

TL: Indie music hot spot

PHOTO BY DEBRA ZELLER



The band Television on stage at the American Music Hall.

be at the Hemlock in time to catch the headliner there." Neutron agrees: "The Tenderloin is the only place where you can walk between major above-board venues that usually feature great and diverse bands," he says. "I've show-hopped in the area many a night." Diversity, of course, is a relative term. You won't find much in the way of jazz or hip-hop in these clubs, and you're not likely to find a commercially marketable band that will soon make it to the playlist at KFOG. The Great

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American is, for many touring acts, a step on the way to larger venues like Bimbo's or the Fillmore, but the smaller clubs are very different. Polk Gulch is dominated by anti-commercial indie rock.

Indie is far from a uniform sound. Indie—dependent—rock is less of a musical movement than a way of doing business — an avenue for people who have adapted punk's do-it-yourself ethos to other musical styles.

While occasionally a band like Detroit's White Stripes rises from tiny clubs to international superstardom, few indie bands have any illusions that they're going to be signed to a major label and get rich. One of the biggest names in San Francisco's indie scene, the Aislars Set, tours Europe and Asia but is still signed to a tiny label and is hardly a household name in the United States. Its members hold down day jobs to pay the rent.

By and large, the indie crowd scoffs at the notion of financial success. And that goes double for bands in San Francisco, who know they have to move to Los Angeles for a major-label talent scout to look their way.

Instead, they stay and play the music they love. They record it for small, independent labels, release their music themselves on CDs or cheap CD-Rs, or simply put them online for free downloading. The result is a vast array of styles and sounds grouped under the indie umbrella.

The San Francisco indie scene includes everything from the delicate, meditative sounds of Vervein to the eardrum-shattering psychedelic noise rock of Comets on Fire — and every conceivable point in between.

The Tenderloin also is home to a number of rehearsal studios like the longstanding Francisco Studios on Turk Street, historic recording studios (Hyde Street Studios) and even the headquarters of a new, industry-savvy music magazine, IM: Independent Musician.

These represent what may be as important as the music venues themselves: support from the community.

Sometimes that comes in a form as simple as conversation. Jaime Borschuk, who plays guitar and sings in the band Plan to Pink, says the other bands she has met in the Tenderloin have been very helpful. Borschuk used to practice at Francisco and now practices in the Cookie Jar, her bandmate Jordan Rode's recording studio inside Hyde Street Studios. At Francisco, she says, bands would meet in the hallways: "We met the band Film School there, and I found out about other bands because they practiced there, like These More Shallows."

At Hyde Street, Borschuk says, "Most musicians are supportive and willing to loan gear, talk about music and

recording."

Deb Zeller, whose music Web site Playing in Fog hosts monthly shows at the Hemlock, is so supportive she doesn't even take any money for the shows she puts on, preferring that as much as possible goes to the musicians.

"I was planning a PIF anniversary show at Hemlock when the owners of the club suggested that I put on a show once a month there," Zeller says. "It seemed to make sense, since Playing in Fog already has a calendar of recommendations, that we take it one step further and do more to promote bands we feel we really want people to pay attention to. It's been really rewarding being able to turn people on to new music that they otherwise wouldn't have probably never paid attention to."

Of course, the Tenderloin being what it is, the scene is not all music and good times.

Josh Zucker, who plays bass with a number of San Francisco bands including Crowsong, Kenni and Garrin Benfield, rehearses at Francisco and describes the area around his studio thusly: "Junkies everywhere, smoking crack right out in the open. I'm amazed that I've never been mugged there. My car's been broken into a few times. Somebody actually died on my car once while I was rehearsing."

"It's shameful," Zucker continues. "It seems that the city lets the junkies hang out and do their thing there so they don't muss up any other parts of the city too much."

Perhaps the city takes a similar approach with musicians. But that's just fine with Neutron.

"The areas that are less financially well off and institutionally renowned seem to always be the ones that are open to things that are more different," Neutron says. "History has shown that artistic innovation always comes out of someplace like Polk Street, not the Marina." ■



Josh Zucker (inset and front and center) practices with Crowsong members Scooter Fein on drums and guitarist Randy Clark.



