



# IN TUNE

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA HAS RHYTHM,  
THANKS TO THE BEVY OF TALENTED  
MUSICIANS WHO CALL THE AREA HOME

By Libby Boren McMillan

Chalk it up to the weather or just pure good luck—either way, Southwest Florida is brimming with musical talent. Venues for live music are also plentiful, so when one is ready to be entertained, the choices can actually be a little overwhelming.

It would be literally impossible to list all the area's great musicians in one article—so many genres, so much talent—but here's a rough guide to some of the local performers you can count on for superb entertainment. We're concentrating primarily on solo acts, while also tipping our hat to the treasure trove of bassists, drummers, and horn players in Southwest Florida, not to mention all the fantastic bands that play locally.

## A STRING OF SUCCESSSES

Jazz guitarist Marc Vee, originally from Miami, consistently wows restaurant patrons and concertgoers alike. Having played since the age of seven, Vee majored in jazz guitar at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music before recording and then touring the United States and Latin America with his band Apex. Capitol Records then signed Vee as a solo artist, and he enjoyed significant airplay on contemporary jazz stations.

Vee has been on stage, or on the same bill, with jazz stars Kenny G, Warren Hill, Jeff Golub, Nestor Torres, Richard Elliott, and Chris Botti, as well as Spyro Gyra, Kenny Loggins, Herbie Hancock, and countless other performers. Vee, who composes, teaches, and produces his own and other artists' recordings, managed to hire Steely Dan engineer Roger Nichols to master his CD *Magic Moments*. This and his first CD release, *Speaking in Sounds*, sell nicely during local gigs; both are also available online.

Vee moved to Southwest Florida with his wife, Elizabeth, in 2000 and became an instant hit on this coast. A collaboration with Johnny Magsax gave birth to the Vee/Magsax Project, which opened at the local Jazz on the Green festival to an appreciative crowd. The two also produced an electrifying CD, *Souled Out*, engineered once more by Nichols.

Today, you're likely to find Vee playing solo in regular gigs around Lee and Collier counties at spots like Keylime Bistro or Sunshine Seafood Cafe & Lounge, or with the Marc Vee Band at special events and select private parties. As of this writing, Vee was immersed in finishing his next album, scheduled for an April or May 2007 release. His local following grows by the week, and Vee lets his fingers do the talking when it comes to his immense songwriting abilities.

When attending one of Vee's shows, get a table up close and enjoy the magic. Musicians respect Vee's skills, while audiences thoroughly enjoy his stylings on an eclectic, relaxing repertoire that includes many appealing originals.



Jazz guitarist Marc Vee can be found playing at local spots like Keylime Bistro.



Heather Brooks and Mike Rogers perform both as a duo and as part of the Heather Brooks Band.



Former Nashville touring drummer Darrell Nutt played on Heather Brooks's album *Turn It Over*.

## A MAN OF MANY TALENTS

Ever stopped by the Lighthouse Waterfront Restaurant at Port Comfort on a Sunday evening? Artist Greg Tali attracts some of the county's finest musicians for his Sunday night jam sessions there. If you want great music, Tali delivers. This talented artist, who moved here from Michigan "for better opportunities," he says, brought his tremendous skills with him and has carved out a niche for himself on the area's music scene.

Able to play any style of music, Tali can serenade while on keyboards or deftly handle a jazz solo on guitar. His trio, the Core, plays jazz standards and is, in fact, the core of the Lighthouse's jams. Tali also entertains with his solo act other nights. Competent in so many genres, he has enjoyed meeting the area's vast array of musicians, including Lee County's own cadre of rockers. Stop in to hear him and discover what you've been missing.

## TWO FOR THE SHOW

Heather Brooks and Mike Rogers are almost always seen playing together, but their individual skills are notable. Brooks, a composer and vocalist, accompanies herself on keyboards. Her partner Mike Rogers is another of Southwest Florida's finest guitar players who can also wield a mighty bass and wails on sax. Brooks and Rogers perform as a duo and as part of the larger, livelier Heather Brooks Band. Both acts are magnificent.

Brooks has been playing since the age of six. She often sets her stories to soulful, carefully considered melodies; the results are usually stirring, sometimes haunting, and always full of hooks. She can really write. Her appealing voice and ability to back herself give her the whole package, and she happens to be one of the few female bandleaders in our area.

