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- Editorials
- Letters

/ Perspective / Columns /

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# ON THE SCENE: Diesel T. He Cat holds court at January Jams in Upper Jay

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New Year's Day means many things to many people. Some take on New Year's resolutions to diet, get more exercise, work smarter, spend more time with family and friends, get organized, or learn some new skill.

For many area musicians and musical enthusiasts, however, it means heading to the Recovery Lounge in Upper Jay to participate in the annual January Jams.

"I've been attending for about four years," said Tim Robinson. "I enjoy the Jams and love this community of musicians."

### Article Photos



Diesel T. He Cat, the January Jams greeter and mascot, si...



The Jams started about a dozen years ago. Even Scott Renderer, who is the director of the Recovery Lounge (aka Upper Jay Art Center) isn't quite sure when his brother Byron came up with the idea. Keeping track of the dates is not nearly as consuming as deciding which musicians plays next. It's a juggling act as he also introduces the performers, helps set their mics and sounds levels,

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and steps in to play the drums for those so requesting - all the while keeping an eye on the door to see who has arrived and is available.

The Recovery Lounge is a former Ford Model T automobile assembly plant, antique store, junk shop, and furniture upholstery business now art center that presents a mix of plays, concerts, art exhibits and artistic extravaganzas in a funky environment filled with elements that refer to past productions. A fair amount of the furniture appears to be Goodwill rejects, comfortable nonetheless.

The Jams take place each Sunday in January from 2 to about 6 p.m. Each performer may share three pieces, though that can depend on the length or how many musicians are waiting to perform.

The Jan. 1 Jam was opened by Carol Kepes, who performed three acappella numbers.

"I just love singing," said Carol. "We didn't sing at home growing up, but we listened to a lot of country music. About age 4, I just started singing along. I had no idea that I could sing well until about four or five years ago when I started singing at an open mic at the Rusty Nail in Saranac Lake. The Recovery Lounge is an awesome place. I don't know how to explain it; there is just a feeling of community here. I encourage other musicians to come on down."

During the Jams, Renderer puts out some beverages along with a wide array of edibles often augmented by what patrons bring. Informal is the word and fun the experience. The music is diverse. While I don't recall an opera diva, do expect a wide range of Americana, much of it quite good. For some musicians, the Lounge is where they got their start, or re-start after some interlude of not having performed. But whether an emerging talent or a polished professional, all are there to share their common love of music.

"I brought some Adirondack venison stew," said Nicky Frechette. "I bring my kids every week to the January Jams. They are very fond of the ham Scott puts out. So I figured I'd bring some stew to help offset the ham they consume. I bring my kids because its educational; they get to hear lots of music, plus my cousin Cathy is one of the performers."

"One of the things I love about the Lounge is it's close to home," said Jim Amirault, who performed with Bob Haley and later joined his daughter Liza in a duet. "I live across the street. The crowd is awesome, plus musicians will join you as Eric did in this last song, which makes it so much fun."

"We've been performing together for at least nine years," said Bob.

"I built that small stage in '89," said Jim, pointing at a platform being used for raised seating. "I've been a stage manager for most of the plays they've held here."

"The Lounge gives bozos like us a chance to get out and make noise," said Bob. "It's a great way to start the year. What else do you do in the wintertime around here if you're not skiing?"

Diesel T. He Cat is the unofficial host, not an assessment he'd agree with by a long shot. As far as he is concerned, all this is for him, whether it's the chair you are sitting on, your lap or the music. Diesel started attending the Jams six years ago. This year, he was not quite as lively as I have seen him in the past, not an indication of health mind you as he seemed fine and alert as always.

"Diesel was out late," said Kelly Tucker. "He was hanging out with the other cats in the neighborhood you know. But he's ready for the music. He's a stalwart. He likes Russ Bailey. He loves when Scott drums. He likes Eric. He finds Eric's music to be very soothing. He's got his favorites, but he's such an icon for him to take sides fights could break out."

Diesel's favorites were not limited to musicians. While Kelly and I talked, he eyed Bobbie Renderer's lap, and before you knew it there he was enjoying her attention.

"I used to be a pro in the Village years ago," said Cathy Harris, a folk-rock musician. "I like the Lounge because it's comfortable and you can hear all kinds of music."

"I wrote them down as the Lord gave them to me," said Doc Comegys of Ausable Forks of his gospel songs. "This is my third year. I love the people here. I love to share God's love with them. I was the swimming/diving coach at AuSable Valley for 25 years. I started writing songs after I retired, back in '97. I had time to be quiet. It provided me the chance to sit down and write the songs the Lord put in my heart. No sooner than I had the words written down he gave me a tune to go along with it!"

"If you count plays, which I started performing in when I was 7 or 8, then I've been performing most here most of my life," said Liza Amirault. "It's where I got my start. I like the sense of community. We care how everyone does. No matter what we're going to be supportive."

If you come, bring a beverage and some snacks to share along with a donation as people's generosity makes the Jams possible. Starting in February of this year, with Ripcord by David Lindsay-Abaire, the Lounge will begin presenting three plays annually. Upcoming events are listed on the Lounge's website. Check often as some talents are booked on short notice based on availability.

Learn more online at [upperjayartcenter.org](http://upperjayartcenter.org).

As for those who miss the Upholstery Shop, it's now back, located on the second floor, and run by Scott's nephew Phillip Renderer, Byron's son.

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