

Two music festivals, one weekend stirs controversy



STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

You've got a decision to make. And it won't be easy.

If you want to see the best bands in the Detroit area has to offer, you'll either be heading to Ham-

tramck or downtown Detroit this weekend. The more ambitious local music supporters might trek out to both cities to catch a glimpse of more than 150 bands vying for a little hometown support.

On March 8, 9 and 10, Hamtramck clubs and bars host the fourth annual Hamtramck Blowout, a local music showcase sponsored by the *Metro Times*. A portion of the proceeds from the Blowout benefit the Motor City Music Foundation, which produces the Detroit Music Awards. About 80 of the 99 Blowout bands are new to the list this year.

Organizer Anthony Morrow said the event stays true to its vision: "Each year attendees have the opportunity to catch acts before they get big. Acts who wouldn't normally be given much exposure are thrust into the spotlight."

The spotlight shines also this weekend on a group of local musicians who dared to introduce a rival event, the first-ever Mid By Midwest Music Fest. The Detroit-centered benefit will raise money for HAVEN - a Pontiac-based nonprofit organization

dedicated to eliminating domestic violence, child abuse and sexual abuse through prevention and counseling. With more than 55 performers in six downtown venues, this two-day festival has managed to get the local music community talking.

Exposed

Atomic Numbers guitarist Zach Shipps said he supports the idea behind both festivals. "Honestly, anything that gets more exposure to more Detroit bands is good," said Shipps. "And there are some great bands on both schedules."

Shipps and bandmate Jeff Wheeler will join the line up for The Mood Elevator to play Mid By Midwest, along with special guest Brendan Benson. TME frontman Christopher Plum sounded excited to get the band together for this special show, after going on hiatus in 2000. "Since I knew the people promoting this show, I felt very much a piece of it," said Plum.

Chris Johnston, singer of 19 Wheels, has signed on for the Blowout, but considers both festivals a sign of "rejuvenation" in the scene. "This is the 'good' kind of competition. It's not about stuffing ballots, it's about trying to get people to come to your show. It puts a tremendous amount of focus on the local scene for one solid weekend. Now we just have to maintain the feeling."

Blush's Amy Anselm isn't at all conflicted. Her band is scheduled to play both festivals. "This weekend is one that people

shouldn't miss, even if you're not a big local music fan," she said.

In a way, Mid By Midwest is an evolution of the concept created by the Hamtramck Blowout. Its creators and participants are musicians well-rooted in the music scene. The festival celebrates their solidarity.

"Both events have their positives," said Willy Wilson, radio host at WDET. "The Blowout was started as a way to get people to come out and check out local bands in an area where they could go from club to club and see bands they always wanted to see. I loved that idea."

"The thing I like about Mid By Midwest is that the money raised supports a local charity instead of an awards show, that in the past hasn't really represented what is happening on the local music scene."

DMA's

The Detroit Music Awards are meant to honor and offer exposure to local performers each year. But some musicians, like Jasper Unfriendly of the punk rock outfit The Unfriendly's, question the decision-making

process. Opting for Mid By Midwest because of its line up, he too feels the Awards are out of touch and tend to nominate and honor the same musicians year after year. "If an outsider was to look over the nominees and winners of the Music Awards in the past, one would think the city has made no progress and has no new talent to offer," he said.

Radium's Tabitha Predovich, however, supports the Detroit Music Awards. Her band was nominated for an award last year. "Everyone can get together at the State Theatre and meet and hear other local musicians," she said. "Plus, there's industry people there. Anything to promote the local scene is good."

Morrow, who admits he isn't a fan of awards shows in general, had this to add: "Mid By Midwest is a direct result of a group of people feeling like they have been ignored. Is what they're doing the most constructive way to remedy the situation? Time will tell."

Mid By Midwest is a break from the established ways of promoting local music. Neil Yee, owner of Detroit's Gold Dollar

and MXMW organizer, isn't afraid to admit it - calling this something of a "hippie move."

"Indie cred and the Detroit Music Awards don't go together," said Yee. "Rock is supposed to be rebellious."

Veering away from the politics, the loyalties and the hype surrounding the Detroit Music Awards, perhaps the most difficult decision this weekend will be mapping out a plan to catch the most music possible in just three days. Whether its Caniff or Cass Avenue, these events are bound to bring some great musicians out of the dark.

The Hamtramck Blowout runs Thursday-Saturday March 8-10 in eight Hamtramck venues. A schedule of performers can be seen at www.metrotimes.com.

The Mid By Midwest Music Fest, runs Friday-Saturday, March 9-10 in six Detroit venues. For details, visit www.mbmusic.com.

Stephanie Angelyn Casola writes about popular music for

the Observer & Eccentric News-papers. Call (734) 953-2130.

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