



The crowds at the Paradise Lounge in San Francisco can kick back and stay there, yet still hear plenty of alternative tunes. The club often books all three of its stages for the same night with three different bands.

gized. "I think they're having some kind of Neil Young problem." Only a half-block away is Slim's (333 11th St., 415-621-3330; cover usually \$5 to \$15). The day I was there, Slim's was hosting a free return gig of the Movie Stars, the band that put neo-oddball folk on the map. Just across the street is the DNA Lounge, a club that's undesecrated by anything as crassly commercial as a sign (375 11th St., 415-626-1409; cover \$3). Orton plays here often.

A few blocks from the DNA is the Albion (3139 16th St., 415-621-9213; no cover), a conglomeration of small, dark rooms. Rather strange folk groups play this club where the atmosphere appears to be stuck in a beatnik time warp circa 1959. I caught Heaven's Insects here, an acoustic guitar/violin duo that manages to sound heavy-metal. Their act comes complete with pseudo-Brit accents and profound song titles like "Float on a Goat."

In the Haight area, don't miss the I-Beam (1748 Haight St., 415-668-6006; cover \$10). It's a gay-oriented disco on weekends, but on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, there's free live music that's...okay, sometimes it's just indie-label promo, but more often it's real solid. I caught the reunion gig of Sister Double Happiness, a group that's the favorite of every alternative record store I hit here.

Within a half-block radius in the Haight you'll find Nightbreak (1821 Haight St., 415-221-9008; cover varies), with black walls, an eccentrically dressed clientele, and a video gameroom complete with shabby couches and piles of *New York Woman* and *Vogue* strewn about. Nearby is the more hard-core-oriented Full Moon (1725 Haight St., 415-668-6190; cover as much as \$5), which frankly seems to attract more self-conscious poseurs than other joints do.

I saw Pool play at a sort of hard-core Swiss chalet

called the Kennel, also near the Haight (628 Divisadero, 415-931-1914; cover \$2 to \$7). They were, of course, LOUD. But after their gig, they took me to what they called "the best club in San Francisco"—the CW Saloon, a Day-Glo-painted covered wagon where standard country-western meets punk (917 Folsom St., 415-974-1501; cover averages \$4).

San Francisco's Alternative-Music Must. To hear an occasional word of a band's lyrics, try El Rio (3158 Mission St., 415-282-3325; cover \$3 to \$5). They book only "alternative groups that know how to balance their sound—no thrash." That is, nothing loud, fast, and distorted.

While you're soaking in the '60s ambience of Haight-Ashbury, visit Rough Trade Records (1529 Haight St., 415-621-4395). They offer hard-core, reggae, and African music, not to mention magazines, T-shirts, and assorted paraphernalia. Prices start at \$4.75. Also stop by Reckless Records (at the corner of Haight and Masonic, 415-431-3434). The rather large store (it used to be a bank) has British imports among its 17,000 or so used and new records. Used LPs sell for \$2.50 to \$6; new ones go for \$5 to \$12. Reckless also hosts album signings by groups like Gun Club and Black Sun Ensemble.

**T**hrash is just about all over this town. "Nashville is Thrashville" according to Intruder, one of the town's primo hard-core groups. On one of the nights I was in town, the floor at mega-rock club Elliston Square

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(2219 Elliston Place, 615-327-3767; cover \$3 to \$4) was covered with sand for a beach bash, featuring volleyball, simulated windsurfing, and gonzo live limbo/surf music by Mel and the Party Hats (actually, it sounded more like feedback to me). Meanwhile, a half-block away, the Stan Lassiter Group was playing—would you believe?—head-banger jazz at the Grapevine Cafe (2206 Elliston Place, 615-327-3222; cover \$2 to \$4). This place is a retro-hippie/fern-bar hybrid that books outrageously eclectic musical styles. Then I found Sal's Rock Block (1929 Division St., 615-329-0221; cover \$4 to \$7), which not only looks but smells exactly the way a hard-core club should: a dark cave soaked in 30 years of spilled beer. Here, the Mammy Nannies pumped out dealening yet oddly delicate hard rock ("somewhere between the Residents and Vivaldi," explained one of the guitarists), while collegians swilled Bud long-necks.



Singer Ronnie Root smooches with a local fan at Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, in Nashville.

My guide, Lisa Ferris, is musically quite peculiar herself. Her traditional country rawness and modern