

Arts and Entertainment

Local music scene not just stale cover bands

by Chris Lee

What do Sunday night, live rock music and State College have in common? For many disgruntled locals seeking a more vibrant downtown culture, the answer may be not much. But one crisp Sunday evening this spring might have charmed even the most dubious of downtowners, as a diverse and colorful mix of people gathered in a S. Pugh St venue.

So what's this got to do with rock music in State College?

The S. Pugh central gathering place was Lulu's Nightspot. While the vast majority of State College music clubs are tiny, densely smoky basement rooms, Lulu's is an upstairs venue, spacious and refreshingly well-ventilated.

Last week's music showcase drew a packed house of hibernating hipsters and music enthusiasts from their caves scattered around town, thus uniting them all under one roof—no small feat for a town with only one remaining independent record shop and an ever-dwindling population of music-lovers.

One attendee was the owner himself of said record shop. Greg Gabbard of City Lights fame operates the last independent record store in town. The store is fierce hold-out in the cold corporate music environment.

State College rock photojournalist Mark Luppold was also in attendance (see photos accompanying this article) as was Tim Bowser of Penns Valley. If you know Tim, you know his presence indicates that the event must be fully sustainable and bioregional.

In the upstairs balcony, I discovered Ben Himes from the Alley Cat music store looking down, and we discussed the second band, Matt Mays and El Torpedo.

When the Deadstring Brothers took the stage, Jared, a journalism major standing next to me speculated on their personality.

"It's all about demographics," I told him sagely. "Look at the keyboard player. He has long hair and a round hat. I think he's Peruvian. How about the woman singer? She looks Cherokee."

After the show, I got the chance to prove how wrong assumptions can be. I told the Peruvian keyboard player, "I know a Steinway nearby, if you want to play some more music."

"Eh, wot, a jam session, then? Brilliant!" Gack! This guy wasn't Peruvian. He was English!

"Yup, so is the pedal steel player," said keyboardist Patrick Kenneally, aka Willie.

The budding investigative reporter approached the pedal steel player.

"Yah, my name's Spencer. Pleased to meet you, tah," he told us affably.



Photo by Mark Luppold
Brothers Jeff and Spencer Cullum of the Deadstring Brothers indulge the camera at Lulu's Nightspot.

It turned out these guys were friendly and articulate. Is it because they're English? No matter the nationality, this wasn't typical dialogue to be overheard in downtown State College on a sleepy Sunday evening. Is

Lulu's actually the Twilight Zone?

With so much elbow-rubbing, local

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Documentary filmmaker explores 'bear' culture

by Jeffrey Carton

David D'Agostino has been making a film about bears for over a year. Instead of taking his crew to dangerous locales or petting zoos, D'Agostino did not have to leave Centre County to find the King of the Bears, Arthur Knight Hammer.

Hammer, a former computer consultant, left his six-figure salary to follow his beliefs, and created a sect of an internationally recognized group for large, hairy homosexual men called "the bears."

The Bear community started in San Francisco in the 1980s and has since stemmed groups on five continents for men who wish to express their manliness in the gay community.

His mansion, named "Bearidise," con-

D'Agostino was only eleven years old, and he knew that he wanted to make films after seeing Tim Burton's *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*.

tains a discotheque, pool, swing set, and large beds. Founded in 1998, Bearidise is strictly for bears and the men who love them. No women.

While living in Boston, D'Agostino met Hammer through a family friend for the first time at a Halloween party. At the time, he had no intention of making a film about him.

D'Agostino was only eleven years old, and he knew that he wanted to make films after seeing Tim Burton's *Pee Wee's Big*

Adventure.

While initially going to school for photography and film in Boston, D'Agostino changed his career path and focused on art because it was more affordable. He taught art to adults with disabilities in Boston for seven years before moving to State College.

As fate would have it, D'Agostino returned to Boston fifteen years later in 2006 and once again encountered Hammer. It was then that he knew that the time to make his first film, *Arthur Knight Hammer:*

King of the Bears, had arrived.

"I really want to make a movie about this guy," D'Agostino said. "I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I really want to make a movie."

After returning to State College, he teamed up with producer, longtime friend and Penn State alumnus, TJ Fogelsanger, who went onto to earn a masters degree in film from Ohio University.

D'Agostino planned to buy a cheap camera at Wal-Mart and keep a low budget for the film.

