

NIGHT OF BEER, JAZZ YOU'LL NEVER FORGET

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This can't be right. I had three beers: one Chimay and two Guinnesses. I drank them over the course of nearly three hours and had a full glass of water along with each beer. Now, I am praying to the porcelain god. I can't possibly be hungover -- I wasn't drunk. I can't be. Can I?

This would never have happened when I was in college and my Belgian friend, Julie, and I would have whole nights dedicated to drinking the serious Belgian beers Chimay and Duvel and eating mountains of flapjacks in the morning.

It was Julie I was thinking of as I sat with my cousin Dan and his girlfriend, Lisa, at the Elephant Room. I had been admiring the bar's street lamplike Duvel signs and appreciating the fact that my Chimay came in a Chimay glass, something Julie would have most definitely approved of. (All the Belgians I know believe a beer should come in its proper glass.) So I was tickled when Dan and Lisa (who works at the Elephant Room sometimes) told me that one of the bar's owners was Belgian. That explains the Duvel signs! (Though the bar has stopped carrying the beer itself.)

The Elephant Room is less famous for its signs than for its jazz. On my last visit, Brannen Temple -- whom Dan and Lisa told no-rhythm me is a world-class drummer -- took the stage and lead the band, who were equally skilled. The music sounded great: Apparently, I'd come on the perfect night. Though every bandleader may not be as good as Brannen Temple, the Elephant Room does have nightly jazz and a happy hour from 4 to 8 p.m. Folks might want to check the bar's Web site (www.natespace.com/elephant) to find out who's playing when -- and remember that big bands can be loud (all those horns) and preclude conversation.

True jazz fans might want to move next to the stage, while people who are not hard-core aficionados can sit farther back in the bar and talk to friends (my preferred arrangement). The bar itself is long and dark, no surprise given that it's a basement establishment. When you enter the Congress Avenue building that houses the bar, you can go up to Kyoto and eat sushi or down to the Elephant Room's brick-walled, low-ceilinged coolness.

And by coolness, I also mean slightly chilly temperatures. I've kept my sweatshirt on during my handful of recent visits. Though I've heard the Elephant Room is smoky, it hasn't been anytime I've stopped in. Lisa tells me that's because the bar works to make sure the air is circulated, and the only way they can do that is by keeping the air conditioner on (in addition to having the standard smoke eaters).

Hence my sweatshirt. Here are some useful things to know about the bar: It's got all the hard liquor your heart could desire, as well as 20 beers on tap and wines by the glass. There's not usually a cover on weekdays, though watch out on weekends. Shows start at 9:30 p.m. and happy hour bands play from 6 to 8 p.m.

My friend Julie and her husband are due for a visit sometime in the next few months. I expect we'll do many of the same silly things we did in college and tie ourselves up in fits of girly laughter. Perhaps I might even make flapjacks one morning (if only for the pleasure of saying that word: flapjacks. Flapjacks.). For certain, I'll take them both to the Elephant Room. I'll just be sure not to drink one Chimay and two Guinnesses, in that order.

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