Small venues, big heart

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WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT CITIES OR TOWNS WITH FANTASTIC MUSIC SCENES, PLACES LIKE NASHVILLE, NEW ORLEANS, MEMPHIS, AND LOS ANGELES PROBABLY COME TO MIND. MUSIC IN AMES MAY NOT FILL THE ROSE BOWL STADIUM, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN IT'S NOT THRIVING.

BLAKE DELANEY, OWNER OF THE VINYL GRIND, PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS THE VINYL CAFE, DESCRIBES THE AMES MUSIC SCENE AS, "UNDERRATED. DEVELOPED, BUT NOT RECOGNIZED VERY MUCH."

DELANEY SAYS HE THINKS MANY AMES MUSICIANS COULD MAKE IT AT THE TOP, BUT IT'S HARD BECAUSE THERE'S SO MANY GREAT MUSICIANS EVERYWHERE.

"OUR MUSIC SCENE, I'D PUT THE TALENT WE HAVE HERE UP AGAINST ANYBODY. WE MIGHT NOT HAVE AS MANY MUSICIANS BUT THE MUSICIANS WE HAVE ARE STRAIGHT UP SOLID, SOLID, SOLID," SAYS DELANEY.

THE VINYL GRIND IS AN IMPORTANT ASSET TO THE MUSIC SCENE IN AMES. LOCATED IN THE HISTORIC DOWNTOWN AREA, YOU CAN FIND COFFEE AND VINYL RECORDS FOR SALE IN A COLORFUL COZY SHOP THAT IS ALSO HOST TO CONCERTS A FEW TIMES EVERY MONTH AND AN OPEN MIC NIGHT EVERY SUNDAY. THE MUSICIANS USUALLY HAVE AN ACOUSTIC SET UP IN THE CORNER OF THE SHOP FACING A FEW ROWS OF CHAIRS WITH OTHERS STANDING BEHIND TO WATCH THE SHOW.

"WE'VE HAD BANDS THAT WILL COME INTO THIS SHOP, WHICH WILL FIT MAYBE 40 PEOPLE, AND SELL MORE RECORDS HERE THAN AT A VENUE OF TWO OR THREE-HUNDRED PEOPLE," SAYS DELANEY, "AND I THINK THAT SPEAKS FOR HOW INFLUENTIAL SMALL VENUES CAN BE TO SALES AND TO APPRECIATION."

SHOWS AT THE VINYL GRIND ARE FOR ALL AGES AND ARE TYPICALLY FUNDED BY A "PAY WHAT YOU CAN" DONATION BUCKET FOR THE ARTISTS. PEOPLE MINGLE, BUY VINYL RECORDS, DRINK COFFEE AND LISTEN TO MUSIC RANGING FROM BLUEGRASS TO ROCK.

DOWN THE ROAD YOU CAN FIND DG'S TAPHOUSE, A RELAXED BAR AND MUSIC VENUE ON MAIN STREET THAT HOSTS LOCAL AND TOURING BANDS. SINCE IT'S A BAR THE SHOWS ARE 21+, AND THEY OFFER A LARGE SELECTION OF BEER, AS WELL AS POOL TABLES AND DARTS. DG'S IS PERHAPS THE MOST COMMON VENUE FOR MUSIC IN AMES, WITH SHOWS FOUR TO SIX DAYS A WEEK. THERE ARE CHAIRS AND TABLES SET UP IN FRONT OF A STAGE WITH AUDIO EQUIPMENT AND LIGHTS. DEPENDING ON THE MUSICIANS PLAYING, YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE COLLEGE AGE STUDENTS, MIDDLE AGED MUSIC LOVERS, AND OLDER ADULTS ENJOYING THE FREE SHOWS AND DRINKS AT DG'S.

BURGIE'S COFFEE AND TEA COMPANY HAS MORE RECENTLY BEGUN TO GET INVOLVED IN THE AMES MUSIC SCENE. WITH ESPRESSO, FOOD, AND LOCAL CRAFT BEER AVAILABLE, PEOPLE OF ALL AGES COME TO HEAR MOSTLY LOCAL MUSICIANS OF MANY GENRES EXHIBIT THEIR MUSIC AT BURGIE'S. THE TABLES ARE MOVED AND CHAIRS ARE SET UP FOR AN EASIER VIEW OF THE SHOWS, BUT PEOPLE STILL HAVE ROOM TO ENJOY THEIR COFFEE AND CHAT WITH OTHERS THERE.

