

music blog - Hey you artists performing live

By Tiki Houseman, 2-August-2008

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Big music scheduled last week. I wasn't able to make all the shows I wanted to support -- you can only divide yourself so many ways. I did catch [Jazzman James Frost Winn](#)¹ at Broadway Studios². They tucked him away in a small intimate room -- I almost missed him. He deserves better, but there was a respectable crowd that turned up. (I took the MUNI 12 to get there).

Then I took a MUNI 30 to the Utah, notoriously known as the bunny bus during commute hours, and for harboring riders bearing pink plastic bags that bestow supernatural strength and aggressiveness to its owners -- nothing I can compete with!

[Kelly McFarling](#)³, [GG Tanaka](#)⁴ and [Roger Rocha](#)⁵ were playing. Kelly had a full band supporting her and she sounded great. GG was there in style as usual -- passing out pink carnations and promotional hats. I finally was able to see the Beatle-esque, melodic Goldenhearts (Ari Gorman was incredible on bass; Roger was, too, on his new white guitar). They are a power trio and you can't imagine how tight you have to be to pull off a great power trio.

But that's not what I really want to write about (yeah, after three paragraphs!). I was talking to several artists at various shows throughout the evening and the same subject kept rebounding: how to get people to artists shows.

You would think this subject would wear out like elastic in a rubber band, but it doesn't for me. The Utah⁶ had an incredible crowd -- and I'm relieved -- but I *heard* that if artists don't have 75 paying fans, the club is not happy with them and future bookings are in jeopardy.

This isn't just the Utah --I've heard this from many club owners (actual numbers vary).

Artists spend a lot of time writing songs, polishing them with others (if you are lucky to have a backing

¹ Jazzman James -- <http://www.myspace.com/jazzmanjameslv>

² Broadway Studios -- <http://www.broadwaystudios.com> --and- <http://www.myspace.com/bandsnbroadway>

³ Kelly McFarling -- <http://www.myspace.com/kellymcfarlingmusic>

⁴ GG Tanaka -- <http://www.ggtanaka.com> --and- <http://www.myspace.com/ggtanaka>

⁵ Roger Rocha and the Goldenhearts -- <http://www.myspace.com/thegoldenhearts>

⁶ The Hotel Utah, San Francisco

band) and performing -- most are not so good with the promotional stuff and we tend to rely on what's called "friend rock" -- you know, when we invite our friends and families to come and support.

When I was performing comedy, it was easy to get family and friends to support and I could pull \$200 at the door -- but for some reason, music is more difficult. But even for comedy friends are not going to pull for you in the long run. Comedians are struggling with the same issue of getting people to their shows (and Jet, if you are reading this, consider forgiving me for that drama I had with Ricky four years ago and work with me on this).

I have heard from management consultants (outside the music/comedy bubble) that people tend to spend most of their time doing the wrong things very well. And I think we do the friend-rock things very well, but this isn't going to work for us in the long run if club owners are going to hold us accountable for our draw (and I wonder if club owners have realistic expectations -- maybe we should work with them on the numbers -- however, if we say we have XYZ draw, is it so wrong for them to hold us to that?).

We're going to have to think outside ourselves and do things that -- gasp! -- EVERYONE can benefit from, not just ourselves. And we're going to have to think outside the box. Everything I've heard so far is a dressed up version of friend-rock, and it will work, but only to a certain degree.

We have to pull in outsiders and make them care about what we do and this will take risks: yes, our fellow musicians are supportive of what we put out there and the rest of the world may not be so kind. We have to take chances and put ourselves out there. We can't just share the piece of ourselves that is 12-tracks, polished-to-perfection CDs and then expect people to adore what we do.

It has to start earlier than that. I don't have all the answers (or any), I'm just raising my hand here and thinking that I want to resurrect my goal/plan of pulling in people from the outside.