

Arts & Features

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{THE BLUE BANNER}

Page 12

UNCA musicians thrive on house show environment

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220 Broadway is more than just a rehearsal space for UNC Asheville seniors Sijal Nasralla and Lance Lathrop, who started a drums-and-bass band called No Shoulders last year.

Since the two moved into adjacent homes on Broadway last summer, No Shoulders hosted several house shows, which feature live performances from student bands, locals and touring acts.

"It is important for there to be alternative spaces for music to happen," Nasralla said. "It's really about taking music away from the hegemony of the bar that has its standards, criteria and overrated sound gear."

Part of a house show's appeal is its authenticity, according to Nasralla, who favors spontaneity over the typical rehearsed live set.

"A house show is an authentic music experience that draws people out," Nasralla said. "Also, I think there is a feeling that anything can happen. There aren't the boundaries or required behaviors that people feel in bars. It's loose and open-ended."

Noah Ben Barratt, who plays with Nasralla and Lathrop in a band called Amazing Face, said house shows have an economical advantage over downtown venues.

"I prefer house shows over venues. It's homier and without the smells of a bar. There's no cover charge, so all money donated goes straight to the musicians," Barratt said. "I've seen great performances at houses that could never happen in a venue, like Shane Perlowin of Ahleuchatistas improvising for a few people sitting around a living room. Plus, there is something magical about very loud rock music in a dirty basement."

In 2007, Nasralla founded a UNCA club called "decomposition of sound," abbreviated as "decomp," in which members explored the power of improvisation with unconventional, often handmade instruments.

"Decomp had a huge impact on my music making. Our meetings were basically 2 1/2 hours of free improvisation, just us making sounds in a room," Barratt said. "I think we all grew as musi-



Ian Hayes - Staff Photographer

Drummer Lance Lathrop and bassist Sijal Nasralla have turned their band's practice space into a regular performance space for local bands, student bands and national touring acts.

"Money, images, music theory, pretensions, competition and creative anxieties are beginning to evaporate."

- Sijal Nasralla

UNCA anthropology student

cians. I'm pretty self-critical about my music, so it was encouraging to be a part of a group where any sound you make is the right note. If not for decomp and the friends I met through it, I would probably hide my songs in a drawer."

Lathrop, a creative writing student, received his first drum kit at age 15, but never took any formal lessons. His self-taught drumming affected his style for No Shoulders more than decomp, he said.

"With decomp, there was rarely, if ever, a complete drum set to play on. Percussion came from found objects mostly, resulting in a more industrial, yet

organic sound," Lathrop said. "I can't say that I've brought that same idea to No Shoulders. Decomp is one room, No Shoulders is another."

No Shoulders takes a minimalist approach to the rock genre, incorporating nothing more than Lathrop's drum kit and Nasralla's bass guitar rig.

Decomp allowed Nasralla and Lathrop to network with other UNCA experimentalists.

"I would not have gotten to know Lance if it weren't for decomp," Nasralla said. "It brought a lot of people together and got music started among them. I proposed the band to Lance under the strict



notion of a drum-and-bass band. I really wanted to work in that tradition. We like the aesthetic this way."

Although decomp no longer exists as an official club, several of its members now pursue their own ambitions, keeping in contact with each other and finding new venues to promote their music, according to Nasralla.

"I know some people like myself, Lance, Zach Smith, Sam Witherspoon, Noah Ben Barratt, Daniel Kairoff, Mat-

SEE NO SHOULDERS PAGE 15