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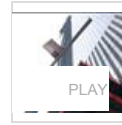


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NY CULTURE | July 2, 2012, 10:08 p.m. ET

A New Chapter for the City's Punk Playhouse

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By ANDY BATTAGLIA



Ebet Roberts/Redferns/Getty Images

Hilly Kristal (far left) in front of his club, CBGB, in 1987.

Grown from new roots planted deep in New York's musical firmament, the inaugural CBGB Festival will run from Thursday through Sunday and feature some 300 bands at approximately 40 venues around town, as well as a thorough-going film series, a talk-intensive conference (including a keynote by Nirvana bassist Krist Novoselic), and even a whiskey-focused "spirits festival." All of it was marshaled by a group of local organizers who recently acquired rights to the CBGB brand—established at the storied punk club that thrived on the Bowery from 1973 to 2006—with plans to cultivate it as something more than a historical enterprise.

With that in mind, the lineup for the CBGB Festival focuses on a mix of older acts with ties to the club's heritage (Agnostic Front, Cro-Mags) and younger groups (the Pains of Being Pure at Heart, the Men) that probably would have played CBGB on their way up had the option been available. In addition to settings already familiar to local rock fans, part of the festival will take place at a free multi-stage outdoor event in Times Square on Saturday.

In the midst of rampant planning, three of the festival's organizers—producers Tim Hayes and Joe D'Urso and bookings

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Mark Abramson for The Wall Street Journal

Festival organizers Louise Parnassa Staley and Tim Hayes.

director Louise Parnassa Staley—spoke with the Journal about exhuming the past, maintaining a legacy, and a plan to expand by way of a new outfit, CBGB Concert Productions.

Some fans of CBGB may be concerned that this festival has little to do with the original, iconic venue. But you all have strong connections to the club.

Tim Hayes: Louise was the general manger there for 20 years. Joe played

there and went there all the time. My wife was a talent agent who was the last agent to represent the Ramones.

Louise Parnassa Staley: [The club's late founder, Hilly Kristal] had a label, a radio station, a canteen, a gallery. He wanted to be big, too. It wasn't just a club with a capacity of 350. It was global.



Enlarge Image

Juan Naharro Gimenez/WireImage/Getty Images

The Pains of Being Pure at Heart will play the CBGB Music Festival.

Kristal's daughter, Lisa Kristal Burgman, had planned to auction off the rights to the brand after her father died in 2007. Why did she sell them to you instead?

Mr. Hayes: The East Village was and is a small community. Lisa is a friend, and she called and said she got control of the estate again and wanted it to go to the right person. She didn't want it to just go to the highest bidder. It wasn't about money; it was about carrying the club and the name on in the tradition that she felt like her father would want. My interview with her lasted a year, almost daily. She wanted to make sure we weren't going to put the CBGB logo on Burger King cups.

Mr. D'Urso: We feel like part of our jobs is to be curators here. Not that it's a museum piece, but it is a slice of rock 'n' roll history.

Ms. Parnassa Staley: We're responsible for it.

Mr. Hayes: We've got virtually everything. Everybody knew it was important and worth saving. We have all the contents of the original venue. Some people have the misconception that we're going to try to re-create it. We'll never re-create a moment in time; we couldn't reassemble it like a puzzle. But we can give some of it a second life.

How will that come to fruition?



Enlarge Image

CBGB

Agnostic Front also playing the festival.

Mr. Hayes: We want a club on the Lower East Side. The downfall of the original location was a landlord dispute, and we don't want to fall victim to that. There are fewer buildings for sale than you would think. If we wanted to rent a spot, it would go much quicker. But we want to own. That might happen soon, it might take a few years. We're also focused on making this festival a big annual event for New



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York and for ourselves, but we don't necessarily want to wait a year every time for it to come around. So we want to be in the concert production business. We want to make a lot of noise. One of the ways is to keep this festival going.

How did you hit on the idea of a sprawling festival?

Mr. Hayes: In our minds, New York deserves to have a bigger festival in this respect. We're not competing with big festivals on Governors Island and Randall's Island. We're more club-based, street-level, ground-level.

Mr. D'Urso: I like "free." The Times Square show is free. It's not easy to do. There's something very cool about being to give people a show like that. It's very New York, and working on CBGB's is as New York as you can get.

Mr. Hayes: When I moved to New York 20 years ago, there were big conferences and festivals for young and new bands. But it feels like Austin stole most of that. South By Southwest is incredible, nobody will touch that. But New York should have something big, too.

When was the first time each of you went to CBGB?

Mr. Hayes: I remember much better the last night I was there. I've never admitted this before, but on closing night I overtopped the bartender on every drink so she would let me keep the glass. I filled up my pockets and walked home with a set of 12 glasses from CBGB, and an ice scooper. I was paying like \$20 a drink so I could keep the glasses and was clinking on my way out the door. Then I sat outside; I didn't want to leave.

Ms. Parnassa Staley: My sister took me. She was in medical school and had this crazy boyfriend who wanted to be a doctor and a punk-rock singer.

Mr. D'Urso: The day I played there the first time was the same day I met Leonard Cohen for the first time. I bumped into him in a Roy Rogers in Midtown. I didn't usually bother people, but I went up and told him my band was playing at CBGB that night and that I was nervous. He put down whatever he was eating, grabbed my hand, patted me on the cheek and said, "Don't worry, you're going to be OK tonight." I felt like I was blessed by the Pope or something.

A version of this article appeared July 3, 2012, on page A22 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: A New Chapter for the City's Punk Playhouse.

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