

Jukebox heroes

More and more bars are going digital, but a few old-fashioned machines are still pumping out a great mix of music.



By Tristram Lozaw, Luke O'Neil, Nick Zaino, Kathleen Pierce, and Meredith Goldstein
Globe Correspondents and Staff / October 9, 2008

Stroll into your neighborhood pub these days and you'll probably find something more akin to a giant iPod on the wall than a real live jukebox playing 45s or CDs. These digital units are usually connected to the Internet, often via satellite, with touch screens offering access to nearly every popular song imaginable. There are no buttons sounding a familiar "clunk," no mechanisms to watch as a chosen disc is guided into place. Just MP3s from some remote databank accessible at the swipe of a credit card; for a little extra, you can even trump another person's spot in line.

The new boxes cop out by trying to be all music to all people, robbing us of the pleasures of grazing through the idiosyncrasies of a well-curated jukebox. Old-school boxes allow for chance discoveries, showing us how a taste for punk could be linked to country, funk, standards, doo-wop, whatever.

Club and diner owners say old-school jukeboxes are too expensive to maintain and take up too much space. But there are a few stalwart standouts to be found in the area, jukeboxes that entertain while offering snapshots of the music tastes particular to a hangout and its patrons. We suggest you go drop a few quarters in the slots while you still can.

McGreevy's: Not surprisingly, the jukebox at the Back Bay bar owned by the Dropkick Murphys' Ken Casey includes a few Dropkick discs. But there's plenty here besides "I'm Shipping Up to Boston." The modern-rock box at Casey's re-creation of America's first sports bar includes plenty of Elvis Costello, Joe Jackson, and David Bowie. Some of the most frequently played albums are "Red Roses for Me" by the Pogues, "High Voltage" by AC/DC, and "Devil's Night Out" by the Mighty Mighty Bosstones. 911 Boylston St., Boston.

617-262-0911. mcgreevysboston.com