

The First Floor Club

The First Floor Club was opened in 1959 by Martin Carrington, Howard Matthews and Julian Burns at 33 Asquith Ave. A Toronto Star article (June 13, 1964 p.12) referencing Julian Burns suggests he had two partners.

It started as other clubs did with a eclectic mix of arts, including poetry reading and theatre in the round, but based on what appears in the dailies, morphed into a full time music club with after hours jazz and dancing thrown in at one point.

Advertising in the dailies was spotty until 1962. References to a number of the plays presented are including for “texture”. The Club wasn’t a favorite of some columnists, in particular Patrick Scott who was arguably cruel from time to time. No wonder Clem Hambourg once threatened to sue him.

The Club does not appear to have survived 1964 as Julian Burns moves on.

Updated: May 21, 2020

1959

Jan 10	An AI Saxes advertisement for acting classes at 33 Asquith Ave	Star Jan 10 th p.25 - between this and the next entry, effectively establishing The First Floor Club starting up in 1959
Nov 2-4	Reference to a play “No Exit” by Jean Paul Sartre being offered in this club	Star Nov 3 rd p.27 and G&M Oct 24 th p.13

Dec 7-11	“The Many Faces of Dance” directed by Garbed Roberts	Star Dec 5 th p.28 and Dec 9 th p.27, in the latter an article by Harvey Hart titled “In Off-Beatnik Club” - another play being presented here with a good description of the club; “a cabaret style night club”. Dates confirmed in G&M Dec 7 th p.27.
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1960

Mar 16	An article by Lotta Dempsey describing the club	Star Mar 16 th p.27 - a good description of what was then a poetry club or at least evening well attended by university students with the performance titled “Vocal Magazine”. See also G&M Mar 5 th p.16.
Mar 18	Globe writer Herbert Whittaker	G&M Mar 18 th p.10 - provides a good overview of local writers reading at the Club.
Jun 11	Globe writer Maria Fusco	G&M Jun 11 th p.15 a good article on jazz pianist Maury Kaye who performs Saturdays at the First floor Club (also appearing Fridays at the House of Hambourg and Sundays at the Chelsea Club).
Jun 11	Globe writer William French	G&M Jun 11 th p.A16-18. Also referenced in other lists, a good overview of the late night jazz club scene.
Jul 9	Coming events theatre column	Star Jul 9 th p.27. G&M Jul 9 th p.13 also advertises poetry reading at the Club.
Jul 11	Robert Fulford’s column on Books	Star Jul 11 th p.20 another “edition” of Vocal Magazine, “tonight and tomorrow night”

Jul 30	Rob McTaggart (trumpet), Rob McConnell (valve trombone). Moe Prieur (tenor). Art Ayre (piano), Ian Henstridge (bass), Andy Cree (drums)	Star Jul 30 th p.28 Tim Ryan in an article " <i>Jazz Clubs Provide After Hours Hideaway</i> " identifies this as a jazz club and names musicians, though not beyond "a Sunday night"
Oct 1	Globe's Frank Morriss describes the entertainment "menu" at the Club	G&M Oct 1 st p.22 "... poetry, folk singing and progressive jazz are included on the menu"
Oct 7	The column "What's on Tonight"	Star Oct 7 th p.24 again reference to the "Vocal Magazine" poetry reading but not to music
Oct 21	In the Tonight's Highlights	Star Oct 21 st p.35 reference under "TV" - " a TV visit to Toronto's First Floor Club for a program of folk singing (30 min)"
Oct 31	"What's on Tonight"	Star Oct 31 st p.28 another reference to the "Vocal Magazine"
Nov 18	Pierre Berton in a column that reviews several coffee folk houses	Star Nov 23 rd p.33. Berton describes the Club as a former girls private club turned "hipster temple" with folk signing ending at midnight and jazz starting thereafter (progressive, very loud). An excellent read describing the club, though not very complementary.
1961		
Mar 29	The First Floor Club promotes a "Blues Dance" at the <i>Frontenac Arms</i> hotel.	Star Mar 25 th p.22 with Don Thompson's 11 piece orchestra, Sonny Greenridge (guitar) and Jay Jackson (vocalist)

