

weather, the patio is a pleasant place.

If you can't decide whether to meet for coffee or a drink, keep your options open at **Grape & Bean** (118 S. Royal St., Alexandria; 703-664-0214; grapeandbean.com), a wine-and-coffee bar in Old Town. The tiny space boasts an \$11,000 Clover coffee machine, one of only a few hundred worldwide and a cult item among coffee fanatics.

During the day, grab an espresso, pastry, or cup of tea and relax on the leather armchairs at **Mayorga Coffee Roasters** (801 Pleasant Dr., Rockville; 301-990-8722; mayorgacoffee.com). Started by a Rockville

resident who grew up in Nicaragua, this local chain works to promote sustainable farming in rural communities by sourcing beans directly from small coffee estates in Latin America.

Authentic Irish Pubs

The pale-yellow building that houses the **Irish Inn at Glen Echo** (6119 Tulane Ave., Glen Echo; 301-229-6600; irishusa.com/irishinn) looks as if it could have been plucked from the Irish countryside and plopped down here. A warren of formal dining rooms takes up most of the space inside, but the pub in front is the biggest draw. Regulars pull up a stool at the 30-foot oak bar or

squeeze into one of the plaid booths for a pint. You won't find shamrocks or Irish-American kitsch, but you may hear brogues—several servers come from Ireland. Every Monday night, there's live Irish music.

At the **Old Brogue Irish Pub** (760-C Walker Rd., Great Falls; 703-759-3309; oldbrogue.com), it's not uncommon to see patrons pushing tables together to make room for friends. That's because this pub has been a neighborhood favorite for almost 30 years. Friendly servers shuttle well-poured pints of Guinness, Harp, and Smithwick's. Ask for a table in the back room, where low ceilings with

wooden beams and a roaring gas fireplace make you feel like you're in a friend's living room.

You can hear traditional Irish music from 7 to 9:30 every Friday and Saturday night at **the Auld Shebeen** (3971 Chain Bridge Rd., Fairfax; 703-293-9600; theauldshebeenva.com), another beloved neighborhood joint. The kitchen turns out good renditions of shepherd's pie and Guinness beef stew. Saturday at noon, amateurs take the stage for an Irish-music open mike.

For more Irish tunes, head to **the Dubliner** (520 N. Capitol St., NW; 202-737-3773; dublinerdc.com).



U Street's Velvet Lounge showcases under-the-radar bands.



The Fatback dance party at Bohemian Caverns is a high-energy evening.

Photograph by Dakota Fine

just that. Paata and Irina Tskurishvili's productions combining dance, drama, mime, and music have wowed audiences and won several Helen Hayes Awards. This spring at DC's Lansburgh Theatre, they'll bring their "art of silence" to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

At Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company (641 D St., NW; 202-393-3939; woollymammoth.net), artistic director Howard Shalwitz isn't afraid to let the odd, the absurd, or the just plain silly shine. MacArthur "genius" fellow Sarah Ruhl's *Dead Man's Cell Phone* played here before it ran off-Broadway. But that was one of Woolly's tamer offerings. This month, Chicago's Second City brings *Barack Stars: The Wrath of Rahm* to the theater.

Operating in a converted warehouse, **Washington Shakespeare Company** (601 S. Clark St., Arlington; 703-418-4808; washingtonshakespeare.org) has created a Stanley Kubrick-inspired

Richard II and staged edgy interpretations of other classic works. It also takes chances on new plays, such as Julie Jensen's *Two-Headed*, about a Mormon massacre in the 1800s, and local playwright Allyson Currin's *Learning Curves*. Onstage now is an adaptation of Molière's *The Miser* by David Ball, in which WSC reimagines the protagonist as a forerunner to a Wall Street CEO.

Keegan Theatre (at Church Street Theater, 1742 Church St., NW; 703-892-0202; keegantheatre.com) brings the Irish dramatic sensibility to American audiences. Some of the plays produced are by Irish writers; some are American plays that echo what Keegan calls the "spare, unpretentious style" that characterizes contemporary Irish theater. Either way, Keegan is a good place to see first-rate work.

