

Up Close and PERSONAL

The Guild Theatre makes the joy of live music easily accessible to the Peninsula

On the first night of the year, Menlo Park's Guild Theatre was alive with the sounds of Social Distortion, allowing fans of the punk band a chance to celebrate New Year's Day with a live concert. Originally a movie theater famous in the area for showing lesser-known films and hosting screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* monthly, the Guild has served Menlo Park and the surrounding Bay Area community as a live music venue since it reopened in February 2022 after COVID-19.

As a volunteer at the Guild, Rich Pearson has witnessed firsthand how it makes live music easily available to the local community.

"If you had told me 10 years ago that there was going to be a music venue in Menlo Park that was bringing in Social Distortion, Macy Gray and others, I would've laughed at you," Pearson said. "The fact that they're able to get some of these bands to come here [makes it] fun to see such an ambitious project come to life."

Very little

expense has been spared in the Guild's rebranding as a live music and entertainment venue.

"[The Guild] has everything that you need in a music venue to make it perfect, including the sound system which is all Meyer sound gear," said Chris Cummings, another Guild volunteer. "They put over 30 million dollars into making this into a

"It's just such a different experience being able to share [music] on an intimate basis, and the Guild fits that niche perfectly."

Chris Cummings, Guild Volunteer

music venue of the highest quality; all the acoustic elements that they built make it sound great."

Though its purpose has changed since its original opening in 1926 as a movie theater, the Guild's new designation as a live music venue allows its legacy to continue as an easily accessible source of entertainment for people living in the Bay Area.

"It was really exciting for me to have The Guild be transformed," Cummings said. "This was a place where I would go during my high school years to see movies."

The onset of Covid was another factor in the Guild's reopening, bringing excitement to the community after a long time of not being able to travel outdoors.

"Once I heard that they were making it into a music venue, I was following it because it happened during

Covid, and Covid wasn't great for live music or any live entertainment," Pearson said. "The first, probably 10 shows, every artist got on the stage and was just so excited to be back in front of live audiences."

Though the Guild is able to bring more well-known bands such as Social Distortion to the Bay Area, it also hosts a diverse set of genres and artists, providing a place for lesser-known bands and musicians to show off their craft.

"The big [bands] would go to Shoreline or play at a big venue in San Francisco, but that is a hard path for hard-working bands that are up-and-comers," Cummings said. "The Guild offers them a place to come and perform. Another

thing they host are tribute bands, [who] will form and play all [the] songs [of] big bands that have made a huge name for themselves."

The Guild's small venue size creates a uniquely personal atmosphere for show-goers.

"Music is all about sharing the experience with other people," Cummings said. "Think about the difference between going to a show at the Shoreline where there are mobs and mobs of people, and the Guild; [because the Guild] is so small and intimate, you can really share the vibe of the music with the people next to you."

Paly English teacher David Cohen's experience at the Guild reflects Cummings' sentiments.

"It's large enough to feel like you're at an event," Cohen said. "I [went] to some places where the stage is barely a stage, and the crowd is kind of small, and then it's a different experience. The Guild is big

Firestone Teachers



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enough to feel like it's a concert and small enough that you don't feel lost."

The effort that has been put into establishing the Guild as a music venue worthy of its patrons and its artists is visible as soon as you walk in.

"Nothing is as intimate as this, being in a new place where everything is so new and there has been so much attention to detail," Pearson said. "People walk in for the first time and they're just like looking around going 'whoa'. Fans of the band that are coming in, they're going 'whoa' because they can get so close seeing their favorite band play. It's really fun to watch."

Paly junior Meredith Glasson feels that her experience with the Guild has been valuable and memorable, especially compared to larger venues.

"At the Guild, you can be really close to the artist which is a really cool experience," Glasson said. "When I went, Bob Weir made an appearance to play which was really special because I would never have

thought I would see Bob Weir in real life. It was actually really crazy that we were that close to him. These are things that I could never experience going to Shoreline or larger stadiums."

The Guild's physical proximity to the Bay Area community makes it an invaluable source of live music, and a venue for concert-goers to be proud of.

"We need it desperately here on the Peninsula because we don't have a whole lot of music venues," Cummings said.

With the rapid expansion of social media through apps like Tik-Tok, some people feel that music has become more manufactured.

"In a world consumed by the media, it is very important that there are places like the Guild that fosters creativity and keeps people in touch with the originality of music," Cummings said.

The Guild hopes to bring diverse music back to younger generations through its shows; there is no minimum age for admission, but the Guild's website states that "patrons under the age of 18 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian."

"They [younger patrons] usually come [with] a family. You'll see some people in their 20s who are going, maybe coming after work or something," Pearson said. "I hadn't seen any Paly students just showing up [on their own]."

Although it is critical to bridge the gap between younger generations and the roots of

music, the process is not easy. The majority of younger people are not used to seeing second tier bands, and this unfamiliarity may drive them away from indulging in new things.

"I think [younger people] are still experimenting," Pearson said. "[My children] had a couple of bands that, when I've asked my kids, they've said, oh, I've heard of that person. 'Typically I think [the Guild] is going to have to get different programming or different musicians to come to bring in the younger audience right now.'"

Being able to appeal to a younger audience is a challenge. However, the sense of unfamiliarity quickly dissipates when seeing performances firsthand.

"Experiencing shows on live streams is totally different from when you are [physically] with a group of people who share the same intensity of the music," Cummings said. "I can see it when we have high schoolers come into the Guild, their eyes light up."

Music has the power to connect people through emotion, and the Guild brings that experience to the Bay Area.

"There's just a joy in live performances," Pearson said. "Even if I don't like the music, it's fun seeing people who enjoy their craft so much that even if a lot of them aren't making a ton of money yet, they're just doing what they love. To have the ability to change people's mood with what they do, that is a really cool thing."

