

# diversions

Kung Fu Fighting Jet Li takes a kick at himself in the wannabe "Matrix" adventure "The One." But this time around the hero falls flat on his face, and dang it, it just ain't cool.



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## | The Business of the Business: Booking |

Emma Gibbs Band, Nov. 8: Cat's Cradle  
 Crazy Russian Folk n' Roll, Nov. 9: ArtsCenter  
 Love the Bomb, Oct. 10: The Cave  
 Tres Chicas, Nov. 13: Humble Pie  
 Martin Si

# Setting the Date

## Want to Book a Gig at a Local Club? Start Making Calls

By BRIAN BEDSWORTH  
 Senior Writer

It's 2:30 p.m. on a sunny Tuesday afternoon, but no sunlight reaches down a steep and narrow stairway. A man named Mouse is hard at work beneath Franklin Street.

It's dark. Mouse lights a cigarette, puts a jazz compact disc on the stereo and listens intently. Mountains of folders, papers and photos are spread out before him. He looks down at the mess.

"It's all propaganda," he says with a laugh. Mouse has what some people would say is one of the most important jobs in Chapel Hill. He books shows for The Cave.

In a town where it's hard to walk down the street without tripping over a musician, getting a spot for your band at a local club can be a true test of your mettle. With so many performers vying for limited venues, open stages are a hot commodity.

That's where people like Mouse come in. It's their job to decide who gets to play where and when. If it sounds like a daunting task, that's because it is.

Tuesdays and Thursdays are booking days at The Cave. From 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. those days, Mouse sifts through the mass of CDs, bios, press kits and photos that bands or agents send each week, taking breaks to field calls from those same bands.

The demo he has put on the stereo, a smoky rhythm and blues and jazz artist from New York, elicits a grimace from Mouse. The Cave features a wide range of acts, from rock to country to folksy singer-songwriters to the occasional world music act, but this demo just doesn't fit.

"This type of music won't go over very well down here," he says.

As soon as the words are out of his mouth the phone rings. It's the artist whose CD is on the stereo.

Mouse politely tells him The Cave doesn't have a spot for him but assures the artist he will pass on his demo to Hideaway Restaurant & Bar, a club where he thinks the music will go over better.

"We all work together," Mouse says after he hangs up the phone. "Go (Rehearsal Inc.) and Local 506 will send me bands, and I'll send them stuff. That's what's nice about booking in this town. I've got some really good acts down here because of that."

The phone rings again. The Yellow Stars, a new pop act from Durham, is on the other end wanting a show.

Mouse looks in his book, a worn black binder

with calendars, contact information and his own personal reviews of every CD the club has been sent since March 2000.

"What kind of crowd can you draw?" he asks the band. "Do you guys like to play late? You guys have enough music for two sets?"

In the end, the Yellow Stars get a spot on the calendar. "If they're local, they'll get a show," Mouse says.

### Sounds Local

Commitment to local music seems to be the norm at clubs in Chapel Hill. Most venues make an effort to include as much local music as possible while still bringing in enough better-known acts to keep the doors open. Even the Cat's Cradle, the club in town, has its Sunday Showcase, a monthly show for eight lesser-known local acts.

The Cradle's little sister, Go, tries to showcase local acts whenever it can, said Mike Triplett, who books shows at the Brewer Lane club.

"We're here to support independent and local artists," he said. "I'm a firm believer of mixing local bands with out-of-town touring bands. It opens the doors for local bands to start touring."

It also allows some local acts to play for larger audiences than would otherwise come to their shows.

Triplett said he also tries to book shows of two or three local acts that individually would not have a large draw but together can bring out more people.

But even if clubs in town are willing to support a broad range of local music, that doesn't necessarily mean it's easy for local artists to get shows, especially if they're just starting out.

Josh Maher, singer and guitarist for Brazilia, a local indie-punk outfit that's been around for about two years, said his band actually played shows in Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania before it could get a show locally.

"It was easier to book out of town than in Chapel Hill," he said. "Even though it's a small town, it's one of those major market places."

The number of touring national acts and established local bands playing Chapel Hill's stages makes it hard for acts just starting out to get their foot in the door, he said.

"Coming to a club as a band from out of town almost makes you seem more professional," Maher said, laughing at the irony.

But, he added, after playing in town for a while, booking became progressively easier with each show.

Now, Maher said, the band can focus more time on booking tours.

Once they reach the nationally and internationally touring level, some local bands opt for booking agents.

Jim Romeo, who runs the Carrboro-based Ground Control booking agency, started out booking tours for some now-defunct local heavyweights like the Archers of Loaf. He now handles



DTH/JOSH GREER

Mouse, who does booking for The Cave, makes calls while sorting through the mountain of CDs and promo pictures he has received from bands hoping for a show.

booking for many bands on Durham's Merge Records, as well as acts like Guided by Voices. "A lot of bands don't really have the time to book tours; they want someone else to do it who has experience," he said.

Romeo handles the logistics of booking a tour for his clients — itineraries, drive times and of course the shows.

Although most of the bands Ground Control works for have substantial national followings, Romeo's work directly affects young bands like Brazilia trying to get shows in Chapel Hill.

