

Mixtapes Brings Back Live Music

Written by Dan Bush

Wednesday, 30 July 2008 10:46



I have a certain admiration for Rob Gordon, John Cusack's character in the 2000 film *High Fidelity*

Although flawed by a heavy case of snobbery, living by the maxim that the more you like something, the more you insult the majority of it, he had such a strong passion for music that he had to make it his life's work.

It seems as though the Quad Cities have their own Rob Gordon (rather, a duo) who have made their passion also their business, making it a must-visit for any music fan in this area. To be fair, Jorge and Amber Tapia, owners of Mixtapes located at 830 15th Avenue in East Moline, carry a different disposition than Cusack's character; they leave the elitism at the door. It seems as though they have developed their own maxim: the more you like something, the more you want to share it with as many people as possible.

On top of owning a record store, they're in a combined six bands, including one called Chica X - which is fronted by their eight-year-old daughter. "I've been [in bands] since I was 10 years old," Jorge told me. And he isn't kidding. In 1994, at the age of 11, he opened for an up-and-coming band called Modest Mouse.

The Tapias also run their own label, Nail in the Coffin Records, which has most notably released a live album from Bay Area folk experimentalists Xiu Xiu. Somehow they have found time to create a makeshift screen-printing studio in the back of their store and booked shows.

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That last venture abruptly ended in March when Mixtapes got an unexpected visit from the city's building and fire inspectors following an anonymous tip. All shows were halted.

The couple admits that it was a mistake to book shows in a makeshift venue. It was nothing but a back room, missing lit exit signs and other safety features. However, they also did not expect the crowds to multiply so quickly. Their last show had an estimated 300 attendees in a space not much bigger than a two-car garage. Before (temporarily) closing their doors as a music venue, they hosted some of the biggest buzz bands in the nation, such as the Dodos - who arguably released the best album thus far this year - and L.A. noise band HEALTH, both of which just played at Chicago's sold-out Pitchfork Music Festival.

The city's intervention ended up as a blessing in disguise. The couple has doubled the store in size, with one side acting as the record shop and the other a larger and up-to-code music venue. On August 1, it will re-open as the only all-ages venue in the Quad Cities catering to local acts. Some of the upcoming shows include Giveupnewyork, a Gameboy musician from Port Byron (August 2) and Chicago hardcore band Slow Horse (August 3).

Holding concerts isn't the only thing that separates Mixtapes from other record stores in the area; it is the way the owners interact with their customers that makes their business so refreshing.

When I first visited the store in May, before the renovations were complete, talking shop with these aficionados almost seemed foreign. It was the only consumer experience I have had in recent memory in which I was engaged in a discussion rather than a sales pitch.

Jorge put on some vinyl while we spoke, telling me about his obsession with Steely Dan. Although he comes off as a punk rocker - arms adorned with tattoos and blond-streaked bangs that cover his eyes - it was an Al Green record that he chose to play. It was just another surprise that made the experience one-of-a-kind.

In our hour-long conversation before he had to leave for a gig, he spoke quickly, as if he were racing the clock. He had many bands to share, and did so without making me feel ashamed when I hadn't already heard of them - something I've experienced in other record stores one too many times. He scribbled quickly in his notebook when I described a band he had not

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heard of, El Guincho, as a Spanish Animal Collective, making me repeat each letter so that he didn't misspell it. His passion was contagious, eager to share what he knows and discover what he doesn't. "We want to start a conversation with people," Amber, his wife and co-owner, told me after a tour of the store. "We want people to come here to support the scene."

They vow to keep their shows and merchandise as cheap as possible, with most shows costing \$5. This is largely due to the experience they had growing up. "Ten years ago we were the kids trying to do something," Jorge told me, "and there was no one that helped. Everyone just wants to sell you something or figure out a way to make money off of you."

Along with a large selection of rock T-shirts, Mixtapes offers a wide variety of both CDs and vinyl covering many different genres, from jazz and hip-hop to industrial metal and hardcore. I picked up a noise-band CD and British Invasion compilation record on my first visit, satisfying the extreme ends of my musical taste.

The couple is kicking off their venue's return with a week full of shows, including one of their own bands, Humanos, on August 1 at 6 p.m. It is a great opportunity to see great live music, browse an eclectic music selection, or even strike up a conversation about Steely Dan.

For more information, visit (<http://www.myspace.com/mixtapesrecordstore>).

Upcoming Shows at Mixtapes

August 1, 6 p.m.: RELS, Humanos, Trash & the Time Bombs

August 2, 6 p.m.: Giveupnewyork, William Side's Atari Party

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August 3, 7 p.m.: Unicorn Basement, Kitten Foreverrr

August 6, 6 p.m.: Irvyn Cytryn, Slow Horse, Kacey

August 8, 6 p.m.: Big Fun!, Katchmir, Back Magic