

Twist and Stout!

FOREVER ENSHRINED BY THE BEATLES,
THE CITY OF HAMBURG IS A FAB FORAY INTO
SEX, BEER AND ROCK 'N' ROLL.

BY MARK ROZZO PHOTOGRAPHS BY MONIKA HÖFLER

In April of 1961, an English art-school screw-up and musician named John Lennon stepped into a doorway in the St. Pauli neighborhood of Hamburg, Germany, and had his image snapped by a local photographer named Jürgen Vollmer. That black-and-white picture is now an iconic symbol of the days when Lennon and his band — hopped up on Holsten beer and over-the-counter uppers called Preludin — played marathon shows, fraternized with strippers and, along the way, became the Beatles, forever enshrining Hamburg's improbable place in the rock cosmology. As Lennon put it, "I grew up in Hamburg, not Liverpool."

St. Pauli has always been a global capital of *louche*; its Reeperbahn is one of Europe's most notorious red-light districts. The street called Grosse Freiheit is filled with peep shows, bars and rock clubs, including a couple made famous by the Beatles in the early '60s — the Indra and the Kaiserkeller. Back then, "it was Kicksville," says the 70-year-old British guitar slinger Tony Sheridan, who was the Beatles' mentor. "The Reeperbahn was a sordid place where seamen came to spend their money. It was whores and pimps and all the rest. But music really brightened it up."

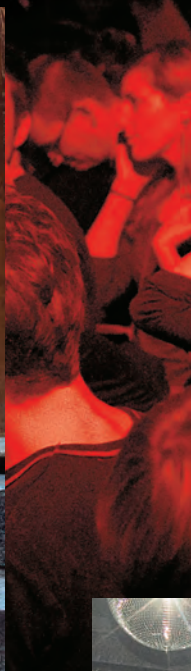
An aura of inspired anarchy remains in St. Pauli, and it's one reason why Hamburg is still a European music magnet — Germany's Austin or Seattle. By night, the heart of St. Pauli is awash in neon signage, throbbing techno, jangling indie rock, arty cabarets, strutting hookers, suburban teens looking to get zonked on 99-cent shots and an all-purpose international array of partiers. "The mix is so interesting, with table-dancing places and rock clubs and great restaurants," says the 33-year-old singer-songwriter Stefanie Hempel, who gives Beatles-themed tours of the area. "But even still, there's a feeling of a little village." By day, greater St. Pauli is reassuringly hung over, a place where artists daub and songwriters strum.

"The whole St. Pauli-Beatles thing, that's the basis for the Hamburg sound even now," Dirk Darmstaedter told me. "There's a '60s-ish mod vibe to Hamburg music." Darmstaedter is one of Germany's underground pop heroes and the cofounder of the influential indie label

Nacht moves

Right: music fans at a rockabilly party at Knust. Below, the Grosse Freiheit, a street of peep shows and rock clubs off the Reeperbahn.





They got the beat
Clockwise from above: a Hamburg hipster; the Astro-Zombies at Knust; the band Warren Suicide at Uebel und Gefährlich; inside the Hanseplatte music store; the crowd at Uebel und Gefährlich; at Kaiserkeller; Grosse Freiheit revelers; in front of Prinzenbar; the singer-songwriter Stefanie Hempel.