Triplett said those national touring acts are what keep people coming to Go.

"I deal a lot with the agents that have rosters of national acts. Those come first," he said. "I'm trying to cater mostly to the agents. Those are the ones that do really well for us. Then I try to put the local bands on those shows to help them out."

### Making It Happen

So how do local bands get that first show opening up for a bigger act?

"You have to be persistent," Triplett said. "You do need to call people back."

Mouse had similar advice.

"If you don't call me I'm not going to call you," he said.

Both Triplett and Mouse said they listen to all the demos bands send them. But when you get 20 or 30 packages in the mail each week, it's easy to get backed up, Triplett said.

"Sometimes it takes me three months to get back to someone about the package they sent me," he said.

There are some things bands can do to speed

the process up, the most important being to send their music on CD instead of cassette. Most clubs don't have tape players anymore, Triplett said, so it takes even longer to listen to a tape demo.

Another thing is to keep whatever supplemental information accompanies the music to a minimum.

"I don't read everything because it's all propaganda," Mouse said, referring to press kits and reviews that many bands send along with their music.

Triplett also said he tended to skip lengthy press packages. "The thing I hate the most is when I get packages of garbage," he said. "It's just people wasting their money. Tour dates, reviews from places I've never heard of — I don't care how big their press kit is. I don't care how Dan met Ben."

Triplett and Mouse said the best thing to send along with music was a one-page biography with contact information.

But even then, the most important thing is still the music.

Romeo said the same is true for bands that want to use booking agents, with all their connections and clout. "A lot of bands come to me and say, 'We don't have a record out, but we want to tour.' And I really just can't do anything for them."

Mouse said he really doesn't care if a band has an agent, a great press kit or even a good photo.

He looked down at the CDs lying in front of him on the bar.

"That's the indicator of whether you're going to play here or not."

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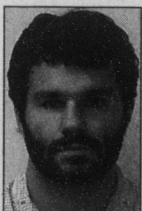
Daniel Jacobs, Nov. 3: The Cave  
 Iris, Nov. 24: Local 506  
 Go! Studios  
 Cat's Cradle  
 The Ritz  
 Stereolab, Nov. 14:  
 Kings, Nov. 12: Lincoln Theater  
 Blue Oyster Cult, Nov. 16: The Pour House  
 We've Got the Spins, Nov. 12: Kings  
 Argyle Aparo, Nov. 19: The Ritz  
 Dec. 8: The Kids, The Pour House  
 Carbor Lear, Nov. 8: The Pour House

## Milo Lead Vocalist: Shows That Don't Pay Now Will Pay Off Later

As part of Milo, I've had experience with the cycle of booking, promoting and playing shows in and outside the Triangle.

For more than three years and almost 40 shows, we've been trying to figure out how to make a name for ourselves with limited time and resources, and the only pieces of advice I can offer to other young bands are things that have worked for us so far, all of which are probably obvious.

Call clubs and establish a connection yourself to anyone who will listen (come with owners or employees, send them a



RUSS BAGGETT  
 MILO  
 LEAD VOCALIST

demo, and make sure you call the venues back after you've sent your CD because 75 percent of the time, they won't call you.

Try to meet and make friends with other bands in the area because you'll definitely find it easier to set up shows with outside help. Put time into making and posting band fliers — if a club makes money off you, it won't take much persuading for them to book you in the future.

Basically, be shameless in promoting yourself to anyone who will listen (come see Milo with Revelation Darling at 9

p.m. tonight at the Great Hall) and work as hard as you can at all these things — though they might have little to do with your music, they have a lot to do with establishing even the smallest success.

And remember it's not glamorous. Andrew Kinghorn, Milo's guitarist, said something the other day that made sense in a bizarre way: "Most people probably don't want to be in a rock band, they just don't realize it."

Milo is the most time-consuming thing in our lives, and we still have light years to go before we'll be where we want. There is constant pressure to not only create new music but also to avoid the frustration of no one hearing it.

Of course, to us and to every other band that takes its music seriously, it's

undoubtedly worth the trouble.

For instance, we drove to Atlanta last Friday to play a 1 a.m. slot at the Sombra Reptile, a club we found on <http://www.indie-music.com>. It was essentially a high school metal band showcase. There were five people left in the club by the time we got on stage. Three of them were working.

We spent about \$80 on gas and weren't paid — but — we seemed to make an impression on the production coordinator, who thought she might want to have us back to play a private party where we would be paid. So it seems that we made a little progress.

The very next night we saw Deathcab for Cutie at the Cat's Cradle. After the show, Andrew met a

couple guys in the band and told them what had happened to us in Atlanta.

One of them replied with a story about the first time they played at Go! Rehearsal Studios two years ago, ironically, to an audience of five.

I happen to know that when they played Go! this past spring, the show sold out, and the Cradle show's attendance was probably close to 300.

And the progress they've made in Chapel Hill — a few thousand miles from their hometown and without the help of a record label — is something that gives me, and should give all of us young bands, a lot of hope.

Senior political science major Russ Baggett is Milo's lead singer.