

The Half Beat

The Half Beat was opened by John and Marilyn McHugh around December 1960, first at 183 Cumberland St., moving some time in 1961 to 47 Avenue Road. It appears from the 1961 Toronto Directory that land assembly for both the Bay St. subway station, and the hotel that was to be built on the SE corner of Cumberland and Avenue Rd. were well underway. Neither John McHugh's address nor much else is listed on the south side of Cumberland in the 1962 Directory. Compared to other coffee houses music was not a focus or if it was, the focus waxed and waned. Based on news articles, coffee and eats were the main offerings. Music at first was rarely mentioned or advertised. In the Telegram it was occasionally picked up in their weekly listings. Residencies of musicians who were named tended to be longer. Open mike opportunities were apparently provided most nights for musicians who weren't publicized. The Half Beat does not appear to have survived 1965.

1960

Dec 10		G&M Dec 10 th , p.15 - reference in an article (writer not identified) to the new Half Beat Coffee house on Cumberland St.
--------	--	---

1961

Feb 18		G&M Feb 18 th , p.13 - reference to the Half Beat Coffee House in an advertisement for the Donald Byrd Quintet performing in the Museum Theatre (possibly selling tickets for the event)
Dec 30	An article by Morris Duff in the Star	Star Dec 30 th , p.22 - titled <i>Jazz Declines and Folk Music Soars</i> - "Just over a year old is the Half Beat owned by John and Marilyn McHugh, both from England. Its ceilings are decorated with old newspapers and its walls with far out paintings. Checkered tablecloths and ice cream parlor stools give it the look of a French café."

1962

- Apr 12 Mary Walpole's *Around the Town* column in the G&M G&M Apr 12th, p.21 - reference to the Half Beat now located on Avenue Rd. with a comment "... Such a colorful note (checkered red and white tablecloths) last year, we are glad to see it open again"
- Aug 22 G&M Aug 22nd, p.5 - reference to the Half Beat at 47 Avenue Rd. in the Toronto After Dark column

1963

- July 27 An article by Ralph Thomas in the Star Star July 27th, p27: the Half beat is mentioned in "*Let's Meet at a Sidewalk Café*".

1964

- Jan 31-Feb1, 7-8, 14-15, 21-22, 28-29, Mar 6-7, Mar 13-14 **Mitsy Hurd** Tely Feb 1st "Toronto's oldest coffee house presents entertainment for the first time tonight when Mitsy Hurd sings folk songs." Tely Feb 20th. Might have been the previous night per G&M Jan 31st
- Tely Feb 27th - Mitsy Hurd folk singer still here Fridays and Saturdays, "Jazz musicians and folk singers drop in all through the week". Also G&M Feb 28th, Mar 13th,
- The Half Beat takes a long break in the listings
- Aug 27, Sep 3, 10, 17, Tely Aug 27th After Four section: "It's the oldest sidewalk coffee house in the city and had started the café craze in the Yorkville Village in 1960. Entertainers drop in occasionally to provide half beat tunes."

Sep 18-19	Black Eagle Jazz Band	Tely Sep 19 th - performer listings reappear; the Black Eagle Jazz Band Fridays and Sundays, other “great jazz artists” on Saturday nights
Sep 25, 27	Black Eagle Jazz Band	Tely Sep 24 th the Black Eagle Jazz Band appears Fri/Sun with “a great band” Saturday night
Oct 2-4, 9-11, 16-18, 23-25	Black Eagle Jazz Band	Tely Oct 1 st - the Black Eagle Jazz Band moves to Fri/Sat according to the <i>After Four</i> listing on Thursday, but the Tely’s <i>What’s going on</i> listing keeps them Fri/Sun with guest groups on Saturday. This inconsistency continues through October. Also G&M Oct 9 th - “one of the oldest established coffee shop in the village”
		But things change in November
Oct 14	An article by Nathan Cohen in the Star	Star Oct 14 th p.44: noting that “some months ago they (the McHugh’s) rented out the Half Beat for the princely sum of \$300 a week.” This may explain the changes in the approach to music.
Nov 5	Joni Anderson	Tely Nov 5 th - with a detailed outline. Joni simply described as a “folk singer”. Go to Joni Anderson’s web page at https://jonimitchell.com/chronology/ click on “chronology” and choose the year. There are three references to Joni performing at the Half Beat between Oct 12 th and possibly Nov 16 th . This is probably a good measure of how the relatively unknown performer was overlooked in the press.
Nov 6-7	Myles Kennedy Trio jazz, followed later in the evening by Joe Mendelson	Tely Nov 5 th
Nov 8	Joni Anderson	Tely Nov 5 th

