School of Hard Rock

Kayli Nartatez
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2016/iss1/8

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ethos by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
School of Hard Rock
Balancing passion and responsibility

BY KAYLI NARTATEZ  DESIGN PAYTON GILMORE  PHOTO MEREDITH KESTEL AND JON LACZNIAK

The lights dim down to almost nothing, and a name flashes up on the screen. A strum of a guitar greets the audience before the artist in the flesh, but there is a faint smile on his lips as he sheepishly approaches the stool in the middle of the stage. The performer’s name is Phillip Lombardo, a graduate student by day and a wickedly talented guitarist by night. In the mix of acoustic performers and indie vocalists on a Thursday night at Zeke’s, a local music venue that provides students and locals the opportunity to perform, Lombardo stands out in the best way possible.

“I haven’t performed in around a year and a half,” he says with that same shy grin on his face. His eyes are filled with excitement and a bit of nervousness. “And I haven’t changed these strings in about the same time, so hopefully I don’t break one on stage.”

To musicians, these statements sound like the usual pre-show talk. When surrounded by other musicians whose skill levels you’re unsure of and talents you’re unaware, people tend to make excuses for themselves and brace for the worst — it’s a curse. They’re over-critical and opinions of themselves are enough to make even Jimmy Page breakdown on stage.

Back in the moment, Phillip’s recording is fresh from being burned right before the show and is being played over the speakers. It’s a bit quiet at first, Phillip’s hesitance clear as he dictates a few alterations in the levels. Once the sound is figured out, he’s playing as if all previous doubt has vanished with the drop of a hat and his fingers move surely across the neck of a beautiful custom-modified 1999 Ibanez JEM7D.

The audience is silent, most staring in awe and others nodding along to the beat. Lombardo is lost in the music, his eyes shut tight and his face portraying the emotions written into the music as he shreds and frets away. Somehow, without any lyrics, Lombardo does what musicians do best and portrays a million emotions in one song. As a graduate student sure of his talents and experienced in the art of balancing passion and priorities, Lombardo has found a way to make a place for music in his life as many students try to do in their time at Iowa State.

One of the hardest parts of maintaining a musical environment in a college town like Ames has to do with the obvious focus on academics. Not as many people are focused on the artistry, but for those who are balancing academic excellence and musical expansion, not having the proper outlets of expression can cause difficulties. Luckily in Ames, there are a variety of ways to stay involved without overwhelming yourself.

Students with majors ranging from biology informatics to aerospace engineering to elementary education can be found performing at Zeke’s, The M-Shop or other locations at any given day of the week. For some, music can be their sanity. Difficult classes and limited breaks make for a lot of pent-up stress, frustration and emotion.

GENRE, or “Gathering Everyone Nearby to Raucously Entertain”, is one unique club on campus that allows students the opportunity to find other students that have similar “sounds” to form bands, create jam sessions...
and gain experience performing around Ames and the Des Moines area. The club has weekly meetings where activities range from acoustic jam sessions to Rockband battles on the projector screens. The club provides a great environment to prosper as a musician without taking away from completing schoolwork.

“By joining GENRE, I was able to find a group of people who are in the same place as I am in life, and understand that I might not always be able to practice at 4am,” one of the members explains, laughing.

Julia Studer, a member of GENRE says it helps her relax.

“Music lets me take a well earned break from constant labs and tough classes every week,” she explains.

Studer isn’t the only student who feels the pressures of a difficult major and equally difficult classes. One of the performers at Zeke’s, a freshman in aerospace engineering, explains that Thursday nights are the only nights he has free to relax and take time to himself.

Beyond simply allowing for stress relief, the music scene in Ames is actually expanding.

“There’s a great amount of diversity and musically-interested people here. The talent is here, the crowd base is here and even professional studios are here.” Lombardo says. With a constantly developing music scene, Ames is the perfect outlet for students aiming to gain a degree and also spend time working on themselves as musicians.

Being a musician can be all-consuming. It’s extremely difficult to balance schoolwork and being involved in a band or performing solo. Between booking shows, practicing, and songwriting, it can be almost impossible to focus on academics. There’s a reason, after all, that so many musicians drop out of school entirely to follow a dream of becoming an international sensation. Luckily at Iowa State, students have the opportunity to focus on school and still explore their musical talents—and potentially even break into the greater Des Moines music scene. 😊

Get Involved

GENRE = Gathering Everyone Nearby to Raucously Entertain
Meetings | Thursdays in Lagomarcino Hall at 5PM
Zeke’s Live Music, Performing Arts, and Community Center
3329 Lincoln Way, Ames IA
Open Mic Night | Thursdays 8PM
Maintenance Shop
Located on the lower level of the MU
Open Mic Night | Tuesdays 8PM