The Quails perform at the Hemlock.

Indie music mag man

WHAT inspires a 34-year-old electrician from Long Island, N.Y., to travel 2,600 miles to San Francisco to live — and work — in a one-room loft in the Tenderloin with no kitchen and a bathroom and shower out in the hall? Ask Paul Tardo, executive director and editor of Independent Musician Magazine.

Beauty inspired King Kong to escape his chains. But in Tardo's case, the siren song of music cut him loose from East Coast life in 2001. Now he lives in one of the funkier neighborhoods in the United States in a renovated building on Market Street only a few feet down the hall from me.

I asked him how the musicians he was promoting in his bimonthly publication were going to make a living here.

"We produce this magazine for exactly that reason," Tardo said. "We try to educate people, give them the most current and useful things evolving, because the music industry today has changed. Everybody wants to be a star. Only a few have what it takes to do it. Get high, do drugs? You get what you deserve. There's a lot of personal responsibility that people don't take for themselves."

I said he was probably as economically vulnerable as the bands he was promoting and wondered if his magazine might change that — and if he cared.

"You need a strong product that the audience wants to buy," he said. "You don't sell a product to satisfy advertisers. You create a magazine to satisfy what people use. Musicians don't listen. They dream and keep thinking about getting a phone call from an a&r guy from a major record label who'll come into a bar, swoop them off their feet, and give them a nice fat contract and a million dollars. It doesn't work that way. The artists need to educate themselves about how to get money on their own."

To do that, Tardo said, they need to build a fan base. They can start with e-mail, which is free, and create a database. Tim Sweeny, one of his magazine's writers, did the math, comparing the income for an artist with a platinum record on a major label

and one who created his own label and sold his own CDs, which cost only 40 cents each.

"That's well within the reach of any artist today," Tardo said. "If he sold the same amount, the difference would be staggering. They don't need to chase that record deal."

I asked Tardo how music has affected his life.

"Music gives people hope," he said. "It gets people from point A to point B. It gets people together who feel the same way. It's made my life an amazing journey so far." He told me about a guy down near Powell who plays blues slide guitar but has only a thumb and index finger on his left hand.

"He's got the slide bar strapped to his little stump," Tardo said, "and he's got a special guitar. It was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen. I want to do a piece on him."

I told Tardo I was impressed with his interest in promoting people who've given up the hope of being stars, who are suffering, but still keep playing their music.

"I know what it means to suffer inside your brain," he said. "I'm bipolar, but I have a family that helped me through it. I was an electrician by trade, but music has had my heart my whole life. I still love that '70s music my Mom used to play. It just seeped into me. I love the way it makes me feel."

Paul Tardo's a sweet cat, a good man who wants to do good.

At the end of his life, the French writer Jean Genet, who was supposed to be the embodiment of evil, was asked what people should do.

"Do good," Genet said. That was it. He went to his little room and died.

Tonight at midnight I saw Paul out in the hall collating pages and doing business for his magazine, helping all the hard-working artists and writers in the music industry to be promoted and survive. They should be grateful to him and glad he lives in the Tenderloin.

— ED BOWERS



I.M. Magazine cover from Web site.

DOPE project helps save 4 lives from drug overdoses

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close behind, according to Bamberger. "New Mexico's governor instructed physicians there to give it (Narcan) out on a case-by-case basis," he added, "and there is an ongoing nonprofit program (using it) in Chicago (the Chicago Recovery Alliance), but it's not government-related."

Narcan, also known as naloxone hydrochloride, is a prescription drug that comes in a vial with a small syringe. The Health Department gets it in bulk for \$1.58 per dose. About 100 doses have been dispensed. (At the Fourth and Market Walgreens, Narcan is sold in packs of 10 for \$50.)

Opiate overdoses, usually heroin, slow the breathing, then stop it altogether. Narcan, given intramuscularly, blocks the effect of an opiate for 30-40 minutes. Then the heroin kicks back in, but it is sufficiently diminished to no longer endanger breathing.

In December 2001, the DOPE project was funded by the Health Department's Treatment on Demand. The next year, the Tides Foundation funded it to expand the work to SRO hotels and, recently, Van Loben Sels/Rembe Rock Foundation awarded a one-year grant.

