

WELLINGTON

SOUNDING OUT

Wellington attracted settlers in the 1840s principally because it has a great harbour. It is strategically placed on the edge of the Cook Strait, a notorious body of turbulent water that separates the conveniently named North and South Islands that are New Zealand. Steep hills and barely believable winds worked against its development until it was proclaimed capital city in 1865.

Along with the indigenous Maori and the British settlers that form the base of the population, there are strong Chinese, Italian, Greek, Polish and Indian communities. In the 1960s Polynesians came for the work, despite the climate, and recent years have seen a marked increase in Asian immigration. The once relatively monocultural norm has become richly diversified and there is a strong interest in the arts and culture.

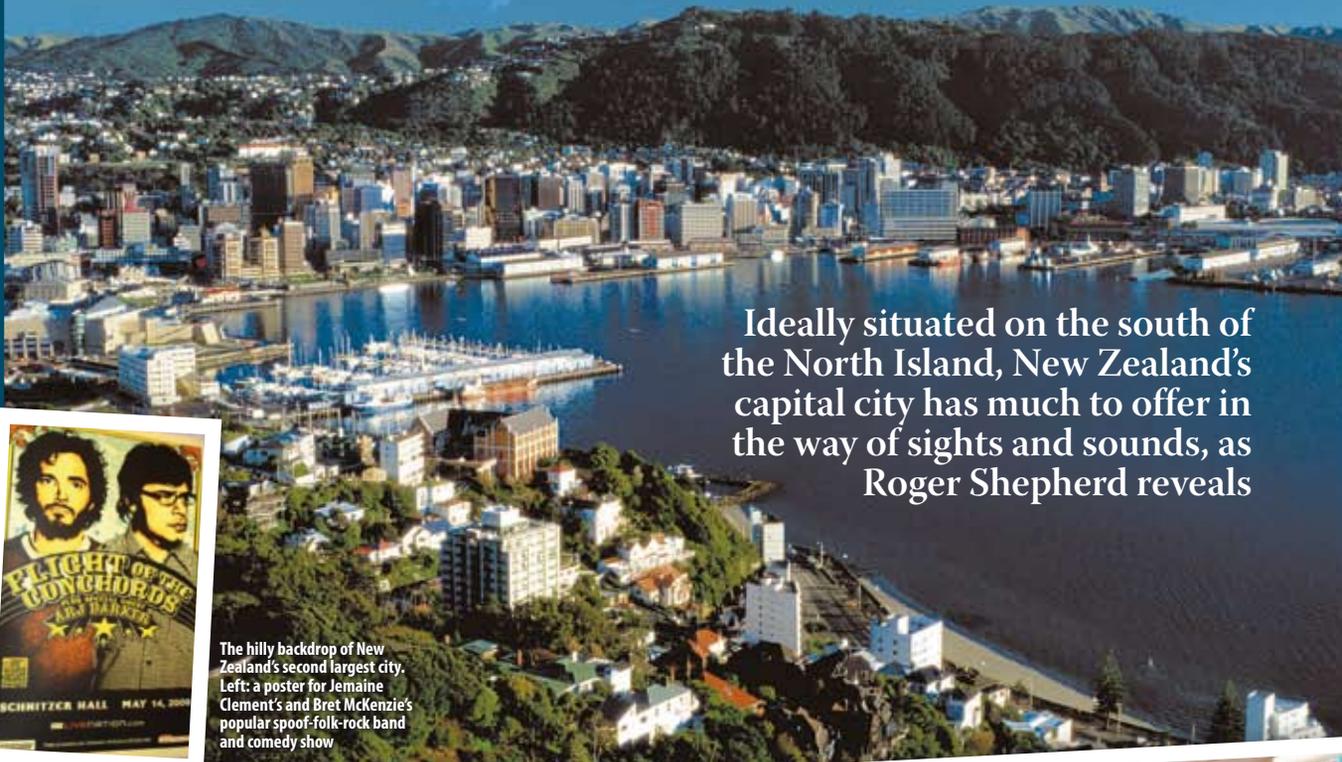
The 60s saw Wellington produce its versions of the beat, and rhythm and blues booms sweeping the Western world, which mutated into more progressive sounds in the 70s. Many talented players and writers were drawn by the radio and television work based in the city, and this contributed to the sophisticated nature of much of the music. Maori and Polynesian influences can be heard from the satellite cities of Wainuiomata and Porirua in some of New Zealand's best reggae, hip-hop and rap.

Enclosed by vertiginous hills, Wellington has a walkable, compact centre that boasts a collection of the best live music venues in New Zealand. While much of the city's nightlife is based on the bars and eateries of Courtenay Place, it is around the bohemian Cuba Street that the best music is to be found. Local and touring acts find an appreciative and knowledgeable audience that will often hop from show to show, with an occasional dip into the (in)famous Cuba

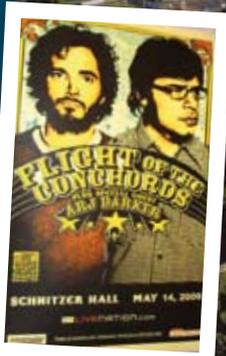
Mall Bucket Fountain along the way if conditions allow.

