

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep On Hoppin' Tour
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing
Key West Bar Boondoggle

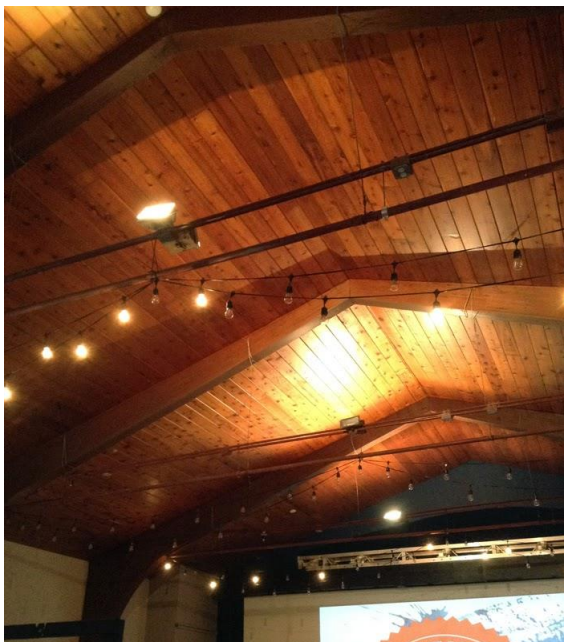
Bar 223:

Key West Theater

524 Eaton Street
Friday, July 25, 6:15 PM

Michelob Ultra (bottle) \$4.00

I think that "Key West Community Theater & Stage" is the official name that Tap wants this one of his properties to go by. Most of the long-time locals that I know refer to it as "the old Chameleon Club". The transplants who have not been here long enough to remember that place (like me), refer to it like "that weird, deserted, haunted, church-like place on Eaton or Fleming or something." That kinda combines everything they say into one set of quote marks, but you get the picture. So, since it doesn't post its own name anywhere, I tend to call it *Ye Olde Chameleon Club*, just cuz I like the sound of it.



This was another nudge-nudge-wink-wink, know-someone, jump-on-the-Hopportunity Hop. This place is not open every night. In fact, it's not open any nights. It was recently "kinda open" for the birthday of Deb and Tina, if you knew them, and knew about it. I do, but I didn't, so I missed that one.

The occasion on this mid-summer night was The First Annual Bubba Awards, sponsored by Key West Weekly (which a lot of people call "the red paper"). I gave them a good discount on the award

tiles, so they comped my ticket, which included food but, sadly, not beer. I went anyway. It was one of those "place to be" things. I was allowed two guest tickets, but nobody wanted to go -- at least not at last minute. I

guess I just don't hang with high society (which is probably why I hang with them).

I gotta admit it was both cool and a bit spooky to be entering this building. I often ride the bike downtown, but on those evenings when I trek down in ZDog, my forest green conversion van, I often find myself parking near this edifice. It always piques my curiosity. I've seen the Ghost Tour people pointing at it, so there must be some kind of heebie-jeebie herein. I'd heard tell that the workers who have been doing renovations inside have been seriously rattled by odd noises and whatnots.



If push came to shove, and I had to state yay or nay, I would say that I do not (i.e., nay) believe in ghosts. That said, I don't really *dis*believe in them either. My motto about such things has long been, "just because I don't believe in it doesn't mean it's not true." Superstitions, omens, curses, God, all that stuff.

If you pick up a heads-up penny, will you have good luck? Yeah, why not? Worth a shot, right? When I get so old that picking up a penny becomes too much of a chore, then fuck it, but, for now, what do I have to lose? I'm not expecting Powerball-lucky -- it's only a freaking penny, fer gawd's sake -- but tiny bits of luck that you never even know

happen could be taking place around you every day because of your pennies. Maybe that bird didn't shit on you because you picked up that penny. That alone would be worth it, right? The Power of the Penny, Jenny.

So, uh, yeah.