Sep 23	Don Thompson Quartet	Star Sep 23 rd p.20 In Dave Caplan's "Man About Jazz" "The First Floor Club has cancelled its <i>dancing to jazz</i> policy to allow fans the undistracted pleasure of listening to the fabulous sounds of the Don Thompson Quartet."
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1962

Feb 3 and 10	In Dave Caplan's "Man About Jazz" article	Star Feb 3 rd p.28 Caplan lists the nights music is offered at several clubs including the First Floor Club: juke box jazz Wed and Thurs (9-1), live modern jazz Fri and Sat (11-4) with Maury Kaye on Sunday (9-1) Star Feb 10 th p.26 Caplan also notes that the Musicians Union had given the Club permission to use the juke box on Wed and Thurs night, provided admission was free and that live music would be provided for the rest of the week.
Mar 30-April 1	Sonny Greenridge quartet (Friday late), Wray Downes (Sat late and Sunday 9:30 to 1 am)	G&M Mar 30 th p.23
May 4-6	Don Thompson's group (Fri), Rob McConnell (Sat) Wray Downes Trio (Sunday)	G&M May 4 th p.23
May 5 and 10	A play "Three Women" is being presented	Star May 5 th p.24, May 10 th p.22 adding a little detail; its "in the round surroundings"
May 25-27	Andy Cree Quartet (Fri late), Wray Downes (Sat late and Sunday)	G&M May 25 th p.25

Jun 1-3	Don Thompson Quintet (Fri), Rob McConnell (Sat), Maury Kaye Trio (Sunday)	G&M Jun 1 st p.21
Jun 8-10	Last week's line-up repeats but with Wray Downes back on Sunday	G&M Jun 8 th p.21
Jun 22-24	The Jun 8 th line-up continues	G&M Jun 22 nd p.21
Jun 23 (in the week preceding)	A rather cutting article of both Lenny Breau and the club itself by Patrick Scott titled " <i>Critic Still Standing After Guitar Session</i> "	G&M Jun 23 rd p.17 describing what may be one of guitarist Lenny Breau's first Toronto appearances. Wray Downes backs him on piano so could have been on the Sunday. As for the Club: "it's rust resistant coffee" and "a piano that had never known the touch of a tuner's hand"
Jun 29-Jul 1, Jul 6-8,	The June 22-24 weekend lineup repeats	G&M Jun 20 th p.21, G&M Jul 6 th p.21
Jul 13-15	Don Thompson moves into both the late Friday and Sat slots leaving Wray Downes on Sunday	G&M Jul 13 th p.21
Jul 20, 22	Don Thompson is listed for Friday late and Wray Downes on Sunday.	G&M Jul 20 th p.19 The next entry explains the Saturday gap.
July 21	Cal Tjader and his sextet	G&M July 21 st p.12 Patrick Scott describes his music: "... pseudo-Latin and pseudo-jazz, a couple of ingredients that make pseudo-music". Ouch.

Aug 17-19	Dave Caplan offers more detail on the Club	Star Aug 18 th p.19 club features the groups of Don Thompson, Rob McConnell and Wray Downes and that the Club is going ahead with plans for expansion (seeking a new site) - but keeping 33 Asquith “in full swing until the big move”, also a mention of the Cave Club at 40 Scollard. G&M Aug 17 th p.21 confirms this line-up for this weekend.
Sep 8-9	Rob McConnell jazz combo (8 th) Wray Downes Trio (9 th)	Star Sep 8 th p.24
Sep 14-16	Don Thompson Quintet, Rob McConnell Sextet, Wray Downes Quartet	Star Sep 15 th p.28 in what may be the first formal advertisement providing names and the times comparable to above
Sep 21-23	Don Thompson Quintet, Rob McConnell Sextet, Wray Downes Quartet	Star Sep 22 nd p.24 a regular rotation of residences continues which is confirmed G&M Sep 21 st p.25
Nov 23-25	Don Thompson Quintet, Rob McConnell Sextet, Wray Downes Quartet repeat	Star Nov 23 rd p.32
Nov 30, Dec 1-2	Don Thompson Quartet or Sonny Greenwich (Fri) Rob McConnell Combo, Wray Downes Group	Star Nov 23 rd P.32 has Don Thompson on Friday, the G&M Nov 30 th p.23 has the Sonny Greenwich Quintet on Friday
Dec 7-9	Dale Hillary Quintet appears Friday followed by Rob McConnell and Wray Downes Sat. and Sunday respectively	G&M Dec 7 th p.23

