

Locale Profiles: Boombox – Little Boxes in DOWncity



Most drinking establishments offer a mere one night of karaoke out of seven, and is usually relegated to mid-week days like Tuesday and Wednesday. But fear not, fans of proletarian vocal performance, because Boombox, part of Providence's new Dean Hotel, makes karaoke the star of the show five nights a week.

Sometimes it's embarrassing (in hindsight) when you're the most intoxicated person at karaoke night, belting out ear-piercing renditions of "Total Eclipse of the Heart" and "Desperado," which is why Boombox is great for karaoke lovers. In addition to the main room, they offer private karaoke rooms, where you and your friends can sing as forcefully and horribly as you want.

Boombox's private-room format takes its inspiration from the karaoke "boxes" that have become popular in Japan and Korea. Karaoke originated in Japan, and is said to have been invented by musician Daisuke Inoue Kobe in 1971. Inoue frequently performed at parties and dinners, and would often be asked by guests for recordings so they could sing along later. Seeing dollar signs, he constructed a kind of tape recorder that played songs for 100 yen each. The rest is history, and the activity has since spread throughout Asia and the world.

Boombox isn't just another Providence dive bar; the carefully done decor reflects its Asian influences, from the small, sleek furniture to the art hanging on the walls. If you have a sweet tooth, the bar also offers an assortment of Asian candies, like gooey Hi-chews and chocolate-dipped Pocky Sticks.

Too afraid to brave the public room, a group of friends and I decided to try out one of the private boxes for an hour. The hourly rate for even their smallest room is more than the cost of a few drinks and it only goes up from there, so you may want to get a crew together to cover the cost. The manager handed us two microphones and two song books and we were off. The room was pretty tiny, only about 13'x13'. The karaoke system is built for the kind of rapid-fire sing-along action that you need to employ to get your money's worth. The queue holds up to twenty songs at a time, and songs can be entered into an iPad while the system is going, so you can plug in a few to sing later while your friends are rocking out.

If you're like me, taking the mic in public doesn't even become an option until two or three (or five) drinks in. It seems that the establishment realizes this, so the Boombox provides a full bar to help facilitate karaoke shenanigans. The drinks include the "Boombox Bomb," a sake bomb made with Milkie's Milk Soda and the house sake, "The Sly," a "beermosa" made with acai and blood orange flavors, and the Karate Prince, a delicious drink featuring soju (Korean vodka, sake, triple sec and apricot). If you'd like to slam a tall boy in between songs, they have 'Gansetts, Sapporo and two kinds of Hitachino. And for those who consider themselves aficionados of sake, Boombox has 10 varieties!

Some highlights of the night included "I've Got a Name" by Jim Croce, "I Try" by Macy Gray, and "Tainted Love" by Soft Cell. I even tackled the high notes on "Dead Leaves and the Dirty Ground" by the White Stripes; the results were, I'm sure, truly horrific. But when I looked at my watch and discovered that over an hour had gone by, I was truly flabbergasted. When you're going from song to song, only stopping to swing by the bar, the time goes by pretty quickly.

If you're indifferent to the art of karaoke, you should stick with your local VFW on Monday nights, but if you're not, Boombox is a must-try. Who would've thought spending an hour in a tiny, loud room full of abominable singers belting away would be such a good time?

Boombox is located at 122 Fountain Street at the Dean Hotel in Downtown Providence. They are open from 5pm - 2am Friday and Saturday, 5pm - 1am on Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday (Closed Monday and Tuesday).