His plan was to shoot the film quickly enough in order to return the camera and get his money back. However, a spontaneous

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Mifflintown musician records, explores PSU

by Adeena Harbst

Come mid-summer, two young musicians from Mifflintown will release a new six-song EP, currently being recorded at Frigo Recording in Boalsburg.

"The recordings stray away from our limited live sound, allowing us to record several instruments and bring the songs to life with the accompaniment of a full band," singer-songwriter Nathaniel Hoho said.

Hoho and Grant Wilson have been working together since June 2006 after meeting at a New Jersey show where Wilson accompanied Hoho's guitar and voice with a hand drum and backing vocals.

They both had been playing under Watson records, an up-and-coming label based in Central Pennsylvania.

All of the promotion has been paying off, too – crowds are growing and opening up new opportunities for the musicians.

This is all very new for the 21-year-old.

"I began playing out solo officially in March 2006," said Hoho, formerly a member of the Scranton-based band Benton.

"I did open mics and shows in Harrisburg and have been playing Central PA heavily ever since."

After Benton fell apart, Hoho spent approximately a year and a half writing and recreating his musical perception in an apartment he shared with another musician, a photographer, and a screenwriter. It was "the perfect atmosphere" to focus on writing.

"Some days I would get out of bed, begin a project, and before I knew it a whole day would have gone by. That time most definitely was a defining time for what I am doing now," he said.

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road trip back to Massachusetts turned everything around.

After finding out that legendary film director Werner Herzog would be speaking at a conference, D'Agostino drove to see him in hopes that he would have the opportunity to speak with him.

D'Agostino got his chance, and after expressing his misgivings about his first film, he asked Herzog for his blessing.

"Yes, you will make good movies," D'Agostino recalls Herzog telling him. Herzog put his hand on D'Agostino's forehead, he said, which helped him relax.

"This is how I hypnotized all my actors and actresses," D'Agostino said, recalling Herzog's advice.

"All you need to remember to make good films is you need money, and always keep the shower curtain inside the shower at all times."

D'Agostino not only left confident about his upcoming project, but with a helpful financial contribution from Herzog as well, which he describes as not anywhere near as important as the support of Herzog's blessing.

D'Agostino production company, David D'Agostino Productions, started principle photography in 2006 with a high definition Cannon camera.

"Dave can really see contradictions in people that are fascinating," said producer Fogelsanger. "Everyone has contradictions, but he can break them down".

Fogelsanger, with a background in social work, believes that personality drives a film

to be great, and immediately jumped at the chance to work on D'Agostino's film.

Arthur Knight Hammer believes that he has been "touched by God" and spoken with him. Hammer's lifestyle as a bear, one that without drinking, drugs, or most uncommon – a vegetarian diet – pushes bears away from his calling.

"There are some bears out there who bad mouth his calling which is unfortunate," said D'Agostino.

"What is important about Arthur is that he does not have an agenda for everybody. He's not preachy and believes everyone should create their own religion, their own Christianity. People who aren't gay go to him for spiritual advice."


As D'Agostino's vision for a film had come closer to completeness, production was halted due to a lack of funds.

"We can finish the movie with what we've got, but in order to make the movie what I really want it to be, there's more footage to be shot. To do that, we need more funding."

D'Agostino's website for the film, www.myspace.com/dagostinofilmproductions features a trailer for the film and information on how to donate to help the film's completion.

Once Arthur Knight Hammer: King of the Bears is complete, D'Agostino plans to travel to Lark, Arizona for his next film.

The town allegedly began breeding a hybrid dog, strong enough to hold the weight of average man to create alternative means of transportation before the government intervened, bought their patent, and crushed the project.



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Photo by River Paul Cortes

Filmmaker David D'Agostino, left, at work on the set of a documentary project.

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celebrity appearances and bona fide new talent on hand, one might wonder just who is the wizard turning the levers behind the curtain of this wholly successful event. After all, in a town where Garth Brooks sold out five nights in a row, drawing this cast of characters from their shadows is a daunting task.

Not surprisingly, there has not been one single unifying force, but a number of recent initiatives that have helped to pave the yellow-brick road to a more vibrant local music community.

Gabbard has noted the sharp decline of interest in music since his arrival in State College in 1985, but remains optimistic and

“In a macro sense, we’re centrally located in the state, three hours to Philadelphia, four hours to New York, two hours to Pittsburgh, acting almost as a downtown for the entire state. In the Cheese Shoppe in the morning, you run into people from Philadelphia, Russia, New York. But it’s like the Boal Mansion in Boalsburg, where the people at State High do not utilize the resource, yet people from BBC-TV in England come to see it,” he said.