1963

Jan 4-6	Wray Downes (Fri), Don Thompson Quintet (Sat) and Dale Hillary Quintet Sunday	G&M Jan 4 th p.33
Jan 11-13	Dale Hillary Quintet (Fri), Don Thompson Quintet (Sat) Wray Downes Sunday	G&M Jan 11 th p.37 same artists, different order
Feb 8-11	Sonny Greenwich Quartet (8 th), Don Thompson Quartet (9 th), Wray Downes (10 th) and “ Blue Monday ” on Monday night	Star Feb 8 th p.22 in “The Week in Toronto” column and G&M Feb 8 th p.5
Feb 15-18	The previous week’s lineup returns, ex Blue Monday	Star Feb 15 th p.22 and G&M Feb 15 th p.5
Feb 23	An in depth article by Warren Gerard “ <i>Downes the Best, He says</i> ”	G&M Feb 23 rd p.13 a well written insight into pianist Wray Downes , w/o the sarcasm of others
Mar 1-3	The lineup returns and presumably last week too	Star Mar 1 st p.19
Mar 22-24	Doug Richardson Quartet (Fri), Don Thompson (Sat), Wray Downes Trio Sunday	G&M Mar 22 nd p.5
Mar 30-31	Doug Richardson Quartet (Fri), Skip Roberts with the Wray Downes Trio both Sat and Sunday	Star Mar 30 th p.27 in Dave Caplan’s “ <i>Man About Jazz</i> ” column claims Howie Matthews of the First Floor Club “discovered Skip Roberts in a Hamilton club” helped out on Friday by the G&M Mar 29 th p.5

Apr 12-14	A US group Prince Lasha and quintet (Fri & Sat) with Doug Richardson Quartet Sunday	Star Apr 9 th p.34 in Gerry Barker's " <i>In Town & Out</i> " " ..to present abstract jazz featuring free expression without worrying about things like melody ... man" and Star Apr 11 th p.26 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Lasha with the G&M listing the Doug Richardson Quartet moving in Sunday
Apr 14	Wray Downes Trio with Skip Roberts also listed for this night in the Star	Star Apr 13 th p.27 - including a very complimentary comment about Skip Roberts by Dave Caplan in his "Man About Jazz" column. Also noting that Doug Cole was by Sept '62 at George's.
Apr 19-21	Doug Richardson Quartet (19 & 20), Skip Roberts, vocalist Sunday	Star Apr 19 th p.24. The G&M Apr 19 th p.5 has Don Thompson (Fri and Sat) with the Doug Richardson Quartet featuring vocalist Skip Roberts on Sunday.
Apr 26	Don Thompson Quintet with Skip Roberts (Fri and Sat), Wray Downes Sunday	G&M Apr 26 th p.5
May 3-5	Don Thompson Quartet with Skip Roberts "singer", Friday and Sat from midnight Sunday from 9 pm	Star May 3 rd p.24. The G&M May 3 rd p.5 has Skip Roberts there only on Friday and Sunday.
May 10-12	Don Thompson Quartet Friday and Sunday	G&M May 10 th p.4 - no specific musician mentioned Sat.
May 31-Jun 2	Ian Hemstridge Quartet (Friday) Don Thompson Quartet Sat. and Sunday	G&M May 31 st p.4
Jun 7-9	Don Thompson Quartet all weekend	G&M Jun 7 th p.4

Jun 14-16, 21-23	Mike Massey Sextet (14 th), Andy Cree Quartet (15 th) and Rob McConnell Quintet Sun.	Star Jun 14 th p.23 and G&M Jun 21 st p.4
Jun 24-30	Lennie Tristano on a loaned concert Steinway grand piano (a first for the club) at 9 pm for the week.	Star Jun 22 nd p.23, G&M Jun 22 nd p.14 has the gig June 24-29. Patrick Scott in a G&M Jun 29 th p.16 article "A Reverent Evening With Lenny Tristano" provides another of his trademark reviews, here of Tristano's performance. It's understandable understand why Clem Hambourg threatened to sue Scott (p.227, Eric Koch's book The Brothers Hambourg).
Jun 28-30	The late night sessions continue to feature Mike Massey, Andy Cree and Guido Basso-McConnell groups	Star Jun 22 nd p.23 and Jun 28 th p.18
Jul 5-7	Art Ayre Quintet takes over the late night slot on Friday with the Andy Cree quartet there after midnight Sat. and Guido Basso-McConnell Sun	Star Jul 5 th p.20
Jul 26-28	Ricky Marcus Quartet (26 th). Ron Collier quartet (27 th) with the Guido Basso-McConnell quintet returning on Sunday	Star Jul 26 th p.20
Sep 13-15	Now just "modern jazz" Friday to Sunday	Star Sep 13 th p.22