This was the 1st Annual Bubba Awards Ceremony. Some of the winners -- and even the categories -- were a bit shaky, but the concept is good, and it should grow well off this beginning. Members of local government were here, highly-placed members of prominent organizations, business owners, and that ilk. There were some that I





could give an honest hey-hey to, or share one of those in-passing conversations, mainly due to work connections, but I found myself, as expected, being a solo eater and drinker.

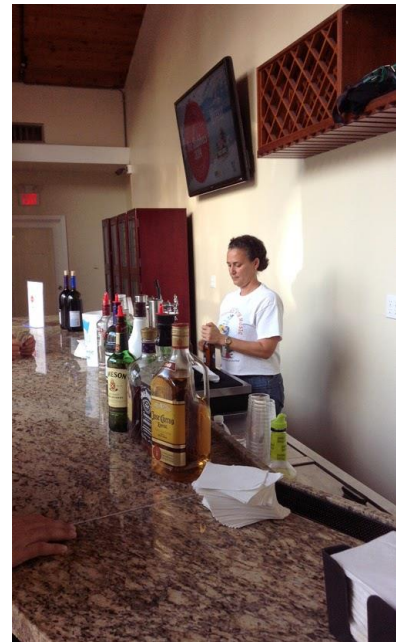
There were two bars here actually, though it can only count as a solo Hop. The first bar took up most of the left side of the great hall. It was a damn cool room, with a really large stage and a very nice wooden ceiling. A video screen hung partly-

extended above the stage. Round, skirted tables, with their white plastic chairs, filled the floor. The walls were plain, belying the still-in-process nature of the venue. There was a buzz of excitement in the room. A lot of people were probably mostly excited about having Something To Do on a July evening.

I got my Mich Ultra bottle, scored some mini-quesadillas, meatballs and strawberries at the buffet, and adjourned to the balcony. Good view from up there. I felt like a pigeon lurking up in the rafters, but less feathery. The screen had been lowered and the room was settling in for the show. The video set-up was quite good, but the acoustics were lame, at least up here. Two guys from *KW Weekly* were serving as MC's and they had their schtick down pretty well. The jokes lurched off the mark, but were soon rolling along with good audience response.

It was soon time for my second beer. The second bar was up here, in the foyer behind the balcony. It was actually a much nicer bar than its ground-floor cousin, though it had no seats. That one seemed temporary somehow, even though it had a nice top and padded bar seats. There was no back bar, though, no shelves of bottles or glassware to make it seem like a permanent fixture. This upstairs one, though, was nice. Long and stylish, with a light reddish marble bar top, it seemed like it had been there in the previous permutations of this place.

The woman tending it was not a happy camper. This bar gave an excellent first impression, but for



this time and season, there were a couple of significant flaws. The southwest-facing windows, which were tall and large, were only partially covered by the thin drapes, meaning that passive solar heat from the late-afternoon tropical summer sun was flooding in. The second significant flaw was that there was no AC. Aha, bad combination. The theater area was well air-conditioned, but somehow this area didn't even have a fan. I was there for maybe three minutes while the barkeep got another guest cocktails and then my beer, and I was already damn uncomfortable. Poor woman was working up a good sweat.

Returning to the balcony, I saw, to no surprise, that someone had taken my seat. This is always a pitfall in the solo-attendee world. You have two choices: leave your property there to save your chair and abandon it to the wolves, or vacate your space (maybe try the tilted-chair thing) and hope it's still there when you get back. If you have a jacket, you can drape it on the chair back and stake your claim. If all you have is an iPad, forget it. Punt on the seat; the beer takes precedence.

The Bubbas show was going along pretty well, but when my second beer ran dry, I decided to mosey. Four-dollar Mich Ultras were not tickling my fancy. If they were Yeunglings, I would have gulped at the price, but still gulped down the beer, but a high price for a beer that I have no use for was just not singing.

Besides, there was no drama or suspense to the evening; I *made* the awards, so I already *knew* who all the winners were.