



Scene: Nightlife

JEZ gets an inside look at the music complex that strikes a chord among chart-toppers and local newbies, plus the fans who love them

From neighborhood music joints hosting brand-new local talent to theaters and arenas that boast multiplatinum performers, Atlanta offers endless options for our entertainment fixes. One particular spot, the **CW Midtown Music Complex**, has made a name for itself by featuring performers spanning all genres and statuses. This entertainment “triplex” houses three venues, each with a completely different vibe and capacity but all with extensive, eclectic lists of performers. And, aside from the musical talents that light up the stage night after night, a slew of comedic superstars also have raked in countless laughs.

How did this “three-in-one” concept come about? **Josh Antenucci**, partner of **Rival Entertainment**, the company that owns and operates the complex as well as books all the talent, filled *JEZ* in on the history of this Midtown hot spot. “**Center Stage** has been around since the ‘60s, and the rest of the venue was just empty space

[for 40 years]. We opened **Vinyl** in 2004 so we could focus on the local music scene and provide a new home for local bands and newer nationally touring artists. In 2005, we opened **The Loft** and fulfilled the overall dream of having three venues where artists could ideally play one then subsequently play the others as they got bigger. It’s the ‘stepping stone’ idea,” Antenucci says. Several artists already have lived “the dream” that the complex is designed to fulfill: **KT Tunstall**, **Marc Broussard** and **Citizen Cope** are the three artists thus far who have performed for sold-out crowds at Vinyl and then went on to sell out the other two venues as well.

The largest of the three, **Center Stage**, is where the big acts come to play, but, with its capacity of only 1,000, ticket holders still get an intimate experience. In the past year, **Ludacris**, the **Backstreet Boys**, **Lifehouse**, **Robert Randolph & the Family Band** and **Ciara** (to name only a handful) have graced the stage, as well

as the multitabled **Jamie Foxx**, who films his Comedy Central special, *Laffapalooza*, at the venue every year. The spot that boasts “every seat in the house is a good seat” was also the choice of megastar **Jay-Z** to kick off his **Hangar Tour** (seven cities in 17 hours), where he gave a 6 a.m. performance for a seriously caffeinated and fanatical crowd. Some of our hometown A-listers also have chosen Center Stage when revisiting their old stomping grounds; **Chris and Rich Robinson** of **The Black Crowes** performed an acoustic set just last month, and **Elton John** recorded his last album, *The Captain and the Kid*, on site in early 2006.

For a slightly more intimate experience, music connoisseurs choose The Loft, the 600-capacity “club room” that’s intended to give fans up-close-and-personal concerts every time. Although designed primarily for standing room, there’s a VIP section attached

for those wanting a tad more plush experience. “The Loft hosts a mix of national and local acts and hot new bands that might be just hitting the radio,” Antenucci says. A testament to the star power that the Loft has seen, the **Goo Goo Dolls**, **Snow Patrol**, **The**

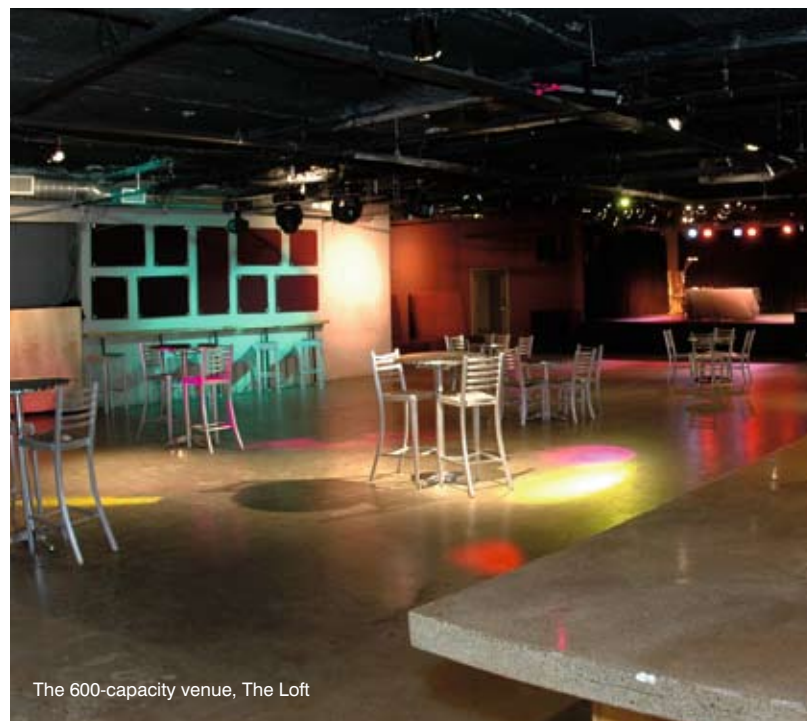
Fray, **The Strokes** and **Everclear** have all played shows within the past year, some right at the onset of their raging popularity.

Both one intimacy level and floor level below The Loft is Vinyl, which offers the same great live music on a slightly lesser scale in a relaxed bar atmosphere. As the smallest of the three, Vinyl holds only 300 guests, which must have disappointed plenty of latecomers when top-notch acts **Hoobastank**, **Barenaked Ladies**, **James Blunt** and **Phil Lesh & Friends** played the venue. On nights when not-so-big names are booked, music lovers stroll in at their leisure, grab a cocktail, sit down at one of the tables and either enjoy artists they already know or become fans of someone new.

With all that these venues have to offer, you might want to try each one, just like the artists love to do. In the words of one who has played all three, Broussard says, “It’s proof positive that when you show Atlanta love by coming back time and again, Atlanta returns the love by showing up with friends time and time again.”

As far as what this musical haven holds in the near future, plenty of big names are on the books, one of the biggest being the **Atlantis Music Conference & Festival**, scheduled for Sept. 19-22. The four-day showcase for new musicians and industry insiders is typically held at sites all over the city, but this year will be hosted solely by Center Stage, The Loft and Vinyl. “Most artists, fans and industry [members] have an idea of what a music conference is all about, and our aim by centralizing this event at the CW Midtown Music Complex was to challenge those ideas,” says festival manager **Kathy Gates**. “We want to turn things up a notch and make the weekend more intense.” Sounds like the perfect opportunity to not only check out band after talented band, but also to get a glimpse at the complex that’s rocking our city’s music scene with a schedule that reads half like a playlist of talented newcomers and half like a Billboard chart. —ASHLEY HESSELTINE

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The 600-capacity venue, The Loft



The 300-capacity venue, Vinyl

Opposite page:
The 1,000-capacity
venue, Center Stage