

AFTER DARK A toast to the Barry Award winners

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If it is true, as a few slightly deranged historians have concluded, that the first nightclub opened in Orange County in the year 1703, then the first **Barry Awards** were announced in 1704.

Of course, there were not a lot of **awards** given out that year. But the selection has improved in the ensuing 300 years, and so have the number of **Barry Awards**, which salute the best of O.C.'s night-life scene during the previous 12 months.

The number of **awards** has grown so much, in fact, that it now takes two weeks to list them all. And if we don't start announcing these **awards** soon, it'll take three weeks.

So, without further ado -- and couldn't we use a little break from all that ado? -- here are the 300th annual **Barry Awards**:

BEST NIGHTCLUB -- Martini Blues in Huntington Beach. Other nightclubs keep shrinking, while this one keeps growing. This cool spot added a third room this year that they call the Back Porch. It features comedy four nights a week, to go along with the jazz and blues that swing in the other two showrooms. This might be a hard place to find (it's hidden in the corner of a Vons shopping center at Springdale and Edinger), but it's worth the trouble.

BEST DANCE CLUB (21 and older) -- Club Vegas in Costa Mesa. After a rocky start, this club is earning a well-deserved reputation as one of the hottest stops on the circuit. When this place is working, there is no more exciting club to be, and that includes the clubs of Hollywood.

BEST DANCE CLUB (18 and older) -- The Boogie in Anaheim. The under-21 crowd has a secret, and this place is it. You can't imagine the energy level in this club on a typical weekend night. You need a can of Red Bull just to keep up.

BEST LOUNGE -- Sutra Lounge in Costa Mesa. This is where the beautiful people hang out, although they will let the rest of you in as well, if you promise not to annoy the beautiful people.

BEST LATIN NIGHTCLUB -- JC Fandango in Anaheim. If you never visited a nightclub in Cuba during the 1950s, and I know there are a few of you out there, then treat yourself to a nightclub experience unlike any other in Orange County.

BEST NEW DISCOVERY -- Rouge in Fashion Island. Chef and restaurant guru David Wilhelm has a knack for knowing exactly what people find sexy in a bar.

BEST UNDISCOVERED GEM -- Boardwalk Cafe in Santa Ana. I once touted Shelly's Courthouse Bistro in this category. Well, the Boardwalk is only a few doors down from Shelly's, on Fourth Street in revitalized downtown Santa Ana, and you should make the effort to walk the extra distance. A delightful place to eat dinner, sip martinis and listen to jazz.

BEST PLACE TO CHANNEL ELVIS -- Crooner's Lounge in Garden Grove. This cozy spot in the back of a Mexican restaurant (Azteca) on historic Main Street is a shrine to the King of Rock 'n' Roll. Presley memorabilia is everywhere, and you will find no bigger jukebox selection of Elvis tunes in the civilized world.

BEST PLACE TO CHANNEL JERRY GARCIA -- Kozmos in Huntington Beach on a Tuesday night. I'm not even a fan of the Grateful Dead's music, but I had a flashback listening to the band Cubensis perform at this weekly Dead orgy.

BEST FUNKY PLACE TO DRINK BEER -- Goat Hill Tavern in Costa Mesa. It would take an entire column to describe the outrageous decor, so why bother? Plenty of beer on tap and peanuts. Enough said.

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Correction:

BEST UPSCALE PLACE TO DRINK BEER -- The Yard House in Costa Mesa and Irvine. This mini-chain has about a zillion beers on tap, but you have to dress much better than at Goat Hill. And, instead of peanuts, you get coconut shrimp.

BEST PLACE TO SPEND A WEDNESDAY NIGHT -- The drag show at the Boom Boom Room in Laguna Beach. And now for something completely different.

BEST LOUNGE ACT -- Phil Shane. This Mississippi native (same town as Elvis) has become so identified with the Orange County night-life scene that he should be wearing mouse ears when he performs his rock 'n' roll-revival show. This guy can turn anyone into a Neil Diamond fan.

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