McLean gives OD education talks at shelters, jails, treatment programs, SROs and, most recently, police stations. She teaches who is liable to OD, OD symptoms and how to respond. Recently released prisoners and patients from hospitals or treatment centers are especially susceptible to overdosing when they try to resume a habit in the dosage they previously used. Their bodies can't take it.

It's not uncommon for users to pool money for a fix but then want

to be alone.

"The part concerning us," says McLean, "is when someone is around but too afraid to attend someone (who is overdosing) because they think they might be charged with murder."

But in the company of a trained person carrying Narcan, a user's life that hangs in the balance can be saved.

According to a three-year study reported last year in the Journal of Urban Health, heroin-related overdose is the greatest cause of accidental death in San Francisco. The study looked at 333 heroin-related overdose deaths, 1997-2000, and found that 47% of the deaths occurred in low-income hotels, (all but three cases in SROs) and 24% occurred outdoors.

"The irony is that the people who live indoors are more likely to die than those outdoors, and it flies in the face of what Gavin Newsom (the author of Care Not Cash) said in his campaign," McLean says. "He claimed that GA and homelessness and overdose were linked. He implied that if you live indoors you don't use drugs. But he can't substantiate that."

"And the coroner's office (the study's data source) does not collect data on income or say anything about GA or SSI. Politics has a tendency to use bad science."

The study went on to point out that "36 percent of all deaths occurred within a 500-meter radius of the intersection of Golden Gate and Jones streets in the Tenderloin neighborhood, an area comprising less than 0.7 percent of the area of the City and County of San Francisco."

In a third of the cases, another person was present when the user lost consciousness and stopped breathing.

The study found that OD outcomes improved when a bystander intervened, "and the distribution of naloxone... to injecting drug users and their peers has been suggested." The very social context of injecting drugs "may be as important as the biomedical context in understanding and preventing fatalities."

McLean says that, despite stereotypes, users do want to take care of themselves even though they know they occupy a niche in a society that doesn't "see their lives as having inherent value."

After McLean told Tenderloin Capt. David Shinn about Narcan last winter, the station commander was so impressed that he asked her to talk to his more than 60 officers, which she did in two sessions.

"Rachel approached me and told me about her program," Shinn told The Extra. "I looked at it as a life-saving program and I invited her here to give safety talks. She was able to help the officers see what an OD situation is. She has also gone to other stations. The response has been very positive."

"Rachel and I are in agreement—you've got to be alive to beat an addiction and get into a program."

McLean has given information sessions at Mission, Southern, Park, Northern and Bayview police stations. And she has conducted one-hour trainings twice a month at several venues, including the Needle Exchange at The Rose on Sixth Street and at the Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center on Golden Gate as well as at SRO hotels.

A former youth outreach worker for Haight-Ashbury Free Clinics Inc., McLean was asked by Mayor Willie Brown's office to start the program two years ago after she helped to draft a recommendations for how the city could deal with the heroin problem. ■

Recommendations to DPH Heroin Committee

IN 1999, the Department of Public Health noted that heroin had become cheaper and was growing in popularity throughout San Francisco. DPH's Treatment on Demand Council formed a committee to determine what threat heroin posed to health in the city, Rachel McLean, DOPE project director, was a member of that committee. Following are some of the Heroin Committee's recommendations:

- "[DPH] outreach teams, which include outreach workers, medical support and substance use counselors, should be expanded to include users who are peer educators specifically charged with overdose prevention education."
- "The Department of Public Health should utilize their lobbyist to change the state law to make possession of syringes legal."
- "Information line should be developed at existing facility that gives information to heroin users about safe injection practices, information from DEA on strength and purity of drugs, overdose prevention strategies. If it is an emergency, caller would be instructed to call 911, and how to do that without risking arrest."
- CPR training for users "should also be conducted by DPH trainers to all inmates inside the jail, and training should include an overdose management component."
- "The Department of Public Health [should] set up a pilot study whereby naloxone is dispensed to users who are trained, and the effectiveness of this as an overdose prevention tool is evaluated. Naloxone soon should be available by nasal spray."

— TOM CARTER