"WE REALLY WANT TO OPEN UP BURGIE'S TO BE ANOTHER SCENE FOR LIVE MUSIC WEEKLY IF THE PRESENCE IS THERE AND PEOPLE ARE EAGER TO PLAY," SAYS JORDAN BURGASON, WHOSE FAMILY OWNS THE COFFEE SHOP. WITH SO MANY LOCAL VENUES TO CHOOSE FROM, MUSICIANS IN AMES GET THE CHANCE FOR THEIR MUSIC TO BE HEARD BY THOUSANDS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AS WELL AS AMES AND CENTRAL IOWA LOCALS. ALTHOUGH OPEN TO ALL AGES, A COMMON PLACE TO FIND MAINLY COLLEGE STUDENTS IN ATTENDANCE IS THE MAINTENANCE SHOP. THE "M-SHOP" IS LOCATED DOWNSTAIRS IN THE MEMORIAL UNION AND IS A MUSIC VENUE RUN BY IOWA STATE'S STUDENT UNION BOARD THAT HOSTS TOURING BANDS A FEW TIMES A MONTH. SHOWS AT THE M-SHOP ARE TYPICALLY UNDER $20 AND THERE'S A SMALL BAR WITH DRINKS FOR 21+ CONCERT GoERS. IT ALSO DOUBLES AS AN AREA FOR STUDENTS TO HANG OUT OR STUDY DURING THE WEEK.
When you think about cities or towns with fantastic music scenes, places like Nashville, New Orleans, Memphis, and Los Angeles probably come to mind. Music in Ames may not fill the Rose Bowl Stadium, but that doesn’t mean it’s not thriving.

Blake Delaney, owner of the Vinyl Grind, previously known as the Vinyl Café, describes the Ames music scene as, “Underrated. Developed, but not recognized very much.”

Delaney says he thinks many Ames musicians could make it at the top, but it’s hard because there’s so many great musicians everywhere.

“Our music scene, I’d put the talent we have here up against anybody. We might not have as many musicians but the musicians we have are straight up solid, solid, solid,” says Delaney.

The Vinyl Grind is an important asset to the music scene in Ames. Located in the historic downtown area, you can find coffee and vinyl records for sale in a colorful cozy shop that is also host to concerts a few times every month and an open mic night every Sunday. The musicians usually have an acoustic set up in the corner of the shop facing a few rows of chairs with others standing behind to watch the show.

“We’ve had bands that will come into this shop, which will fit maybe 40 people, and sell more records here than at a venue of two or three-hundred people,” says Delaney, “And I think that speaks for how influential small venues can be to sales and to appreciation.”

Shows at the Vinyl Grind are for all ages and are typically funded by a “pay what you can” donation bucket for the artists. People mingle, buy vinyls, drink coffee and listen to music ranging from bluegrass to rock.

Down the road you can find DG’s Taphouse, a relaxed bar and music venue on Main Street that hosts local and touring bands. Since it’s a bar the shows are 21+, and they offer a large selection of beer, as well as pool tables and darts. DG’s is perhaps the most common venue for music in Ames, with shows four to six days a week. There are chairs and tables set up in front of a stage with audio equipment and lights. Depending on the musicians playing, you can expect to see college age students, middle aged music lovers, and older adults enjoying the free shows and drinks at DG’s.

Burgie’s Coffee and Tea Company has more recently begun to get involved in the Ames music scene. With espresso, food, and local craft beer available, people of all ages come to hear mostly local musicians of many genres exhibit their music at Burgie’s. The tables are moved and chairs are set up for an easier view of the shows, but people still have room to enjoy their coffee and chat with others there.

“We really want to open up Burgie’s to be another scene for live music weekly if the presence is there and people are eager to play,” says Jordan Burgason, whose family owns the coffee shop.

With so many local venues to choose from, musicians in Ames get the chance for their music to be heard by thousands of college students as well as Ames and central Iowa locals. Although open to all ages, a common place to find mainly college students in attendance is the Maintenance Shop. The “M-Shop” is located downstairs in the Memorial Union and is a music venue run by Iowa State’s Student Union Board that hosts touring bands a few times a month. Shows at the M-Shop are typically under $20 and there’s a small bar with drinks for sale for 21+ concert goers. It also doubles as an area for students to hang out or study during the week.

“PEOPLE COME FOR THE MUSIC AND STAY FOR THE CONVERSATION,” SAYS DELANEY, “YOU’LL HAVE SOMEBODY WITH A MOHAWK NEXT TO A GUY IN A SUIT AND THEY’RE JUST TALKING, IT’S JUST A VERY OPEN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE FEEL SAFE.”
LOCAL MUSICIAN NATE LOGSDON PERFORMS DURING A VALENTINE'S SHOW HELD AT THE VINYL CAFE.
Ames resident Luke Wilson has attended seven shows at the M-Shop. “You pretty much see the same type of people at every show,” says Wilson. He says he knew about the shows going on because he would look online and find them.

“I feel like a lot of people probably did the same thing, and were probably interested in the same music. It’s a friendly place, it’s small, I always meet someone new there,” says Wilson.

