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The 10-Night Intergalactic Funk Odyssey

By **SETH SCHIESEL**

There is a certain species of New York music fan that is ready to skimp on sleep. This person probably has a day job, a career even. But that's not going to stop him (and it is usually, though hardly always, a him) from getting down to live music until 1 in the morning on a Wednesday, if there's a good show to be had.

And rocking it again the next night. And the next. And the next.

For the last week or so a few hundred of us have basically been camped out at [Brooklyn Bowl](#) in Williamsburg, site of the second annual 10-night residency of the funk trio Soulive and an array of guest musicians that could power an intergalactic dance engine.

On the first night of what is inevitably known as Bowlive, that meant Maceo Parker. The next night it was Talib Kweli. The next night it was Bernie Worrell and Questlove. Over the weekend it was Robert Randolph. This week it means the likes of Ivan Neville (who first appeared, appropriately, on Fat Tuesday), John Scofield, Oteil and Kofi Burbridge, Karl Denson and, for the final night on Saturday, Matisyahu. Fans are also hoping that Derek Trucks and Warren Haynes show up after at least one of their shows with the [Allman Brothers Band](#) this week at the Beacon Theater.

In the best image of the legendary rock impresario Bill Graham, Peter Shapiro, the owner of Brooklyn Bowl, opened the first night by ushering in a phalanx of waiters carrying huge trays with 600 free shots of tequila for the packed crowd.

It hardly seemed necessary. The energy in the room was ecstatic already. For folks in this city who like to stay up late while real musicians brew a pungent blend of funk, rock, jazz and soul, Bowlive has become an event.

“Let me tell you something: If I didn't want to be here I would be somewhere else,” Maceo Parker, 68, who originated funk with [James Brown](#) and George Clinton, said in a trailer behind Brooklyn Bowl last week before going onstage. “I don't do a lot of outside stuff. But these guys can play. It's great to just show up and have fun.”

The guitarist for “these guys,” Eric Krasno, happens to be exactly half Mr. Parker’s age: 34. A trio, along with the drummer Alan Evans and the keyboardist Neal Evans (they are brothers), Soulive may be even more popular among other musicians than it is among the public. (Mr. Krasno said that when the young band got a surprise invitation to open for the [Rolling Stones](#) in 2002 at the Tower Theater near Philadelphia, it was because Charlie Watts had enjoyed one of its albums.)

When Soulive got its start in 1999, the music industry was still into genres and labels. Back then what Soulive did was known as jazz fusion (the band has released albums on both Blue Note and Stax), an impression reinforced by the band’s core repertory, which is strictly instrumental. But the digital tide that swept away much of the traditional music business also seemed to erode what the musicians considered artificial commercial barriers among different styles.

“The death of the record store is sad, but in that system you had to file everything under Jazz or Pop or Rock or Funk, and the whole business was structured like that,” Mr. Krasno said on Sunday over coffee near his home in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. “Now you don’t have to do that and you can have more commercial success blurring those lines. At Soulive we love collaborating with other people from all different styles. We just love soulful music, good music regardless of genre, and the great thing is that there are a lot of other people like that, both artists and fans.”

To bring together those artists and those fans, Soulive started its own music label, [Royal Family Records](#), which also represents friends who just happen to be powerful musicians like the Shady Horns, the singer and keyboardist Nigel Hall and the drummer Adam Deitch.

Though each of the 10 nights of Bowlive includes some “pure,” three-member Soulive, most of the three to four hours of music tends to consist of a lot of mixing and matching. One of the most popular configurations is called Lettuce (which includes the guitarist Adam Smirnoff and bassist Erick Coomes), while the breakout young artist of this year’s Bowlive has been the soul singer Alecia Chakour.

“You get that feeling at 3 a.m. at [Tipitina’s in New Orleans](#) during JazzFest, that feeling that serious funk is happening among musicians who are having a great time, and that’s what we’re getting to here,” Mr. Shapiro of Brooklyn Bowl said with more than a little justification.

As for the fans, seeing so many shows (I must admit I missed one) just becomes part of the daily routine.

Greg Baranovsky, 28, was one of the fans who bought a 10-night Bowlive pass for \$125. (Nightly admission is normally \$15, if you can get a ticket at all.) Last Wednesday he came to the show in a business suit, straight from his Wall Street finance job.

“Sure I have to be at work at 7 a.m., but there’s no way I would miss one of these shows,” he said. “The energy has been through the roof, and yet every night is different.”

A few days later, on Saturday night, Mr. Baranovsky was still there. Was he tired yet? “Well, I’m 28,” he allowed. “So far I can make it. But I’ll tell you, what I really like about these weekend shows is I can wear sneakers.”