Brooks's CD *Turn It Over* is well worth adding to your collection. The production values on it are impressive, and it was created with the help of several area performers, including the supremely talented Darrell Nutt, a former Nashville touring drummer and an entertaining musician in his own right.

Of Rogers's involvement with the CD, Brooks says, "Mike is a big fan of creating these lush soundscapes." Brooks credits him with the CD's multilayered sound. "I would do a partial string arrangement, and Mike would use his keyboard to add more, to make it sound really rich," she explains. "All the harmony ideas and male vocals were his also." The two have home studios and are "actually both writing and recording stuff all the time," Brooks adds. She makes some singles available for download online.

Rogers also started young and never looked back. He was largely influenced by the legends of funk, rock, jazz, and soul, and his stellar playing is indeed a tribute to James Brown, the Isley Brothers, Miles Davis, Prince, Steely Dan, Marvin Gay, Stevie Wonder, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, among others. He also credits the recordings of two imaginative pop icons, Sting and Seal, as having helped shape his own sound.

Rogers has put out several albums and toured the country with various bands, including Wattwuzzat, for which Scott Mathews produced an album. (Mathews has worked with Van Morrison and Eric Clapton.) Today, in addition to teaming with Heather Brooks, Rogers can also be heard playing in the outrageously fun band Funky Sea, Funky Dew.

Brooks counsels us to add Ray Nesbitt to our list. "He does a solo act and duos, and he plays with the full band Adrenaline, as



**Platters singer Al Holland gets folks dancing, performing at local spots like Parrot Key Caribbean Grill.**

well as my band,” she says. “He’s a very talented guitar player and a great singer. Now he’s got an act with David Johnson, where they do some unique stuff.” Johnson is, in fact, the area’s funkier bass player; he occasionally puts his busy local schedule on hold to tour with the Neville Brothers.

## THE WIND JAMMER

Smooth jazz fans across the country are familiar with the name of a particularly talented Southwest Florida resident. Paul Rozmus, a classically trained flautist originally from Poland, brings an infectious enthusiasm to his jazz performances, whether live or recorded.

Rozmus’s first album, *Rhythm of Love*, was widely heralded at its release. On it, Rozmus showcases his abilities on flute, easily bending the instrument to his will with percussive sounds, sensual phrases, and everything in between. Once smooth jazz stations started adding cuts from *Rhythm* to their playlists, Rozmus’s U.S. career took off.

He followed up with his sophomore album, *On the Funky Side*, a hook-filled blend of R&B, funk, blues, Latin, and pop layered over a base of contemporary jazz. Prominent artists adding contributions included Jeff Kashiwa and Freddie Jackson. Critics and industry heavyweights on this side of the Atlantic now recognize Rozmus as a world-class arranger, producer, and composer (all songs on the album were written or cowritten by him).

Also an accomplished keyboardist, Rozmus started studying piano at the age of five (why is this not a surprise?) and picked up a flute before turning thirteen. The prestigious Polish Academy of Music later awarded him a master’s degree, and Rozmus went on to arrange and record more than two hundred songs, many of which were hits on the Polish pop charts. He has toured the world, performing and leading the Paul Rozmus Jazz Band.

Coming to the United States in the mid-eighties with violinist wife Renata (who also graduated from the Polish Academy of Music and fronts her own local band), Rozmus established his own studio here in Southwest Florida, and the resulting albums have made him a household name in jazz circles. If you have the chance to hear this talented musician, don’t hesitate. You’re guaranteed a great evening.

## MAKE A DATE

Several special events and performance series each year shine a spotlight on live music in Southwest Florida.

- Lee County’s Alliance for the Arts outdoor jazz concerts, held in March and April in Fort Myers, 239-939-2787, [www.artinlee.org](http://www.artinlee.org)
- Sanibel Music Festival, held each March, 239-336-7999, [www.sanibelmusicfestival.org](http://www.sanibelmusicfestival.org)
- Sounds of Jazz, takes place in March at Cape Coral’s Jaycee Park, 239-573-3123, [www.capecoral.net/citydept/parks/pks\\_specevents.cfm](http://www.capecoral.net/citydept/parks/pks_specevents.cfm)
- River & Blues Festival, held in April at Centennial Park in Fort Myers, [www.riverandbluesfestival.com](http://www.riverandbluesfestival.com)
- Jazz on the Green, an outdoor jazz festival at Florida Gulf Coast University held in October, 239-477-4683, [www.jazzonthegreen.com](http://www.jazzonthegreen.com)
- BIG Arts’ Great Performers Series, takes place November through March on Sanibel, 239-395-0900, [www.bigarts.org/musicseries.htm](http://www.bigarts.org/musicseries.htm)



## LISTEN UP



There are lots of great places to hear live music in Southwest Florida. Here are a few recommendations.

