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Bruce Springsteen's custom 1957 Chevy

**links**

**Rock out to history:** Remember all the reasons you love music at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame NYC Annex, 76 Mercer St, SoHo, tickets \$24.50 per adult, [www.rockannex.com](http://www.rockannex.com)

**Remember you well:** Rock and roll all night at the Hotel Chelsea, 222 West 23rd St, [www.hotelchelsea.com](http://www.hotelchelsea.com)

**Bands galore:** Le Poisson Rouge, music ballroom and art space at 158 Bleeker St, Greenwich Village, [www.lepoissonrouge.com](http://www.lepoissonrouge.com)

**See it all:** Aim for a sunset session at the Empire State Building, but be warned about the queues, 350 5th Ave, [www.esbnyc.com](http://www.esbnyc.com)

**More empire:** Eat in style at New York's most iconic diner, the Empire Diner, [www.empire-diner.com](http://www.empire-diner.com)

**NEXT WEEK: CALIFORNICATION AND THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE FOR THE GRAMMYS**

# Every street a song title

Every man in China suddenly picked up his bamboo pipes and warbled a tune about Beijing, New York would still be miles ahead in the song stakes. The Big Apple's playlist, from Sinatra to Dylan and everything between, has put that city at the top of the pile as the world's most musical metropolis.

Before I hit town and rustled up a guidebook, my knowledge of New York landmarks was limited. *Home Alone II*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and Woody Allen films: all major planks of my New York smarts (so lots of robbers, sewers and old man-young girl relationships, then).

But, fortunately, I had one other pre-arrival New York guide, a song called *New York City*. Well, one of about 30, I'm reliably informed by Wikipedia. (Another couple of dozen are just called *New York*.)

But my long-time favourite, performed by a Brooklyn band called They Might Be Giants, tells the story of two punk kids meeting at a gig on The Bowery, holding hands on the subway and visiting a comprehensive list of the city's attractions. With a perky hook, the song's main message is that everyone's your friend in *New York City*.

Really? *The New York*? That big, bustling, snow-bound place where no one ever looks up from the sidewalk? Go to the right places and They Might Be Giants are pretty close to the truth.

Such as the footpath in front of

the Hotel Chelsea, where Sid Vicious may or may not have murdered Nancy. Leonard Cohen immortalised the place in song, in *Chelsea Hotel No.2* when he dished dirt on his affair with Janis Joplin.

I wander the opulent lobby and find several music fans doing the same. Curiosity sated, we go up 23rd St to enjoy a beer at the Art Deco Empire Diner.

At the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in SoHo, there is more evidence of a city welcoming all-comers. Visitors start with a blasting multimedia introduction to the genre.

Think the world's greatest rock moments mashed into a 16-minute video.

History lessons show you how the Dusty Springfields of yesterday became the Amy Winehouses of today, while the soundtrack blares from your custom headphones.

But it's in the New York section that you'll really find what's to love about the city. Starting with Bruce Springsteen's 57 custom Chevy (the Boss, from nearby New Jersey, named his E Street Band after an East Village street), you'll find hand-written lyrics from the biggest names in rock and roll — some even scribbled on subway timetables.

And for all the locals, there are as many ring-ins. The special exhibit features punk invaders the Clash, while an original Angus Young schoolboy suit has pride of place in the New York section (AC/

DC did New York tourism a favour with its tribute to the metropolis, entitled *Safe in New York City*).

While AC/DC was no doubt cruising the streets by limo at that stage, my subterranean chariot ride seems equally safe. Look lost for a second and you'll be swooped on with ready subway advice.

Same on the top of the Empire State Building, where everyone offers to snap a photo for you and the friendly pigeons land on your shoulders, so be prepared to bat them away. Expect a bit of queuing to get up there, but it's worth the wait.

My Saturday morning visit offers clear views, if freezing conditions.

And, finally, folks are very friendly at Le Poisson Rouge, a ballroom on Bleeker St, where They Might Be Giants play on Saturday night. Local lads Kenan and Darren offer to sell me their spare ticket to the sold-out show and we swap musical favourites for the rest of the night. I tell my new friends I'm there because I love the band's *New York City* song. The dedicated fans look confused.

You know that's a cover, right?

Luckily, They Might Be Giants still play the song, the packed crowd goes crazy, and the story ends happily. You can find all the city's geography in thousands of record liner notes, but to find the real New York you really do need to go.



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