

Traveling to Jupiter with Planet Loop

By Andrew Gilbert

December 17, 2015 7:00 am



For the average patron the music at [Jupiter](#) might seem like an afterthought. Most people show up to dine and drink with no foreknowledge of who'll be performing underneath the towering redwood at the back of the patio. But the restaurant's longtime music policy provides an essential anchor for many East Bay musicians, giving them a friendly and easily accessible forum at home. Jupiter's gravitational pull can even attract artists from far beyond the local constellation, like [Planet Loop](#), who return to the patio on Saturday night.

The band's sound has evolved considerably since the first Jupiter gig in 2008 as a duo featuring [Michael Schaller](#) on bass and [Carrie Jahde](#) on drums. Based in Boston and looking to move to the West Coast, the couple cold-called Alain Grissette, who has booked the venue since 1993, and he gave them a shot.

"I always like to get touring bands a date if I can make it happen," Grissette says. "I think I dug the sound they were able to produce as a duo, which wasn't the typical coffee-shop jazz."

Grissette couldn't know it at the time, but his openness to presenting a combo untested in the Bay Area gave the couple a major boost of confidence at a delicate moment of transition. "We actually got the gig before we even

moved, and it's a special spot for us," says Jahde (pronounced jay-dee). "Obviously it's a great spot to play, outdoors with a big tree behind us. But that was our first gig in the Bay Area, and it was an encouraging sign that things were going to be okay when we got here."

Living in South Berkeley since then, Jahde and Schaller have released two Planet Loop albums that track the group's evolution. Initially inspired by electronics and the possibilities afforded by samples and looping, they performed as a duo focusing on original compositions on the group's debut album, 2008's *Enjoy Your Stay*.

"I would write the songs thinking about counterpoint," Jahde says. "Mike was playing bass at first, so there were no chordal instruments. It was much sparser way of writing, with these longer melodies floating over the base lines."

By the time Planet Loop released 2011's *Triple Trio Album*, they had brought in a rotating cast of collaborators, and Schaller had traded in his bass for a seven-string guitar/bass, a hybrid instrument with three bass strings and four guitar strings that allows him to play two lines simultaneously via two amplifiers. And now the band creates all its sounds in real time.

"We don't use any loops or electronics anymore," Jahde says. "So it's kind of false advertising, but it's too late to change our name. It's been a lot of fun for us. We're not trapped in the endless loop thing, which can be confining in terms of improvising. We're back to acoustic, organic sounds."

For Saturday's Jupiter gig, they'll be joined by Oakland multi-instrumentalist Jeff Hobbs on violin, trumpet and saxophone. A stalwart of the Bay Area improv music scene who also doctors damaged instruments at A & G Music and Best Instrument Repair, Hobbs can often be found in exploratory musical settings.

Born and raised in Nebraska, Jahde put in time on several instruments and settled on the drums in her early 20s while living in Eugene, Ore. She ended up graduating from Berklee College of Music as part of a contingent of older students, and soaked up as much jazz and Latin music as she could. Planet Loop is only one of her steady ensembles (the group performs regularly at [Off the Grid](#) in El Cerrito and Alameda).

Since moving to the Bay Area, she's worked in a vast array of settings, including the [NoCoasters](#), a trio featuring veteran pianist Lee Bloom and bassist Brandon Essex, and the band [Shugga](#) with powerhouse vocalist Helen Bernard Gray, pianist Larry Steelman, and bassist Jay Styne, which performs monthly at Caffe Trieste (next hit, Jan. 2).

Recommended gig: Erika Oba at Claremont branch of Berkeley Public Library

Berkeley-raised pianist/composer [Erika Oba](#) returns to Berkeley Public Library's Claremont Branch at 4 p.m. Thursday for an intimate duo set with bassist Chris Bastian, her collaborator on the 2012 CD *Carry On*. For the concert they'll be focusing on recent compositions and arrangements. For more information about this free concert, call 510-981-6280.

[Andrew Gilbert](#) writes a weekly music column for *Berkeleyside*. He also reports for the *San Jose Mercury News*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *KQED's California Report*. Read [his previous Berkeleyside reviews](#).

Want to know what else is going on in Berkeley and nearby? Visit [Berkeleyside's new-look Events Calendar](#). Submit your own events for free if they aren't there already — and give them featured status for just a few dollars a day.