

Ego's is a Dive with a Poetic Side

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My wonderful friend Susan just got married. The wedding was one of those fabulous ones: Everyone is really happy for the bride and groom, the bride walks down the aisle to a Smiths tune and the music at the reception has been chosen so carefully you just can't keep off the dance floor -- and your former thesis adviser ties a napkin around his head as if it were a weird commando bandanna, then dances the night away with his similarly be-napkinned wife. You know, the way weddings should be.

Part of what made it so great is that the bride and groom are slam poets and many of their friends are slam poets -- really good ones who made hilarious, delightful toasts and kept a running Scrabble game going throughout the reception (and the after party). God bless smart, funny people. It's so much fun to get to know and hang out with them. Of course, I'd already gotten to know some of the poets because they perform every Wednesday at Ego's, the smoky dive bar on South Congress.

Ego's is a great fit for slam poetry. (The slam used to be at the Electric Lounge before that venue closed, then moved to Gaby and Mo's before it closed, then to Ego's, which we hope won't close.) Ego's low-ceilinged dingy darkness suits the left-leaning, political discovery of identity that happens so often in slam poetry. It also suits the sarcastic, funny, sometimes raucous performers who are always broke and need cheap drinks. At night, beers are \$3.25 and \$3.75 for domestic and import respectively and \$2.50 and \$3.25 before 8 p.m. Me, I don't think I've ever had anything other than Lone Star or Shiner at Ego's, though I hear tell that people actually drink martinis and such there too. (There's a full bar, but its offerings are pricier than beer -- well drinks are \$4.50 after 8 p.m.)

Of course, Ego's also hosts lots of music. Bands and singer-songwriters perform every night, also sorting through identity (and broken hearts). Is there anything besides identity and broken hearts? I've seen Rockstar Brent perform there with Shane Bartell. That was a strange night; I ended up talking to Brent's friends about aliens landing and creating civilization and angels and stuff. Nights with Brent are never boring. Actually, my nights at Ego's have been rarely boring -- another night a friend finally came out to me while we were having drinks. Funny, the things you can learn in those few minutes between sets. In addition to the small tables and sturdy wooden booths in the main room, there are pool tables in a back room where you can hang out before your friends go on stage. The bathrooms are small, graffitti'ed, and beat-up. There are a couple of TVs unobtrusively located up by the bar. It's a dive. And it's really smoky, a Deep Eddy at 2 a.m. kind of smoky. Oh yeah, and they have finger paints available on request. Seriously. Finger painting Sundays used to be a regular event -- now you just have to ask for them from bartenders. Check out the walls -- see all that finger-painted art? Guess where it came from.

It's funny how many people have told me stories of first dates at Ego's or hanging out at

Ego's or getting a little raucous at Ego's when they first arrive in Austin. The crowd itself runs from self-aware thrift-store chic (all that music will do that to a crowd) to plain old dive bar denizens. The place opens at noon (happy hour is actually from noon to 8), and according to the bartenders, the daytime crowd tends to be older and full of regulars. Which makes sense, given that the bar has been around for more than 25 years. Ego's is just an old South Austin dive.

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Ego's

510 S. Congress Ave., 474-7091

Open Monday-Sunday, noon-2 a.m.