### On Sanibel:

- Dolce Vita, 239-472-5555
- Ellington's Jazz Bar & Restaurant, 239-472-0494, [www.ellingtonsjazz.com](http://www.ellingtonsjazz.com)
- Traders, 239-472-7242

### On Captiva:

- Keylime Bistro, 239-395-0882, <http://captivastrandinn.com/village/keylime.htm>
- Mucky Duck, 239-472-3434, [www.muckyduck.com](http://www.muckyduck.com)
- RC Otter's, 239-395-1142, <http://captivastrandinn.com/village/otters.htm>
- Sunshine Seafood Cafe & Wine Bar, 239-472-6200, <http://captivastrandinn.com/village/sunshine.htm>

### In Fort Myers:

- Biddle's Restaurant & Piano Bar, 239-433-4449
- Brick Bar, 239-332-7425
- Cin Cin Mediterranean Bar & Grille, 239-415-2007, [www.cincingrille.com](http://www.cincingrille.com)
- Dwyers, 239-425-0782, [www.dwyers-pub.com](http://www.dwyers-pub.com)
- La Brasserie, 239-415-4375
- Lighthouse Waterfront Restaurant, 239-489-0770, [www.lighthousewaterfrontrestaurant.com](http://www.lighthousewaterfrontrestaurant.com)
- Patio 33, 239-337-2846
- Sunshine Seafood Cafe & Lounge, 239-489-2233

### In Fort Myers Beach:

- Orpheus Cafe, 239-463-1549

### In North Fort Myers:

- Harbourside Grill and Tiki, 239-997-7110
- Hurricane Harry's, 239-997-8300, [www.hharry.com](http://www.hharry.com)

### On Pine Island:

- Tarpon Lodge, 239-283-3999, [www.tarponlodge.com](http://www.tarponlodge.com)

### In Cape Coral:

- Oasis on Lafayette, 239-540-5678, [www.oasisonlafayette.com](http://www.oasisonlafayette.com)

### In Buckingham:

- Buckingham Blues Bar, 239-693-7111, [www.buckinghambar.com](http://www.buckinghambar.com)

## A RISING STAR AND A LEGEND

Massachusetts lost a real talent when Danny Sinoff chose Southwest Florida over New England. This twenty-four-year-old phenom regularly awes the crowd at Ellington's Jazz Bar & Restaurant, where he exhibits a masterful command of the piano while crooning jazz standards accompanied by his own trio or quartet. This young professional is already used to being compared to Harry Connick, Jr. and Frank Sinatra, both of whom were major influences on his decision to become a professional jazz musician.

Sinoff, a Berklee College of Music alum, has played with the Brubeck Brothers Quartet, David "Fathead" Newman, Sweet Georgia Brown, and countless others. He cites Mel Tormé as another big influence, which is quite unusual for a young man but fortunate for his appreciative audiences.

Remember the Platters? Did you know that the smooth vocals of Platters singer "Big Al" Holland can be enjoyed in Southwest Florida on a regular basis? When he performs, legions of loyal Holland fans dance and sway the night away to oldies hits and pop standards of the 1970s. Holland plays keyboards while mesmerizing the crowd with his voice, and this fantastic entertainer never misses the opportunity to connect with his audience. He's the oldies groove master with personality plus.

## MUSIC TO ANYONE'S EARS

Our area has long supported multiple jam sessions; the plethora of retired musicians who live in Southwest Florida is simply mind-boggling. Two mobile home communities near Sanibel have their own bands during season. In addition to the Lighthouse on Sundays and an impressive North Fort Myers jam on Wednesdays at Harbourside Grill & Tiki (which replaced the one previously hosted at downtown's Hendry Street Station), Orpheus Cafe on Fort Myers Beach has long been home to a Monday night event with a talented core of players. (Call before driving to any of these spots; jams are notorious for moving about.)

It goes without saying that Sanibel's favorite son, Danny Morgan, can still pack a house, get folks dancing, *and* write tunes that appeal to a broad audience, most of all our island-loving visitors who long to get back here. Danny provides the catchy CDs that Northerners rely upon to help recall the feel of sunburn and sandy feet while driving to work under gray skies or, worse yet, in ice and snow.

