

# Paradiso found

■ The downtown cafe emerges from remodel with improved sound and a new look, hoping to draw the under-21 crowd

By Caron Alarab  
for the Emerald

A large mural spans the width of Cafe Paradiso, swirls of lines and color merging as three faces sing in different directions. Beyond the mural, painted by local artist Steve Lopez, lies a dark curtain serving as a backdrop for the stage, which is surrounded by tables and chairs. The smell of coffee lingers in the air, and patrons lounge on couches around the room.

But the cafe, located at 115 W. Broadway, didn't always look this way. In mid-August, the cafe finished a five-month renovation that transformed it into a full-fledged music venue. General manager Robin Pendoley said he hopes the cafe's new look will appeal to a wide audience, including the under-21 crowd.

"It's a place for 21 and not to hang out and enjoy live music," Pendoley said.

When the cafe was established seven years ago, it was simply a coffee shop. But before long, the cafe's owner, Greg Feener, wanted to add music, so he invited local musicians to play there. Feener had little experience managing a music venue, Pendoley said, so he simply communicated to the public that the cafe was open to any local act that wanted to play.

However, the cafe, which had at one time been a bank, didn't lend itself to high-quality sound, venue manager Randy Hamme said. An open kitchen and a large pillar in the middle of the room hindered the sound, which bounced off the walls and back windows like a rubber ball, Hamme said.

Feener recognized that the sound quality was lacking, Hamme said, but he didn't know how to fix it. Business began to decline as establishments in the downtown area kept moving to other locations, selling their leases or even going out of business. Feener, who felt pressure from lack of business, decided to hire a general manager to help him, Pendoley said.

"A year ago this week, I was hired as the general manager of Cafe Paradiso," he said. Then, a lit-



Mason West Emerald

Justin King performs during an all-ages show last Saturday at Cafe Paradiso.

tle more than six months later, local singer T.R. Kelly gave a solo performance at Cafe Paradiso. Unlike other acts, Kelly, also a member of the band Rotosquirrel, brought sound equipment with her, as well as her friend and bandmate Randy Hamme to set it up, Hamme said. Hamme had worked at a music store and came away from the job with a few "equipment perks," as he called them.

According to Pendoley, the sound quality of Kelly's performance was so good that he approached Hamme to ask his advice about sound equipment and Cafe Paradiso's potential as a music venue. Experienced with the local music scene, equipment and the needs of a venue, Hamme's suggestions inspired Pendoley to put them into effect, and he and Feener hired Hamme as the cafe's venue manager.

"The universe threw us together that night, and magic was made," Hamme said.

Then Pendoley and Feener began implementing Hamme's ideas. A wall was built to separate the kitchen from the main floor, and the pillar in the middle of the room was removed. After that, a bar was added, the food menu was expanded, a curtain was hung along the wall of the main stage and alcohol was stored in the former bank safe (one of the perks of the original layout), Hamme said. Hamme also suggested to Feener that they pay the musicians who played at the cafe.

"I just explained to him that if he didn't pay them better, they either wouldn't come or would come and

play badly," Hamme said.

One of the acts that will perform frequent shows at Cafe Paradiso is the Justin King Band. Frontman Justin King is an Alaska-born Eugene local, and, while he and his drummer, James West, are currently in London recording new music, King still sees the local scene as part of his future.

"I wouldn't leave Eugene for anything," he said.

Hamme said King's sound is exactly what Cafe Paradiso is looking for: "more conservative music. With so much time put into quality and presentation," he said, "we don't want to limit our audience — we want to expand it. If anything, we are trying to meet somewhere in the middle, between generations."

While the cafe has always tried to appeal to a wide audience, Pendoley said he is now focusing on attracting the under-21 crowd, both as performers and as spectators. Pendoley said he graduated from college a year and a half ago, and he remembers what it was like to be 21 and not be able to hang out with younger friends at 21-and-over establishments. He said Cafe Paradiso is one of the only places in town where both people on both sides of the drinking age can go to eat and listen to music together.

"There are incredible musicians under the age of 21, and now their friends can come," he said.

And Pendoley agrees with Hamme, who summed up the changes at Cafe Paradiso.

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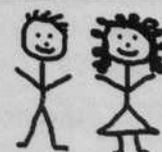
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