Sep 27-29	Again, “modern jazz” Friday to Sunday	Star Sep 27 th p.21
Oct 10	Gerry Barker’s <i>In Town & Out</i>	Star Oct 10 th p.31 Julian Burns “is negotiating with pianist Horace Silver but it depends on “how well Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers do next week in the noble jazz-without-booze experiment. The club is undergoing redecoration” See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jazz_Messengers
Oct 18-19	Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers	G&M Oct 18 th p.4
Nov 2	A small, dark and eerily atmospheric club that presents a parade of local groups on weekends”	Tely Nov 2 nd The club gets recognition in the newly introduced <i>What’s Going On</i> listing in the Toronto Telegram
Nov 8-10	Rickie Marcus Quartet (8 th), Don Thompson Quintet (9 th) & the Art Ayre Quartet Sunday	Tely Nov 9 th
Nov 18-23	Horace Silver Quintet a “US piano star” does a week long gig	Star Nov 16 th p.27 Advertisement: starting “Monday” Star Nov 23 rd p.31 “closing tonight”, and in Tely Nov 16 th see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Silver G&M Nov 23 rd p. 17 in Warren Gerard’s column: “... the jazz pianist who introduced funk to music ...”
Dec 4-7	A play <i>Piandello’s Six Characters</i>	G&M Nov 30 th p.15 Gordon Froggatt’s “Curtain Call” column
Dec 28	Patrick Scott’s “Jazz Scene”	G&M Dec 28 th p.14 another example of why a musician might want to sue Scott

Nov 29-Dec 1	Rickie Marcus Quartet (29 th), Don Thompson Quintet (30 th) & the Art Ayre Quartet Sunday the 1 st	
Dec 13-15	Don Thompson Quartet , with Tony Collacutt “taking over the Sunday session.”	Star Dec 14 th p.26 Dave Caplan writing in the Star’s <i>Showbill</i> column
Dec 13-15	Rickie Marcus Quartet (Fri) Don Thompson Quintet (Sat) & the Art Ayre Quartet on Sunday repeat	Tely Dec 14 th
Dec 20-22	Rickie Marcus Quartet (Fri) Don Thompson Quintet (Sat) & the Art Ayre Quartet on Sunday repeat	Tely Dec 21 st
Dec 31	New Years eve shows	The Tely lists the Club as one providing a show

1964

Jan 3-5	Rickie Marcus Quartet (Fri) Don Thompson Quintet (Sat) & the Art Ayre Quartet on Sunday repeat	Tely Jan 4 th Note this column is probably covering the current week, (Friday in the rear view mirror) not the coming weekend as it has it seems for weeks w/o saying so. Star Jan 4 th p.21 has Art Ayre on Sat, Tony Collacutt Sunday.
Jan 10-12	Telegram’s “What’s Going On” column	Tely Jan 11 th “Week ends, lots of good jazz by assorted performers” as the Tely drops naming artists for a while
Jan 17-19 to Feb 14-16	“modern jazz by assorted performers”	in the Saturday edition’s “What’s Going On”

Feb 18-19	<p>Sleepy John Estes “something different for this modern jazz club is powerful blues singer”</p>	<p>Tely Feb 15th “What’s Going On” column with modern jazz groups performing on the weekend (21st- 23rd) Star Feb 8th p.28: a note that with John Estes coming to town, that the CBC would video tape the first night’s show “for a segment on The Observer”. The Star Feb 11th p.35 features an article by Lotta <i>Dempsey</i> “<i>Comeback for Sleepy John</i>”. In it Dr. Beverley Lewis and Richard (Dick) Flohil are credited with bringing Estes to Toronto.</p> <p>G&M Feb 19th p.10 and Feb 22nd p14. Patrick Scott does it again!</p>
Feb 21-23 to Mar 6-8	“modern jazz groups abound”	Tely “What’s Going On” columns
Mar 14	Don Thompson Group	Tely Mar 14 th
Mar 20	Junior Messengers	Tely Mar 14 th
Mar 21	Don Thompson Group	Tely Mar 21 st
Mar 27	Junior Messengers	Tely Mar 28 th
Mar 28	Don Thompson (tenor sax) Quartet	Tely Mar 28 th
Apr 3	Junior Messengers	Tely Mar 28 th
Apr 4	Don Thompson Quintet	Tely Apr 4 th
Apr 3	Art Blakey group	Star Apr 3 rd p.32 Julian Burns to manage the group’s “Far Eastern Tour”

