

Venue needed on the Big Isle - West Hawaii Today, June 2008  
By Ma'ata Tukuafu

The people of Hawaii love music and musicians. "Hawaii creates such good musicians, I think there are more here than in any other state," said Rob Decker of Waimea. Decker, who is a musician himself, said he would love to see more venues on the Big Island where musicians can perform their music. He believes there is a void as far as venues are concerned, and thinks musicians are "kind of creating their own gigs."

"I think that in this area, we are all waiting for the Blue Dolphin to re-open so we can see more shows," Decker said.

Ros Sinclair-Nelson, another Waimea resident and singer in a band called Redd, is also looking forward to having the Blue Dolphin re-open. "We have Tante's here in Waimea, and in Kona, there is the Mixx and Jake's. In Hilo, it's the Palace Theatre," said Nelson. "I would absolutely love to have a place near here where we could go to dance or listen to music."

Nelson said she thinks the Big Island has it "sewn up" with traditional Hawaiian music and Jawaiian or reggae music. "I feel there are not a lot of venues that are open to musicians who play alternative or original music," Nelson said. "Our nightlife here needs an injection of new energy. I know there are plenty of people out there who would pay to hear decent music."

When asked what type of music he would like to have come to the Big Island, Kona resident Steve Velonza answered, "More live anything!" Velonza said he is a season ticket holder at Kahilu Theatre in Waimea and supports any music that comes to the Big Island.

"No more blues, or reggae," said Velonza. "I'm not putting it down, it's just that there's so much more."

Velonza said he and partner Zoe Ryan pay a lot of money to travel and attend music concerts. This year, they are flying off island to go to Oahu, Florida and even as far as England. "We're paying to satisfy our need for music," Velonza said.

"But we'd love to spend our money in our home town," Ryan added. She believes that if West Hawaii provided a venue that could accommodate at least 5,000 people, it would attract larger musicians and bands to the Big Island. "We need top notch promoters who are responsible," said Ryan.

Because Hawaii is a mid-point for many traveling musicians, Velonza said he would love to see more tours stop here. "They stop in Honolulu, why not here?" asked Velonza. He and Ryan feel the key is providing a large venue that can safely accommodate our island residents.

Dana Mattos, who has lived in Kailua-Kona for over 35 years, said a large venue would not only give residents a chance to attend more music events, but it would help with Big Island tourism. “Most travelers check the internet to see what concerts or events they can attend when going on vacation,” Mattos said. “We’re cutting out visitors in the age group of 20 to 35, and also visitors from the west coast.”

She would love to see more jazz concerts, salsa music and easy listening entertainers perform. “I don’t want it to turn into Lahaina around here, but I’d love to see a place where we could pay to see good concerts and not have to travel to get there,” said Mattos.

South Kohala resident Bev Storment said she definitely checks first to see what band is playing in any city or town she is traveling to. She travels often and asks many of the bands she goes to hear if they would perform on the Big Island. “I talked with members of the String Cheese Incident and the band Hot Buttered Rum. They want to come, but where would they play?” asked Storment. “I know they would accept less [pay], because they are coming to Hawaii. Like in Kevin Costner’s movie: if you build it, they will come.”

Storment said she that while she loves island music, she’d love to see more of a variety of genres offered; rock and roll, hip hop and classical. “Most island residents don’t really look at going to concerts at the hotels,” she said. “We need a venue that will bring people together other than ballrooms at the hotels.”

“I’d love to see African music concerts,” said Sala Vonderheyden, who has sung vocals in a reggae band. She loves island music, reggae, Jawaiian and tries to attend every concert that comes to the Big Island.

As far as a new venue goes, many people feel a new amphitheater or concert hall should be situated away from neighbors. “We need something like [Honolulu’s] Blaisdell Arena here,” said Allegra Ortiz, 35, who works at Costco. “We have so much land around here and it could be built to hold big concerts and have lots of parking.” Ortiz said she would like to see new artists and local artists have a place to showcase their talent.

“We’re on an island...isolated, and lacking entertainment,” said Tor Koyanagi, 39, who has lived on the Big Island his entire life. “We need an outdoor venue that will accommodate musicians and bands, and they will draw the crowds.”