



Amy Cook
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Music in the Food

By Jessica Dupuy
Photography by Jake Holt

In the world of dynamic duos there are many wonderful partnerships: chocolate and vanilla, Sonny and Cher, Batman and Robin, and let's not forget chips and salsa. For Austin, it's music and food. From the Cornell Hurd every Thursday at Jovita's or rotating rock bands at Opal Divines and the Mean-Eyed Cat, to acoustic licks at Guero's Taqueria and summer shows on the patio at Shady Grove, music is all around this capital city. And it's typically enjoyed with a cold drink and a plate of good food. Locals who have been here a while sometimes take it for granted, but visitors are often enthralled to find some sort of live music at just about any type of eatery in town.

It's not unusual to stroll down South Congress avenue on the first Thursday of the month to find the San Jose Hotel parking lot crowded—packed not with cars but people—sipping Lone Star beer or nursing a hot cup of coffee and snacking on Frito pie or banana-nut bread while listening to a laid back singer-songwriter strum their guitar at Jo's Coffee shack. For more than five years, Jo's has been a regular performance stop for California-turned-Austin native, Amy Cook, whose singer/songwriter-meets-electric-guitar grooves have garnered a loyal following in town. Though she's played the Continental Club, the Cactus Café, and has a new regular gig at Lamberts, Cook loves the organic vibe at Jo's where, often, half the crowd consists of unassuming South Congress strollers who stop by to listen to a stripped down Austin jam session. "The parking lot is what's most amazing about this place," says Cook. "A lot of people would have developed this, but leaving it as a parking lot allows for outside entertainment on a street level and it's fantastic."

Doug Strahan, the lead singer of the Moonhangers, plays a regular Wednesday night gig at Lamberts and usually orders up one of the seasonal specials.

It's this kind of vibe that Lix Lambert envisioned when she opened Jo's in 1999. At first, it was simply to fill a need for good coffee and snacks on South Congress while she was finishing up her renovations to what is now the Hotel San Jose. The music part just naturally followed. "The question was, 'what does the community want?'" says Lambert. "That's how Jo's became what it is on South Congress. A great place to bring your dog for coffee and a great place to have a beer and listen to music."

During South Congress' First Thursday each month, Jo's "Sinner's Sunday Brunches", and of course, throughout the entire week of South by Southwest, Jo's South Congress location is always hopping with a lively crowd and great music. (This year Cook will preview her upcoming album, "Let The Light In," when opening for producer Alejandro Escovedo on Friday of South by Southwest week. Now with a second location in the Second Street District, Jo's has expanded its culinary options to include a gourmet twist on diner-style items including tasty chili dogs, tuna melts, and juicy hamburgers served on sweet toasted buns. (For dessert, the Dr. Pepper cake is a heavenly treat.)

"I love Austin in general," says Erika Wennerstrom, lead singer and guitarist for the bluesy indie rock band, The Heartless Bastards. "But I really love that it's a city where people really come out to hear music." Traveling an average 200-plus days a year, Ohio-native Wennerstrom says Austin's magnetic zeal for live music is what drew her to move here permanently a few years ago. "When you play a gig in a similar college town like Columbus, Ohio, you may get a crowd of 400. But in Austin the same-sized venue draws three