Apr 18	Don Thompson Quintet	Tely Apr 18 th "What's Going On" column: "Along with singer Don Francks and Don Thompson's quintet there'll be a showing of Jazz Toronto, an NFB movie featuring the same performers. Confirmed by a Star advert Apr 18 th p.26
Apr 21-26	Muddy Waters and his South Side Blues Kings with Otis Spann (piano) and James Cotton (harmonica)	Star Mar 26 th p.29 in Gerry Barker's "In Town and Out" column a delightful description of how Flohil and Lewis teamed up again to bring Muddy Waters to the First Floor Club "for week beginning April 21". G&M Apr 8 th p.10 confirms April 21-26. G&M Apr 25 th p.20 and Apr 29 th p.11 Patrick Scott's two complementary reviews!
Apr 30		Tely reverts to advertising w/o artists named for two weeks
May 19-24	Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers	Tely May 16 th "What's Going On" column see also Star ad May 16 th p.33 Another two weeks pass with no artists named in the Telegram
Jun 12-13	Junior Messengers	Tely Jun 13 th "What's Going On" column appearing to hold down Friday nights
Jun 19-20	Junior Messengers (Fri) with blues singer Jason King and the Art Ayre jazz trio (Sat)	Tely Jun 20 th "What's Going On" After Four the following week acknowledges live jazz Thurs to Saturday every week.
Jun 26-27	Last weeks line-up repeats	Tely Jun 27 th "What's Going On" G&M Jun 26 th p.10 has Don Thompson on Saturday (26 th)
Jul 3-4	Last weeks line-up repeats	Tely Jul 4 th "What's Going On"
Aug 29	Junior Messengers	Tely Aug 29 th "What's Going On"
Sep 5	Junior Messengers	Tely Sep 5 th "What's Going On"

Sep 12	Junior Messengers	Tely Sep 12 th "What's Going On"
Sep 19	Don Thompson and his jazz group	Tely Sep 19 th "... on the menu"
Oct 2-3	Junior Messengers	Tely Oct 1 st (After Four) - specifically listing them for both nights 11 pm to 4
Oct 13	Nathan Cohen's column titled <i>An evening of doldrums</i>	Star Oct 13 th p.36 "Sad to report the First Floor Club is no more as of last week" (presumably closing Oct 10 or 11). Cohen notes the space will reopen "in mid-November as Le Grand Prix Club, with a more middle-of-the-way music policy".
Oct 27-Nov 1	Robert Nighthawk American blues singer, accompanied by Johnny Young on mandolin and Jimmy Collins on drums	Tely Oct 24 th and 31 st "What's Going On", confirmed in a Star ads Oct 21 st , p.41, Oct 24 th p.25 and Oct 31 st p.25 still calling it the First Floor Club
Nov 19	Dave Caplan's column " <i>Live performances keep Cohn alert</i> "	Star Nov 7 th p.26 " <i>Julian Burns is considering a job with booking agent Willard Alexander in New York</i> " With the above, references to the First Floor Club end in the dailes

Data Collection

This list is a composite of what appeared in online searches of the Toronto Star (Star) and Globe and Mail (G&M) archives from the 1960s, augmented by entries in the Toronto Telegram's What's Going On listing in the Showcase Section, October 1963 to late 1964 and the Chum About Town lists in the After Four Section (Feb 1964 - Feb 1965 as accessed from microfilm held by the Toronto Public Library. It was still necessary as usual with these listings to interpolate when performances started or finished based on previous weeks line-ups. Where I take words directly from a listing I use "quotation marks". Where material is taken from a column the writer is acknowledged wherever possible.