Nov 9-12	Mark Strange	Tely Nov 5 th also “folk singer”
Nov 13-14	Myles Kennedy trio with Joe Mendelson late both nights	Tely Nov 12 th
Nov 15-18	Mark Strange	Tely Nov 12 th - through this period the Tely’s <i>What’s going on</i> listing doesn’t seem to keep up to the change in format
Nov 19	Monty Duck?? “accompanist to Ian & Silvia	Tely Nov 19 th
Nov 20-21	Myles Kennedy Trio with Joe Mendelson late both nights	Tely Nov 19 th
Nov 22, 25-26	Mark Strange	Tely Nov 19 th
Nov 23-24	The Brothers	Tely Nov 19 th “sing folk”
Nov 27-28	Myles Kennedy Trio as Joe Mendelson “sings the blues” late into both nights	Tely Nov 26 th
Nov 29	Mark Strange	Tely Nov 26 th
Dec 11	Article by Nathan Cohen in the Star	Star Dec 11 th p.32 “ <i>A tear for Cindy-Ella</i> ”, Cohen returns to the topic of the Half Beat being rented out. Something obviously happened, the McHughs “have taken back active possession of the Half Beat.”

1965

- Jan 9 Tely Jan 9th "Back in business this club is now seven days a week; 8 pm to 3 or 4 am; a roaring fire, conversation and recorded music" but the listing ends after April 17th . The Tely Feb 27th specifically says "no live entertainment here". Also references to another location: 271 College St., upstairs, but appears to be a misprint.
- Mar 30 G&M Mar 30th, p.14 - the Half Beat is mentioned in an article announcing that "the New Gate of Cleve will move into new quarters - a site on Avenue Road between the Half Beat and the Purple Onion in May."
- Jun 4-5 **Vic Garber** Tely Jun 5th - Listing returns - "open all week" "Vic Garber sings folk songs on the weekend"
- Jun 18-19, 25-26 **Vic Garber** Tely Jun 5th through Jul 10th - a simple acknowledgment
Jul 2-3, 9-10
- Jun 25 **Mike Edmunds** G&M Jun 25th, p.14 - listing him performing "in the garden" from 9-2 am nighty
- Jul 16-17, Jul **Johnny (John) Kay** Tely Jul 17th "open every night with folk singing as the big
23-24 Jul 30-31 attraction". John Kay, later of Steppenwolf fame.
- The Tely listings for the Half Beat end in July, 1965

1966

- May 14 An article by Bruce Lawson in the Globe G&M May 14th, p.13: *Yorkville: money in the coffee* refers to the Half Beat as "defunct" and "called something else".

Data collection

This list is a composite of what appeared in the microfilmed Toronto Telegram's (Tely) What's Going On listing in the Showcase Section, January 1964 to July 1965 (when the house appears to end live music) and the Chum About Town lists in the After Four Section (Feb 1964 - Feb 1965); augmented by electronic searches of the Toronto Star (Star) and Globe and Mail (G&M) archives from the 1960s which provide particularly useful information from the time before the Tely listings started. Occasionally the scanned Tely records are difficult to read, hence occasional spelling mistakes will occur; corrections welcome.

Long residencies were common. It was often necessary as elsewhere 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 I cite an article I reference the reporter if the writer's name was published.

Updated: February 13, 2021