The City of Edinburgh was left in an interesting quandary in the late 90's when it discovered a series of caves, cliffs and stone corridors over two floors dating back to the 1700's hidden underneath the city's historic Old Town, a UNESCO world heritage site. What should one do with such a dramatic discovery? Host a slamming dance floor jazz club, that's what! And so, with the courtesy of Departure Lounge, that's exactly what happened.

Departure Lounge has been causing a roarblock on the last Friday of every second month for three years now purely on the power of word-of-mouth alone. That's important as it remains the only 'pubic' event allowed to make use of the unique venue since it first opened. As its co-founder, Chris Knight (aka DJ Astroboy), explains, it's not been easy to get Departure Lounge to take off. "You name it - dampness, flooding and fires - it's been a battle to make the Caves work the way that it has, and we owe it to the cooperation of the venue's management team of Norrie Rowan and Julie Blythe that we've got to where we are now."

Where they are now is to be in a position to bring the Brazilian dons Azymuth to Edinburgh. As Bertrom, Cocti, Malheiro and Alexander enter the Caves to sound check; it's nice to note that such well travelled professional musicians are still hit with the same sense of awe. "To me, the Caves resemble a Camera Acoustica (acoustic chamber) with little resonance needed to achieve the perfect sound. Its due to the stone materials used to build the place" explains bass player Malheiro as he gapes up towards the arched ceiling "Edinburgh reminds me of Salvador de Bahia in Brazil in the way that such old buildings can give you such a special atmosphere."

Showtime, and as Chris looks on at the power of Azymuth's self proclaimed 'theatre of sound', he's keen to stress the enthusiasm and diversity of Departure Lounge's dance floor: "We pride ourselves on having an international following, we get Japanese jazzers, Jamaican reggae-boys, Spanish hippies, Kiwis, Brazilian sambistas, Scottish folk stars, hip-hop heads, soul boys and Senegalese shockers... all getting down on the dancefloor under one flag: good music and friendly vibes."

To illustrate his point, as Azymuth entered their third encore on what they described as "the best gig of their 15 date European tour", an exhausted Bertrami decided it was all too much, called it quits and walked off the stage wading into the pandemonium of the dance floor. Not so fast, as one of their newly converted fans swiftly picked him up in his arms and carried him back up onto the stage and placed him firmly behind the keyboards once again. A stunned Bertrami responded in classic fashion; opting to ratchet the tempo up another level with their fastest Brazilian samba stomper of their set. Azymuth's performance is an important watermark for Chris Knight, who along with Cammy Sinclair and Mark Colquhoun have been running things since day one: "It's the biggest act we've brought in to date" states Chris "yet it still builds on our ethos of exposing local bands to international artists and give international artists the chance to perform to the best crowd in Scotland". Respect duh, as he can reflect on three years of bringing a stellar list of Chas'trock acts to Scotland's capital: "The best clubs I've ever been to in my life" remarked our Dom Servini who racked one of the best sets in the clubs history: "London would kill for a crowd like this" remarked one Patrick Forge who sent the place spots when he dropped a live CD-R of "Mother of The Future" for the first time.

"We never move backwards" emphasises Chris, "It's about keeping it as fresh as possible and we've got a community out on that dancefloor that backs us up to the bit... and that allows us to take risks". That risk taking element, reflective of the evolution of jazz itself, is what really sets this place apart: you never know what's gonna happen on the night; a local twenty-piece Edinburgh symphony school might show up performing drum 'n' bass or a Scottish piper taking you into the new year for one of their legendary Hogmanay specials. Departure Lounge looks set for take-off to bigger and better destinations - you just don't know what you're in for until you arrive! (Words: Will Page; Photography: Helen McLean and Jamie Archer)

My Info www.departurelounge.co.uk – Third Birthday, Friday 28 July 2006

Seven Local Acts to Tracks Packing the Scotch Corner of My Space

1. Kate Turnstall Feed Your Mind (Yash2K)
2. Jon Archibald Quartet: The Burning Circle (CD-R)
3. The Fusion Experience: Scrummangi (Goya)
4. B-Burg Desert Island Disco (Local Product (CD-R)
5. Digital Jones: High Heeled Generation (CD-R)
6. Found Found can Move (Surface Pressure Records)
7. Profilere: Roslyn Chapel (CD-R)