Some acts that have played at the M-Shop in the past include Twenty-One Pilots, Kaleo, Rainbow Kitten Surprise, Andy Grammer, and Aaron Carter. The venue also offers an open mic night for ISU students to share their talents.

A venue known more to Ames locals than to Iowa Staters is The Record Mill. Donna Miller is a homeowner in north Ames and decided to open her doors to music lovers after her son joined a band.

“He’s still 19, so three years ago [the members of the band] were even younger and didn’t have anywhere to play, so we said ‘you can have some friends over and have a little mini concert down in the basement,’” said Miller.

Since then, the basement has transformed into an important place for many involved in music in Ames as both a venue and a recording studio. Miller allows attendees to hang out in her living room upstairs before the music starts and between sets. Once the bands are ready, everyone crams downstairs and gathers around local or touring bands surrounded by sound-proofed walls, an ample audio system, and go-pro cameras recording the event. There is normally a mix of local and touring bands during a show at The Record Mill with an array of genres.

“I’VE SEEN A LOT OF DIFFERENT BANDS COMES THROUGH HERE FROM REALLY HEAVY TO INDIE, POP, WE EVEN HAD A FOUR PIECE COUNTRY STRING BAND COME THROUGH HERE ONE TIME, WHICH IS AWESOME, I THINK. THE DIVERSITY IS GREAT,” SAYS MILLER.

Tyler Stodghill plays for an Ames-based band called Stars Hollow, which he describes as “emo-indie-screamo.” He also helps out during shows at The Record Mill.

“It’s almost always $5 or $10 for touring bands. People are allowed to drink here if they’re of age; it’s BYOB,” says Stodghill. Stodghill has been involved with the Ames music scene for a little over two and a half years and says they try to play many local shows but have also been touring around the Midwest and other areas of the country.

Jon Marko Correa is a musician that’s been involved in music around Ames for a few years as well. Correa is originally from Puerto Rico, but moved to the area as a child. Him and his bandmate Jeff Livengood started their current band “Jon Marko and The Good Cooks” about three years ago after finding that they worked well together. Livengood moved from the Omaha area to Ames to pursue his music career with Correa.

“I was really bad at first, and I took some vocal lessons,” says Correa. After he felt confident enough with his voice, he began composing.

“I’ve always loved composing. I’ve always been comfortable on stage. I don’t get stage fright or anything like that, it just feels like that’s where I should be at that time,” says Correa.

The band released their first full album in December and has been touring around Iowa and some of the Midwest. They plan to
Correa sings and plays guitar, harmonica and some piano, while Livengood, who is classically trained, plays drums, violin and dabbles in guitar, bass and viola. The two say the goal for their music is to be true to themselves and do everything they can with the love in their hearts.

"Every time I take a little side note, music pulls me back in. When you have a crowd of people up front and they're just grooving to your music, nothing's better in the world," says Livengood.

Correa says they have jobs in Ames, but their jobs are mostly to fund their music career until it funds itself.

"Being rich, you know, that would be cool, but it's not as important as fulfilling that passion and letting that passion die would be grievous," says Correa. "At the end of the day we're just musicians, and we're just there to make sure people are having a good time. When I'm up there I'm not thinking about anything else. You get to see things that you create come to life, and sometimes people don't like it and sometimes people love it and it touches them."

The band says they've played just about every nook and cranny in Ames, and describe the Ames Music Scene in a similar way to other members of the community.

"It's a tight-knit circle but they're always so welcoming. It's a very welcoming community," says Correa.

Stodghill says the Ames musicians and local music lovers are supportive. "You can always expect to see familiar faces. Everyone gets that it matters."

Delaney says as long as you have something to offer, it's easy to become a part of music in Ames because of how amicable the community is.

"I feel like I'm part of a fabric, I feel like I'm part of a purpose. I think more people in Ames need to get out and experience what this downtown has to offer, for me it opened up my world," says Delaney. "I see my friends every single day, I listen to music, I make coffee. I'm part of a scene down here."

He also says that touring musicians find Ames to be a comfortable place to play that makes them want to return.

"I think when bands come from out of town and see the love and support they get in this town, they want to come back. Even if they've only played to ten people, they're welcomed so warmly that it becomes a place you wanna come back to," says Delaney.
continue touring and would eventually like to share their music on a national scale.

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"EVERY MONTH IT KEEPS GETTING BIGGER AND BIGGER AND BIGGER, WHERE EVENTUALLY WE'LL PROBABLY HAVE TO CHOOSE ARE WE GOING TO GO DOWN THE 9-5 ROAD, OR ARE WE GOING TO QUIT OUR JOBS AND PURSUE THIS FULL TIME," SAYS CORREA, "I COULD SEE THAT HAPPENING IN A YEAR OR TWO. WE'RE ALWAYS REACHING OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE BECAUSE THAT'S HOW YOU GROW."