DISCO IS OUT, LIVE IS COOL

Musicians draw celebrities and the hip back to cafes and bistros

By MARGARET AMBROSE

A-LIST celebrities and everyday Parisians are turning their backs on a Paris nightlife icon, the discothèque, as cafe and bistros win them back with live music.

The discos are still pumping out the re-recorded and pre-mixed music but numbers are down on the dance floor. These days the hippest places to be seen are small bars and bistros that provide food, wine, and live music.

In Paris, live music is experiencing a boom in popularity, not seen since technology-based music hit France in the 1980s.

The young and fashionable of Paris are flocking to venues such as the canal barges, Batofar and Makara, where they can enjoy nights ranging in theme from flamenco to swing, Cithéa, which hosts jazz nights, and Réservoir, which features an eclectic array of up-and-coming musicians.

The trend took off last year when popular French singer Patrick Bruel embarked on his sell-out Entre-Deux tour. Bruel performed a collection of vintage French songs dripping with sentimentality and nostalgia in a venue designed to make the audience believe they were patrons at a smoky Paris bar. The stage was a scene from a black and white movie, complete with street lamp, bar and tables, and a cast of men and women

Photos by David Henry http://www.davidpherry.com/

TUNING INTO CAFE LIFE: Musicians perform to evening drinkers outside a café in place de la Bastille

twirling around a dance floor to the music. Following the success of the tour, the A-list of Paris jumped on the live venue bandwagon. Reigning queen of French film Monica Bellucci recently declared the cabaret music hall Le Zèbre to be her favourite venue and can be regularly spotted there with husband Vincent Cassel.

The increasing popularity of live music venues is evident in the success of l'Atmosphère, a small café/bistro in the 10th that has rapidly built a name for itself as the premier jazz venue in Paris.

Over a meal or a bottle of red wine, patrons can sit back and enjoy up-and-coming jazz musicians. It is so popular that on weekends it is almost impossible to get a table.

Yannick Landais, manager of the cool and ambient Satellit' Café, believes that the exodus from discothèque to live music, can be attributed less to its celebrity profile and more to the experience. "In bistros and bars the spaces are more intimate," he says. "People participate with the music and the artist, and the emotional connection to the music is stronger." According to Landais, the multicultural nature of modern Paris has leant support to the current popularity of live music with African cultures in particular having a long appreciation for live music. Satellit Café specialises in World Music, classical and modern, and "shows the people of Paris their real culture and their history," he adds.