The compactness of Wellington has spawned an interconnected and self-supporting music scene that is diverse and has produced noticeable commercial successes. The Wellington-based New Zealand School of Music serves as a focus of activity, and has strongly fed the emergence of the uniquely Wellington dub scene sound, with the likes of the commercially successful The Black Seeds and Fat Freddy's Drop.

There is plenty more going on. Wellington-based The Phoenix Foundation are a national institution with a unique, futuristic, kraut-rock, alt-country feel. The musical comedy duo *The Flight of the Conchords* have made an international splash recently with a successful television series and live act that draws greatly on their New Zealand and, particularly, Wellington roots.



Ideally situated on the south of the North Island, New Zealand's capital city has much to offer in the way of sights and sounds, as Roger Shepherd reveals



The hilly backdrop of New Zealand's second largest city. Left: a poster for Jemaine Clement's and Bret McKenzie's popular spoof-folk-rock band and comedy show

RECORD SHOPS

Slow Boat Records

The place to go if you enjoy an old-fashioned record buying experience with plenty of opinionated comment thrown in by the knowledgeable staff for no extra cost. Slow Boat stocks a quality selection of new and used CDs, vinyl LPs and 45s, videos and DVDs. Stock is good quality and particularly strong in New Zealand, country, alternative, folk, jazz and blues.

183 Cuba Street, +64 (0) 4 385 1330,
www.slowboatrecords.co.nz

Real Groovy

A large, recently revitalised shop with a big range of new and used CDs, vinyl and DVDs, books and magazines.

250 Cuba Street, +64 (0) 4 385 2020,
www.realgroovy.co.nz

Parsons Books and Music

This long established art book specialist also sells world music, folk and classical CDs – particularly New Zealand artists.

126 Lambton Quay, +64 (0) 4 472 4587,
www.parsons.net.nz



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A local reveller looks to Mexico's Dia de los Muertos for his costume inspiration for the Cuba St Carnival



Bar Bodega

FESTIVALS

New Zealand International Arts Festival

This premier arts festival is biennial and will next be held in February-March 2010. Various venues are used around the city over four weeks, with the best of local talent and many overseas artists coming together to perform opera, dance and music. The last edition saw groups such as The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain and A Hawk And A Hacksaw.

www.nzfestival.nzpost.co.nz

One Love

This one day of roots celebration is held every year on Waitangi Day, February 6, in a sheltered velodrome close to the city centre. Waitangi Day 'celebrates' the signing of the still much-contested Treaty of Waitangi, between the indigenous Maori and the British Crown in 1840. It is also Bob Marley's birthday, so there is also plenty of 'love' in the air on the day.

www.radioactive.co.nz

Homegrown

This quality one-day, inner city, waterfront-based festival will be next held on Saturday March 20, 2010. It features an eclectic mix of the finest New Zealand music including dub and roots, electronica, indie and rock.

www.homegrown.net.nz

Sandwiches Summer Set

The end of summer will be celebrated for the fourth year in April 2010 at the Basin Reserve, close to the city centre, and will again feature the dub, electronica and roots-orientated music that is so significant to Wellington.

www.sandwiches.co.nz/summerset/info

Cuba St Carnival

In February this year, the technicolour spectacle that is the annual Cuba St Carnival celebrated its tenth anniversary.

Created to showcase 'the distinctive artistic output of Wellington's most loved street', you can expect music, mobile sculptures, performances, fireworks and a bustling parade stretching from Courtenay Place to Ghuznee Street.

www.cubastcarnival.co.nz



LISTINGS

Groove Guide

The free *Groove Guide* can be found in music shops, cafes and online. It has good basic information on gigs and events of all music styles.

www.grooveguide.co.nz

RADIO

Radio Active 89FM

If you want to get a feel for the cross-cultural sounds of Wellington, tune in or log on to Radio Active. This long-standing pillar of the music community has its origins in student radio and plays a fearless mix of genres, with a strong emphasis on the local and the alternative.

www.radioactive.co.nz

VENUES

San Francisco Bathhouse

A very well organised premier music venue featuring a range of good local, as well as touring New Zealand and international acts. Good sound, with a great bar and staff, and an outside balcony for brave smokers.

171 Cuba Street, +64 (0) 4 8016797, www.sfbh.co.nz

Mighty Mighty

The epicentre of much night-time music related activity. The go-to late closing bar that features a good assortment of interesting original New Zealand music. Dancing on the tables is optional.

Upstairs, 104 Cuba Street, +64 (0) 4 385 2890, www.myspace.com/mightymightybar

Bar Bodega

This most historic institution has recently been refurbished and consistently hosts good music and one of the best selections of beers in Wellington.

101 Ghuznee Street, +64 (0) 4 384 8212, www.bodega.co.nz

Sandwiches

An award-winning venue situated on the Courtenay Place side of the inner city – ten minutes walk from Cuba Street. This venue has a fine bar and a great room specialising in dance and electronica which also hosts excellent solo and acoustic acts.

Corner Kent Terrace & Majoribanks Street, +64 (0) 4 385 7698, www.sandwiches.co.nz

Happy

This is a small, cosy venue that caters for many musical waifs and strays, from jazz and rock to the acoustic and experimental, and always features something of genuine quality and interest.

Corner Tory and Vivian Streets, +64 (0) 4 970 1741, www.myspace.com/happybar



Courtenay Place – the hub of Wellington's nightlife