



Orchestras
across the
country are
tapping into
listeners'
newfound
curiosity at
alternative
venues—and,
more often than
not, they're
finding new
homes and
building their
brands.

Bar Co

by Jayson Greene



Street scene outside Manhattan's Le Poisson Rouge (left) and the club's interior (above). Musicians who have performed there include violinist Jennifer Choi, pianist Simone Dinnerstein, Calder String Quartet, ACME Contemporary Music Ensemble, and So Percussion.

One night last February at Le Poisson Rouge, the hip new performance space in downtown Manhattan, singer-songwriter and novelist John Wesley Harding dropped by for a three-concert residency. He came backed by an unlikely cast of collaborators: novelists Rick Moody and Jonathan Ames; droll hipster comedian Eugene Mirman; country-folk singer PT Walkley; and post-modern ventriloquist Carla Rhodes. The view from the stage was that of Manhattan's young, intellectual elite: Among the black-frame-besppectaced audience, there was a preponderance of master's degrees and first novels in various stages of completion. The atmosphere was loose and informal, the cozy, low-lit vibe punctuated by the murmur of conversation and the occasional clink of wine glasses. Two days later, the ACME Contemporary Music Ensemble was on the same stage, performing works by Louis Andriessen, John Cage, and others, and the crowd again consisted of curious young twenty- and thirty-somethings, listening appreciatively as they toyed with their drinks. To them, John Cage and John Wesley Harding were all a part of the same spectrum: something stimulating to take in on a Friday night.

It's a scene repeating itself at emerging venues in several cities, as orchestras branch out into rock clubs and trendy restaurants and find a different group of concertgoers who normally might not venture into a concert hall. Le Poisson Rouge opened its doors on June 16, 2008, with a concert