An evening spent watching people dance to Morgan's music reminds us all why we're so lucky to live here. (The many talented friends who join him on occasion are a bonus.) Find yourself getting grumpy about



BOTTOM PHOTO BY LAUREN DAVIES



**Local fave Danny Morgan gets fans in a beachy mood at Traders (above), while young phenom Danny Sinoff regularly awes the crowd at Ellington's Jazz Bar & Restaurant (opposite bottom).**

traffic, the real estate market, or your next-door neighbor? Head out to find Morgan; he'll have you smiling in no time.

Other artists to add to your go-hear list include finger-style guitarist Pat McCune; keyboard master Michael Moore-Kelly; the talented and original Chris Workman, who backs his vocals on piano (check out his CD); multitalented jazz guitarist Steve Uscher; guitar great David Dust, who often accompanies rip-roaring vocalist Tonya Mahanger; Dolce Vita's Woody Brubaker on grand piano, who's sometimes joined by keyboardist Joe McCormick or horn player Skip Haynes; popular vocalist Paul Ventura; guitarist Mark Dupuy; mandolin whiz Frank Greathouse; Victor Guittard on both sax and guitar;

pianist Tim Goodman (who organizes that fantastic North Fort Myers jam session); and fun-loving guitarist Steve McDugal.

Also check out pianist Chuck Coughlin (who falls sway to his operatic roots and breaks into song by evening's end); guitarist Clint Wiley; Funky Sea, Funky Dew member Brad Brown, who can also wow with lush jazz standards on piano; high-energy Nashville guitarist Brent Moyer, who made his Broadway debut in *Ring of Fire*; Daniel Klimoski, who impresses on sax and clarinet; the entertaining Susie Jennings on guitar and vocals; longtime local favorite Dan Tudor on piano; enthralling jazz vocalist Lynn Richardson; and all the artists working on Captiva's Andy Rosse Lane, which has become a mecca for fantastic live music. (Keep it up; we are paying attention!)

The record for longest-held gig probably goes to the ever-popular Lila Moore, who still holds court at the Veranda's piano in downtown Fort Myers. Sanibel's own Blind Pass Band, fronted by Marty Stokes on guitar, is a fairly new homegrown blues band with a large local following.

Several great artists regularly commute to our area for gigs, including world champion slide guitarist Kraig Kenning; finger-style guitar master Chuck Van Riper; sexy soul singer Dana Paul ("You Can Keep Your Hat On"); trumpeter and big band leader Lou Columbo; Latin jazz flute prodigy Jose Valentino, who brings the house down with his contagious energy; Tampa's own smooth jazz sax star Mindi Abair; and Ed Calle, whose electric solo performances on sax are as equally astounding as his resume, which includes television, film, studio, and touring gigs for the biggest names in the business. Calle most often appears at Lee County's Alliance for the Arts. An impressive number of touring jazz greats have also made appearances at Ellington's on Sanibel. Keep an eye out for who's playing at both venues.

One of the more amazing musicians in our area doesn't perform much in public, unless there's a fire. Shawn Kilgore, a classically trained guitarist, is also the newest hire at Captiva Fire Control. If you're walking by the firehouse one night and hear the intense strains of an impossibly difficult and painfully beautiful Spanish tune wafting from somewhere inside, now you know why. Try not to start any evening fires while this young man is practicing.

Great live musicians are everywhere and deserve to be acknowledged in a world that is too often filled with the cacophony of television, radio, and boring prerecorded tunes. Go out this week and support a musician who's laying it on the line, playing live music. 🎸

*Libby Boren McMillan spends at least two nights a week going to hear live music with her husband, Mike, a bass and guitar player with an affinity for the congas.*

## GET THE 411

Several of the musicians mentioned in this story have their own Web sites that provide info about the artist, touring schedules, and CD sales. Local artists also sell their work online through vendors such as CD Baby, iTunes, and Amazon.com.

- Heather Brooks, [www.heather-brooks.com](http://www.heather-brooks.com)
- Al Holland, [www.alholland.com](http://www.alholland.com)
- Danny Morgan, <http://dannymorgan.com>
- Paul Rozmus, [www.face2face-records.com/paul2.asp](http://www.face2face-records.com/paul2.asp)
- Danny Sinoff, [www.dannysinoff.com](http://www.dannysinoff.com)
- Marc Vee, [www.marcvee.com](http://www.marcvee.com)

