

Midnite brings its reggae show to WOW Hall to honor Marley

The St. Croix-based band Midnite will play Friday as part of a celebration of Bob Marley's birthday

By **Natasha Chilingierian**
Pulse Reporter

Friday is Bob Marley's birthday, and WOW Hall will celebrate the life and music of the legendary reggae artist with a show featuring Midnite, a quartet from St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Honoring Marley's birthday with a reggae performance has been a WOW Hall tradition for more than 10 years. WOW Hall publicist Bob Fenessey said he remembers when a Eugene resident first asked WOW Hall to host a show for fans of Marley and reggae.

"When a community member suggested that we have an annual show for reggae fans, they added, 'It wouldn't matter which reggae band you had!'" he said.

Fenessey said since Midnite is an internationally-touring band, the show should be more exciting than past concerts. The performance opener will be Santa Cruz, Calif.-based DJ Swami I spinning Marley's tunes. Midnite will follow with a set of original material.

Midnite's members — lead vocalist Vaughn Benjamin, keyboardist Ron Benjamin, drummer Dion Hopkins and bassist Phillip Merchant — formed their group in 1989 and have been touring the United States ever since, releasing 10 albums along the way. Independent publicist Mike Kelly, who currently represents the band, said Midnite offers surprises and a new distinguished style while older Jamaican reggae artists fail to vary

their music.

"They are highly enlightened," Kelly said. "They strip down reggae to its bare roots and play unique rhythms. It's like reggae music from the 1970s with a fresh take."

He said a handful of Midnite's



Courtesy

Lead vocalist Vaughn Benjamin will perform with reggae group Midnite tomorrow night at WOW Hall.

lyrics speak of Rastafarianism, a religion among black Jamaicans that teaches the redemption of blacks and their return to Africa.

"Many reggae artists identify with (Rastafarianism); most reggae is a testament to the religion," he said.

Swami I said Midnite helps reggae music to branch outside of its most commonly known Jamaican roots.

"They make it a world music genre," he said. "It's not just one island and one sound. They bring reggae to a human level, and their lyrics involve issues of the 21st century."

Swami I's interest in the group was sparked around four years ago when he heard one of the band's CD at a reggae festival. He met the band two years ago at a Sierra Nevada World Music Festival, where he "liked their sincerity in person."

"The depth of their sound together told me to seek them out," he said.

Although the group will not be

playing Marley covers, both Kelly and Swami I said the memory of Marley will be the driving force of Friday night's performance. Swami I said that he looks up to Marley spiritually, and Midnite has the potential to live up to his memory.

"The way I was raised, we called him Saint Marley," he said. "He sent a message of unity for all people across the world on the small platform of reggae. Midnite, if any band, could hold such a candle to him. They have the sincerity and spirit to carry their reggae to a much higher place."



Courtesy

Midnite, from the U.S. Virgin Islands, will participate in WOW Hall's annual celebration of Bob Marley's birthday.

WOW Hall is located at 291 W. Eighth Ave. Tickets are \$17 in advance at the WOW Hall Box Office and \$20 at the door. The show begins at 8 p.m.

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drop in their glass of water to give it some color. In a few years, they graduate to a full glass of wine. Most importantly, there are no pushy waiters who imply to teens and 20-year-olds that having a nice glass of rosé is a crime.

It isn't just the ban on wine that bugs me. By prohibiting all alcoholic drinks to minors in this country, the beverages become a forbidden fruit, making them all the more desirable. And when curious minors get their hands on it, they go wild. In a country like France or Italy, where alcohol is readily available to all, it doesn't seem that exciting anymore. Fewer young people partake in binge-drinking fiascos over there, because what's the fun in downing a legal substance?

Minors may also be less inclined to abuse alcohol in Europe because they associate drinking with Mom and Pop. Wine is introduced in the safe environment of the home, while in the United States, alcohol is normally first experienced in a rowdy residence hall — a place much more conducive to misbehaving. And at 12 a.m. on most Americans' 21st birthdays, it's off to the bar to get sloshed and finally be welcomed into the merchant's world of alcohol. It creates a perfect ritualistic opportunity to go buck wild, whereas across the Atlantic, one night of drinking wouldn't matter from the next.

I'm smart enough to know this law won't change anytime soon, but it would be a miracle if this country realized someday that suppression leads to desire — that wine tasting

does no more damage at age 20 than it does at 21. It would be nice even if waiters would show a little more respect. Like the server at The Olive Garden who demonstrated to a friend and me two years ago when he allowed us, as minors, to have a complimentary drop of wine with our desserts. I sure became an Olive Garden fan after that!

I've got 12 weeks until my 21st, but in the meantime I'm going to visit Canada, where I can have my last dose of enjoying the respect that I lack at home. And I plan to hit the bar on my 21st for an unhealthy night of drunkenness that, had I been living in France, I would do without. But why not? It's a ritual.

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