

John Henry's: Keith Martin

Keith Martin says his booking career was built on selfish motives.

"I had bands I wanted to see play there," he explains. "I knew the owners [of John Henry's] at the time. They wanted someone to work with more of the local stuff. It was a total accident. I just basically said, 'I think you should book The Supersuckers.'"

Martin began working with the notoriously drippy, cavern-in-the-wall bar when it was still at its former location on West 11th. Now, with John Henry's relocated to a smaller, more finished (but still fabulously dive-y) home on Broadway, Martin has taken on partial ownership of the bar. He feels the new John Henry's has successfully managed to reinvent itself as a venue.

"I think we left behind our harder image about five years ago," he says. "When we moved, we opened it up to a whole lot of different stuff we never would have considered before. It wouldn't have worked because [the old bar] was too dilapidated."

A musician in his own right and fan of bands from all over the map, Martin strives to produce a mix of shows drawn from pools of both national and local talent. Unfortunately, an ever-widening variety of bands to choose from means harder decisions for Martin.

"There's a lot of bands but not a lot of shows," he says regretfully. "I try to work [local bands] into the rotation, get them on a bill when they fit. We do our best to get everyone in."

Martin's memories of his seven-plus years as a booker include watching Lemonhead frontman Evan Dando suck down an entire case of whipped cream canisters by himself before going onstage ("We kept the balloon for a while, hanging above the bar") and marveling at the magnetic attraction of short, bald, glam rocker Har Mar Superstar ("Every girl in the place was lined up waiting for him after the show!"). But while sex and drug moments may abound in the music business, his favorite nights bring in big, rowdy crowds and fans who fall outside the stereotype of a typical John Henry's rocker.

"The coolest part of it is seeing a diverse crowd. My parents always come out for the Red Elvises," he says. "At Hank [Williams] III — it was totally sweaty and everybody was so into it — this lady in her 80s came up to me after the show and said, 'Thank you so much. I'm here with my kids and my grandkids!'"



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