

Tokyo Confidential

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(Kurt Andersen kindly gave permission to reproduce this fascinating piece on a vinyl based music bar)

As we walked down one of the narrow side streets of the Times Square-ish entertainment district around the Shibuya train station, past swank rock clubs and “love hotels,” we came upon an unlit, grimy, highly decorative stone-and-stucco facade that looked to be from the first third of the 20th century – an anomaly in a city where buildings from the 1950s and 60s count as unusually old. We entered. And discovered one of the oddest, most wonderful little establishments in the developed world. Do you, like me, fantasize about time travel? Are you a fan of Eric Ambler or Alan Furst novels? Then this is your place.



It's called [The Lion](#), an 82-year-old lounge devoted not just to classical music but, in effect, to reproducing a particular highly atmospheric time and place — Europhilic Japanese cafe society of the interwar years, tatty old-

school gentility with just a touch of noir.



The wood is dark. The lights are dim. The tobacco fog is thick. The menu consists mainly of coffee and tea. The chairs are red velvet, each with its own white linen antimacassar. And nearly all the seats are turned to face loudspeakers contained in elaborate wooden cabinetry, over which Shostakovich is playing — Shostakovich from an audibly vinyl recording punctuated by heartbreaking pops and hiss. Although Lion's two floors could easily seat 100 people, the arrival of the four of us at 5:30 yesterday increased the patron count by a third. People read, people write, one man sleeps, but no one (except the loud Americans from New York) speaks.

- Kurt Andersen