Escape Buttoned-Down Washington

For a night your date is unlikely to forget, try a show

at the **Palace of Wonders** (1210 H St., NE; 202-398-7469; palaceofwonders.com). Pasties, shrunk heads, and taxidermied curiosities abound at this bar/museum/freak show in DC's Atlas District. The tiny stage offers a host of performers each week, from vintage-style burlesque to sword swallowers and magicians. Regular acts include the Lucky Daredevil Thrillshow and the Weirdo Show & Wasabasco Burlesque. Patrons willing to pry their eyes away from the entertainment can look at the Coney Island-inspired collection of oddball artifacts. A unicorn and a five-legged dog are popular attractions.

Let's Dance

Go Clubbing

The Art Nouveau-themed **Josephine** (1008 Vermont Ave., NW; 202-347-8601; josephinedc.com) feels as if it belongs in London or Miami. Beyond the velvet rope,

corseted bartenders and beautiful people get down to an imaginative soundtrack—anything from old-school house classics to Jay-Z. For those who want a table, it's a minimum of \$500.

Chic clubbers also head to **the Park at 14th** (920 14th St., NW; 202-737-7275; theparkatfourteenth.com), a loungey wood-and-glass-paneled space with four levels and several balconies where you can see and be seen. The bar downstairs serves good snacks such as sliders and spinach dip. Make a reservation to get in, or arrive early and dress well.

Hit a DJ Dance Party

At **Gate 54**, the basement lounge in Café Saint-Ex (1847 14th St., NW; 202-265-7839; saint-ex.com), DJs spin a mix of international, Motown, and electronica for a crowd of twenty- and thirtysomethings. You and your date can sip cocktails at one of the small tables lining the walls of this aviation-inspired space be-

fore hitting the dance floor.

Or head a few doors down to the **Black Cat** (1811 14th St., NW; 202-667-4490; blackcatdc.com). Mousetrap, a quirky Britpop music night, runs regularly in the indie-rock club's Mainstage area, but it can be hit or miss. We prefer to boogie down at Backstage—the Black Cat's warehouse-like space—where DJs feature everything from '80s alternative to punk. Equally great are the occasional "vs." nights, which mix music from two or three legendary artists—Prince vs. Outkast was a recent example—in a mash-up everyone can sing along to.

Die-hard dancers will find funk, soul, go-go, and more at the popular **Fatback** (fatbackdc.com) party. Thrown the third Saturday of each month at Liv, inside Bohemian Caverns (2001 11th St., NW; 202-299-0800; livdc.com), it's hosted by a



Every Saturday night, hundreds of swing dancers fill Glen Echo Park's Spanish Ballroom.

group of seven rotating spin masters. The event is frequently touted as one of the most energetic dance parties in Washington.

Jump and Jive

The legendary **Spanish Ballroom at Glen Echo Park**

(7300 MacArthur Blvd., Glen Echo; 301-634-2222; glenechopark.org) still dominates the local swing scene. Every Saturday night from 9 till midnight, 500 people jump, jive, and boogie-woogie to live music in the cavernous hall with feet-friendly

sprung-wood floors but no heating or air-conditioning. Lessons for beginners are from 8 to 9.

Friday nights, the **Hilton Washington Dulles Airport** (13869 Park Center Rd., Herndon; 703-478-2900; gottaswing.com) has live music, lessons, and open dancing. For a more formal venue—think Rainbow Room—the **Carlyle Club** (411 John Carlyle St., Alexandria; 703-548-8899; thecarlyleclub.com), with its dark-leather banquettes and Art Deco atmosphere, is the place for 1940s-style dinner and dancing to big-band music, often by national acts.

Feel the Cuban Rhythms

Cuban, or casino-style, salsa—often danced in a "rueda" circle with other couples—builds such a sense of camaraderie that instruc-



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