

Best Blues Jam Session

Saturdays at the Archie Edwards Blues Barbershop

4701 Queensbury Road, Riverdale

In the 1950s and '60s, Archie Edwards' barbershop on Bunker Hill Road in Northeast D.C. was the place to be if you had any sort of interest in the blues. It's where blues legends like Mississippi John Hurt and Skip James would frequently hang out and play songs for each other and whichever customers were around, fostering a community of local blues musicians and music lovers for decades to come.



Photograph by Charles Steck

The spirit of Archie Edwards and his barbershop lives on in Riverdale Park, Maryland, at the Archie Edwards Blues Barbershop, which houses the Archie Edwards Blues Heritage Foundation. In addition to some relics and remnants of Edwards' original barbershop, the small center—situated, appropriately enough, next to railroad tracks—frequently hosts concerts and workshops, but what it's truly known for are its Saturday jam sessions.

For nearly 50 years, acoustic jam sessions were held Saturday afternoons at Edwards' barbershop, even after he died in 1998. When the barbershop's building was sold in 2008, Edwards' friends and fans kept the tradition alive, establishing the Archie Edwards Blues Heritage Foundation in Riverdale Park and continuing to host informal Saturday jam sessions. It's one of, if not the oldest, blues jam sessions on the East Coast, proudly keeping alive the Piedmont blues tradition Edwards was known for.

Each Saturday, musicians of all skill sets gather from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. for an afternoon of songs and bonding over a love of the blues. Bring your guitar, harmonica, fiddle—whatever, as long as it's an acoustic instrument (No amps! Is one of the few rules of the jams). Even if you don't play an instrument, you can find something to bang and keep rhythm. After all, the blues is all about inclusivity and community.

—Matt Cohen