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NEW MUSIC VENUES CHANGE DIRECTION

BY JORDAN LAWRENCE
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Some people in Chapel Hill might not think of Franklin Street's Jack Sprat Cafe as a place to see local music. Dayn Peters is out to change that.

The booking agent and live sound engineer at the restaurant says he has a canned response to correct local bands who think they wouldn't fit in at the venue.

"Some bands think they're way too loud to come and play here," he said. "I just say that's why they sell ear plugs."

Peters, who has been spearheading a recent flurry of live local music at the venue, said he believes his venue has a place among the area's already established music clubs such as Cat's Cradle and Local 506.

"I'd like us to be a mini-Cradle or a mini-506," he said, adding that he wants the cafe to be an outlet for bands that aren't big enough to headline at those venues on weekend nights. "I'd like us to be the venue they can go to."

But in light of the January 19 closing of Raleigh's Hideaway BBQ, some members of the Triangle music scene question the viability of such non-traditional music venues.

Glenn Boothe, owner and bartender at Local 506, said he loved the concept for the combination of country-music bar and southern barbecue that Hideaway employed.

"When Hideaway BBQ opened up, I thought it was a really genius idea," he said.

But Boothe also said that such enterprises combining live music with other businesses can be tough to operate.

"When you try to do live music and something else, one of those businesses has to give," he said, indicating that when you have food and music it's hard to not let one suffer at the cost of the other. "At the end of the day, if you're going to do it, then both ends have to be good."

Boothe admitted that Jack Sprat has had some ideas he has also begun to implement at the 506.

For instance, 506's new Free For Alls, free shows on week nights that give untested acts a chance to play the

venue, are modeled on Sprat's ability to cut costs by using a smaller PA system and not having to hire someone to manage the sound.

"The idea is we can buy the same PA that this place has, plus we have the benefit of having a stage," Boothe said, emphasizing the fact the stage at 506 offers a better view of the band than venues like Jack Sprat can.

Boothe also added that the newly installed DJ booth at the venue is a direct reaction to such sets being played at local venues such as Blend. "Some of these things that we're doing right now are a reaction to the smaller venues in town," he said.

Boothe added that bands and audiences have different expectations about what they want from venues, indicating that these differences sometimes give the smaller, non-traditional venues an edge.

"Bands would much rather play with a stage and a nice PA system, as opposed to having to move some chairs out of the way and use a vocals-only mic and set up on the floor," he said.

Boothe explained that concert-goers' expectations are different.

"If X band is playing here and we have to charge \$6 because we have to make enough money to cover our sound-guy cost, and that same band is playing at a restaurant or a bar in town that doesn't have a stage and is able to do it at a cheaper door price, most people don't see the difference."

And some artists in the area do like playing the smaller clubs.

Nathan White, leader of Chapel Hill's Nathan Oliver, said that he enjoyed his performance at Sprat earlier this month.

"I thought it was a pretty good experience," White said, admitting a drop in sound quality from more traditional venues such as the 506. "It's not set up to be a music room."

"It was definitely a lot better than other places we've played before. Even other places we've been that have bands more frequently."

White was also pleased with the different crowd drawn by Sprat.

"I think the best aspect that Jack Sprat has going for it is probably just that it gets really good street draw,"

he said.

"It's just a different group of people; I think it's younger people too."

White, like others in the area, has also noticed a pattern of places not known for live music beginning to jump into the game and is not sure what to think about it.

"I think more places are becoming more open to different kinds of music, which I think is better on the whole for everyone," he said.

But others, such as Jason Kutchma, lead singer/guitarist of Durham's Red Collar, don't look on the rise in the number of venues in a completely positive light.

"I don't think there is enough of a crowd," Kutchma said, explaining that there aren't enough people willing to go to shows to support the growing number of venues.

"Show attendance is in a bit of a drought."

"If one place is successful, then you open a second one, and if that one is successful then you open a third. But they just keep opening, and I'm not sure if it's for the best."

Boothe said he believed that there is simply not enough room for more venues in the area.

"I think this area's maxed out," he said, proposing that the amount of venues in Chapel Hill could become a problem.

He explained that just because there is a wealth of bands and venues in the Triangle, this doesn't correlate to a large enough audience to support them all.

"Every time a new place starts having bands it just takes the pool of people that go see live music and takes another slice out of it," he said. "The same people go. Now it's just one more show on any given night that you're competing against. That's where it gets tough."

But Kutchma also sees hope in the situation if people who aren't aware of the music scene get roped in by the myriad of shows.

"The crowd is out there," he said. "They just don't know it yet."

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