chris Fink almost instantly made a musical connection.

“We communicate musically very well,” Masters said. “When we want to try new things individually, we can trust that the other guys will be there, so that if you want to get a little crazy, things won't fall apart.”

Masters said, he and his fellow jazz mates possess a solid musicianship and comradery that are often neglected in music this day in age.

When the University Cafe closed last winter, Masters and company decided to keep the jam sessions going in the event that they could find another venue to host weekly get-togethers. In the meantime they decided to form a jazz band, which they would name The Dangerous Kitchen. It includes guitarist Ed Prokop and percussionist Mike Barker.

Eventually, the group arranged with the owner of Read All Over Bookstore, to conduct a weekly jam session every Sunday afternoon during which The Dangerous Kitchen would serve as the house band.

These musicians not only have a undeniable passion for playing jazz music, but maintain a strong sense of responsibility for the education of local emerging musicians and jazz enthusiasts.

Knobler said that the band really prizes the community aspect of these jam sessions, where folks getting their musical start in middle school, high school or college have the opportunity to learn Jazz first-hand from veterans who have studied music on the university level and practiced playing jazz music for years.

“It gives us an opportunity to teach and cultivate these young musicians, who are primarily coming from rock or rap backgrounds,” said Knobler.

A collection of jazz standards exists to provide a guideline of musical principles for jazz artists, while aiding in their collaboration with one another.

“Jazz is an improvisational art form,” Knobler said, “At an event, everyone is reading the same charts, but musicians take turns improvising in the middle, and bouncing ideas off one another.”

The regular participants in these jazz jams all agree that it is the practice of experimental collaboration during these sessions which keeps them returning to the bookstore every Sunday.

Fink said, “It gives me a chance to try out new things on the drums that I wouldn't be able to do otherwise without accompaniment.”

Knobler concurred, saying that the experience of playing with other musicians is what drives artists to improve.

Aside from the creative outlet these sessions offer, they also serve as educational forums for all who attend.

“In the jazz jams, we play a tune, and often times I'll talk about how the song came about, or interesting aspects of the tune musically,” Masters said. “A lot of people who come aren't musicians, they just want to sit and enjoy. We like to provide them with insight into the innerworkings of what we're doing.”

The cultivation of young jazz musicians and the education of jazz enthusiasts is something that the members of The Dangerous Kitchen believe is essential to elevating the local Jazz community.

Fink, along with his fellow band members, voiced concerns regarding the limitations jazz musicians and enthusiasts face in the existing downtown arts and business corridor.

“There are a number of good musicians in town who you never hear of in the jazz context, because there are not enough places to hear jazz in town, especially places willing to host a night of live music, with jazz as its main focus.”

Though you may be able to catch a jazz guitarist at Kybecca, or listen to some bluesy-type vocals at Colonial Tavern, it is a rare thing to find a truly jazzy experience downtown.

In an effort to shine a light on the seemingly underground local Jazz scene, the members of The Dangerous Kitchen ensemble recently decided to establish a non-profit organization, called the [Fredericksburg Jazz Collective](#), in an effort to raise jazz awareness throughout the community.

“We hope the collective will provide a way for all of the different jazz bands and musicians in town to connect, and help spread the word,” Fink said, “there is Jazz to be heard, and the collective can help the public find it.”

Transform a frigid Sunday afternoon into a unique musical and educational experience, and stop by Read All Over Bookstore today. The Jazz Jam Session runs from 2:30 to 4:30pm, and is free and open to the public.