Gabbard agreed that much of the town’s problem is due to lack of local participation.

“Everyone knows you go to Mr. Small’s Fun House in Pittsburgh and the 9:30 Club in DC. But when I say the Deadstring Brothers at Lulu’s, ninety percent of the people here say, ‘Who? Where?’”

Swanson too is optimistic.

With so much elbow-rubbing, local celebrity appearances and bona fide new talent on hand, one might wonder just who is the wizard turning the levers behind the curtain of this wholly successful event. After all, in a town where Garth Brooks sold out five nights in a row, drawing this cast of characters from their shadows is a daunting task.

believes that the music scene is currently making an impressive comeback. For evidence, he cited Roustabout! at the Dark Horse Tavern on Wednesday nights and nodded to local promoter Ted Swanson as part of the fabric holding together the tattered music scene.

Swanson said he “started with grunge/alternative back in the day and evolved into Americana – roots rock, country rock – because that’s where the good stuff is coming from.”

He was a piece of work – a tall, blond, preppie-looking guy. I asked for his business card.

“I don’t roll that way,” he said, adding, “People who know me, know me. If you bring something good, they know who you are.”

So does Swanson think there’s a viable music scene in State College?

“This is not a typical college market,” he said. “There are a lot of people who really love music and want innovation as part of their daily lives.”

“In a micro sense, with Lulu’s and Zeno’s, and the concentration of bars and restaurants, the State Theater, the Downtown Theater, you have a very walkable downtown,” said Lulu’s owner Tony Sapia, a new addition to the handful of downtown bar owners who has seen the profitable side of live music.

“There’s been more development this past year for performance space for national touring acts in State College than there ever has been. There are better choices. I looked at the Weekender recently and Jeff Van Fossan’s Chronic Town, Zeno’s, the State Theater, and Lulu’s all had national acts. It was five days back-to-back, not even including Penn State happenings. All different people could choose from all different kinds of events. That hasn’t happened here before – ever.”

But it will take more than college kids, noted Swanson.

“You need musicians who live here full-time because they want to, and whose hearts and souls are invested in the future and people who give back to the community,” he said.

Later in the evening, the whole crowd, reluctant to end their night just yet, walked from Lulu’s across the street to Zeno’s where the bar was celebrating its 35th anniversary. Beatles master Ken Volz was whipping the crowd into a sing-along.

Ken called me up to harmonize on a couple of Beatle songs, which I dedicated to our new English friends, who were completely cordial and decent, even if they did speak in full sentences.

As the scene at Zeno’s wound down, I reflected on the good time I had but continued to ponder the question of State



Alpha Wolf and Cherokee Woman of the Deadstring Brothers

Photo by Mark Luppold



Deadstring Brothers keyboardist Peruvian Willie performs at Lulu’s Nightspot.

Photo by Mark Luppold

College’s music scene and downtown culture as a whole.

The vitality of the music scene here may have a long way to go and remain that way for quite some time to come.

But in the mean time, there is an ever-growing crowd of music lovers and talented musicians, both local and imported, grooving in all corners of this town—and they’re not ready to turn down the volume just yet.

Artisan Connection to showcase renowned ceramist

by Kerianne Inglima

To create pottery, one requires a certain amount of patience, a sharp eye and an understanding of how clay moves and responds. Some people may not even know that they possess these skills until they try pottery for themselves.

This was the case for one Philadelphia artist: ceramist Andy Shaw originally had plans to be an historian, but a chance meeting with a potter changed his thoughts about the future and led him into a career he never thought he would pursue.

Andy's pottery is unique in that it serves functional uses while maintaining a decorative appeal. Its surface looks and feels smooth and embodies patterns that give it an elegant and imperfect disposition, but that's where the beauty truly lies. It gives the piece character and charm.

"[My work] takes into consideration the vernacular form that is pottery, deriving some structural qualities from Asian ceramics as well as others that speak more about the contemporary, visual vocabulary of function."

His pottery includes sugar jars, teapots, juice cups, bowls, dinner plates and more, all possessing characteristic designs and patterns.

