

Searching beyond the beaten 'Track

With the Sidetrack Café's recent closure, SU venues might see the effects of local artists hunting for some different places to perform

AMANDA ASH
Arts & Entertainment Editor

Nearly a year after moving to its new location, the Sidetrack Café decided to close its doors permanently on 15 February, 2007—the date of its 26th birthday.

The April, 2006 move to its current location was initially undertaken in order to combat the Café's numerous efficiency problems and to make room for condominium development after to the land had been sold. However, because of many unnamed financial and legal issues, the new venue was forced to pull the plug and slap up a tragic "closed" sign.

Trevory Pomeroy, the Sidetrack Café's now former entertainment manager, couldn't disclose the exact details as to why the 'Track now lies deserted, but noted that the postponed opening of the new location—due to the derailment of a train carrying its new flooring—and the difference in atmosphere contributed to the closure.

"In hindsight, we should've shut it down [instead of moving]," Pomeroy said. "As it turns out, Edmontonians were more attached to that train and that old building than what the Sidetrack represented. If we had opened a castle, they would've said, 'This isn't the old Sidetrack.'"

The Sidetrack Café was one of Edmonton's biggest and most renowned live music venues. For Pomeroy, it was "heartbreaking" to have to cancel two months of events, especially for local bands. He says that local artists "stepped up to the plate for the Sidetrack in a way that would make you cry."



SAYING GOODBYE TO AN OLD FRIEND The Sidetrack Café was forced to shut down after 26 years, but hopefully its usual artists will find another home.

MIKEOTTO

But even with Edmonton's thriving music scene, the Sidetrack isn't the only venue that has struggled to make ends meet. The University of Alberta's Powerplant has lost \$209,807 as of 31 December with four months remaining on its fiscal year, and from Pomeroy's perspective, he's unsure whether or not the Sidetrack's closure will bring more business to the University venue.

"There might be a couple of bands that were supposed to play at the

Sidetrack that will go over there, which would be great for the Powerplant," Pomeroy said.

Colin Priestner, a local folk artist and University of Alberta student, sees the Sidetrack's closure as one less place for Edmonton musicians—specifically singer-songwriters—to perform and create a name for themselves. As an artist who's headlined a CD release party at the Sidetrack and opened for Josh Ritter at the Powerplant, he's skeptical about

turning to the 'Plant for bookings.

"The problem with the Powerplant is that for people that aren't familiar with it, it's hard to find and there's no parking," Priestner said. "I'm a little more hesitant to book a show there because a lot of my crew knew where the Sidetrack was and I have to go out of my way to tell everybody exactly where the Powerplant is."

However, according to Priestner, the Sidetrack's closure might lead to increased bookings at places like the

Myer Horowitz or local theatres like the Varscona.

"As a singer-songwriter, it's different than a band because you need to have some sort of listening venue rather than a drinking venue," Priestner said. "I've been considering booking a lot of shows at places like the Varscona Theatre or smaller theatre venues. Places like that are designed for listening instead of heavy drinking."

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The Golden Dogs have their day

The Golden Dogs

With Jets Overhead
Tuesday, 27 February at 10pm
The Powerplant

PAUL BLINOV
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On the eve of their latest tour, The Golden Dogs are as sick as, well, dogs. When the young Toronto band should be out celebrating their modest-yet-growing success, they unfortunately find themselves trying to recover from a bout with the flu that's hindered every member of the band.

"[The Tour's had] a bit of a rough start, for sure," laments frontman Dave Azzolini. "We all caught [the flu] in Regina, so for about three or four days we all went through this massive sickness at my brother's place. He fed us soup and took care of us, but now, we're coming off a bunch of bronchitis/chest infection type stuff. Everyone's got the same cough. Yeahhh," Azzolini trails off, and his dour mood is understandable.

If his vocals were to give out right now, the rest of their tour—promoting the foot-stompin' pop of their new release *Big Eye Little Eye*—would have to be put on hold. But the band hasn't been forced to pull any shows yet, and if their luck prevails, the Dogs will still

have plenty to wag their tails at.

For the first time in their five-year existence, the band is looking at a solidified lineup: Azzolini on vocals/lead guitar, his wife Jess Grassia on keys and Taylor Knox, Neil Quinn and Stew Heyduk rounding out drums, guitar and bass, respectively.

"We all caught [the flu] in Regina, so for about three or four days we all went through this massive sickness at my brother's place."

DAVE AZZOLINI

This lineup is the culmination of a number of changes, including Knox switching from bass player to drummer after their previous drummer left. Azzolini seems more than satisfied with the current roster of musicians he's working with.

"[The Golden Dogs] has been mine and Jess' thing right from the start," Azzolini explains. "But Knox was all over the album and was just as bit of a part of it as Jess or myself. This band lineup now is, I feel, pretty solid. I don't feel like there's too much distance."

Now complete, the band is also looking at their second appearance at the hipster-reputed South By Southwest music festival. This time around, though, Azzolini's hoping to get much more out of the trip.

"The first time we were just kinda hanging out, trying to get the vibe of the place," admits Azzolini. "[We basically just] hung out with a bunch of Canadian acts. It was a fun time, but hopefully this time we can get more [from the festival] than last year."

The South by Southwest festival has helped launch the careers of numerous Canadian acts including Sam Roberts, and having a second appearance there certainly speaks the volume of acclaim. The Golden Dogs are beginning to receive. And while the flu is a temporary setback, there's even more for the band up ahead.

Furthermore, North America isn't the only place that's been calling for the band to strut their musical stuff. With the horizon looking ever brighter, the band's been asked to play Europe, too.

"We keep getting more and more e-mails from European places, which is nice," Azzolini explains. "I've always wanted to tour England at least once, just to see how we'd do there. I always figured we'd do well there if we ever had the chance. [Things are] starting to look good."