"[Textile arts] generally influence my work through a blend of strict pattern which gets refined with softness due to the technique of drawing, painting or stitching or due to the movement of the fabric which blends the pattern and shifts symmetry or exactness into something a bit more shimmering; a loose symmetry."

Patterns in Andy's work make indirect references to the mountains near his home in Pennsylvania and also incorporate influence from many different sources including Kuba cloth and parfleche (rawhide containers) of the Native American plains.

Andy Shaw was born in Lewisburg in Union County, Pennsylvania. He spent his first year of college at the University of St.

Andrews in Scotland studying Scottish and Medieval history. He then returned to the states and attended Kenyon College in Ohio where he studied Medieval Icelandic law and government.

In 1992, Andy graduated cum laude with a BA in history. During his time in college he enjoyed art from a spectator's point of view, visiting museums and admiring other artists' work as much as he could. He never took art classes but rather busied himself with swimming for the first couple of years.

Throughout his life he had been a swimmer, coach, lessons instructor and lifeguard, however, he chose to end his swimming career his junior year of college, finding himself with more free time and nothing to exert his energy on.

For a while, he had been thinking and discussing with friends about how nice it would be to have a lifestyle that incorporated a working vocation. Then, one day Andy was invited to meet the sister of one of his friends. When he arrived he found that his friend's brother-in-law created pottery and decorated the kitchen and living space with it. Intrigued, Andy returned to college and began throwing pots as an extracurricular activity.

Ironically, despite his talents, he never saw himself as an artist nor did he see his work as art. However, pottery seemed to fit a need that suited Andy's personal goals.

After college, Andy entered an apprenticeship at Basin Creek Pottery in Montana. He still saw himself as becoming an historian someday, so spent as much time as he could reading historical texts. During a ceramic workshop in British Columbia, he suddenly realized that there was so much more to discover about pottery and about himself for that matter. It was then that he decided to move from history to a full time concentration in pottery.

Andy continued his art education after Kenyon and Basin Creek. He attended the University Park campus of Penn State as a one-year special student focusing on ceram-



Photo by Kerianne Inglima

Andy Shaw's ceramic art is on display at the Artisan Connection, 135 E. Beaver Ave.

ics and earned an MFA in ceramics from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. He has also taught undergraduate and graduate courses in ceramics at various schools such as Louisiana State University, Gettysburg College, Andrews University, and Arcadia University.

His various exhibitions over the years have included Baltimore Clayworks, The Clay Studio, Society of Arts and Crafts, Mount St. Mary's College and the 10th and 11th Annual Strictly Functional Pottery National of which he's won awards for his artwork.

He also won best in show at the Central PA Festival in 2004, of which he is attending this year. His latest achievement is the 2006 Evelyn Shapiro Foundation Fellowship. He received it where he currently does his studio work at The Clay

Studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This award gives him funding for the entire year as well as a solo exhibition in September at The Clay Studio.

Andy currently does all of his work at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He has been a resident there since September of 2006 and teaches classes as well. "I aspire to make pots that can reciprocate the attention of the people who use them. In the resulting relationship, the pots will reveal aspects of personal potential, encourage more generosity towards self and promote creative, active living."

Andy Shaw's artwork will be exhibited at the Artisan Connection for the entire month of June. Located at 135 East Beaver Avenue in State College, the Artisan Connection will host an opening reception on Thursday, June 7th from 5 to 8 pm. Refreshments will be served.

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Once Hoho met up with Wilson, the two hit the boardwalks to test their "new sound" and were surprised at the growing crowds stopping to listen.

"We returned to NJ and MD beaches with a new vigor and were trying to meet everyone we possibly could," said Hoho.

"We returned to NJ living solely off of the

tip money we make on the boardwalks."

The boardwalk shows left Wilson and Hoho with a book of wild experiences and new friends who requested for the musicians to play in their hometowns.

They realized they had to meet as many people as possible, and the music would speak for itself.

"We began playing shows in college towns. We would go to the colleges weeks

in advance and parade the campuses with a guitar strapped to my back and a drum in Grant's hands," Hoho said. "Living so close to Penn State, State College has managed to become our home base and most frequently played town."

"Music occupies my brain 90 percent of the time in at least one form or another. As a musician you can always recreate who you are and how the world perceives you,"

Hoho said.

The pair looks forward to releasing the EP in mid-summer and sharing their harmony/percussion sound through future touring together.

For music samples and info on upcoming events, visit Nathaniel Hoho's Myspace page: www.myspace.com/hohohosound