

WE'RE YOUNG, AND
WE'RE ALL ARTISTS.
WE'RE PRETTY ROOTED
IN THE COMMUNITY
DOING DIFFERENT
THINGS, BUT AS
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CITY WE LIVE IN.

Nate Eng



SPEAK EASY

In juxtaposition to the easy vibes of Hivemind is the grittier, urban feel of Speak Easy, hosted every few months at The Potentialist Workshop, 836 E. Second St. The first thing to know before literally getting in the door is the password—and it's not posted publicly. Anyone interested in the password has to directly message the Speak Easy Instagram account, @speakeasy775, or they can ask any one of the dozens of artists and performers who will post about the event on Facebook and Instagram.

Once in the doors, the audience is ushered to the performance space in the back. It's not flashy. The walls are brick, and there are blackout curtains affixed to the windows. There's dust in the air kicked up by a pack of partygoers getting down with the 808 bass drum pumping from the speakers. It's a scene that might harken back to the birth of hip-hop in the '70s in the South Bronx, led by cultural originators Kool Herc and Grand Master Flash. It's an homage to the roots of the genre, or at least that's the vision of Speak Easy's founder, Niles Quinn.

Bay Area transplant Quinn is interested in all facets of hip hop, including emceeing, graffiti, turn tables and dancing. He's been rapping and collaborating in Reno for years, and, like the Hivemind founders, he noticed a lack of local opportunities for what he wanted to see and hear in the music scene.

"All I ever saw was rappers coming from out of town, but there's no one from this city putting artists on from this city," said Quinn. "We're filling the void."

To create Speak Easy, he reached out to Reno artists of all kinds. In jest, they decided to go with a prohibition-era theme, and it

The next Speak Easy event is Friday, March 8, at the Potentialist Workshop, 836 E. 2nd St. at 8 p.m. The password is required for entry and a \$5 donation is requested.

stuck. Some people still show up in fedoras and flapper costumes, but there's no enforced dress-code.

What evolved is a grassroots hip-hop spectacle, where local acts like Redfield Clipper and Peavine Prophets spend time before each event dialing in their sets, collaborating with different musicians and producers.

Ruby Barrientos, an artist who has done live drawing at both Hivemind and Speak Easy described her process for her performance art:

"I just feel the energy in the space—positive energy from creators creating," she said. "It's not what people see on the regular in Reno. It's something different that Quinn is bringing to the table—that we all are, as a collective."

"I think Reno is moldable right now," said Nate Eng, a beat-maker and producer who goes by Enigma Beats. "It's changing so fast. We're young, and we're all artists. We're pretty rooted in the community, doing different things, but, as artists, we can really change the city we live in."

Eng is a regular performer at Speak Easy, but he also co-founded Hivemind with Bazooka Zac. He said that people have suggested he and his talented friends could consider moving to LA or other, bigger art scenes. They reject that idea. Eng and Quinn believe more in making Reno into the exact scene and the culture they want.

The lineup at Speak Easy changes with every event, usually flowing from live music and emceeing, to beat battles and kinetic breakdancing performances, with DJ sets mixed in. Painters and artists set up their easels on the outskirts of the dance floor. These aren't typical "rap battles" where rappers diss each other in their rhymes, however. Quinn won't tolerate hate speech or outright negativity. Every show ends with an open mic cypher.

"It's an open mic freestyle with heavy improvisation," said Quinn. "At this next one, we will actually have the live band laying down the grooves."

RAPPING IT UP

For audiences, the experiences at Speak Easy and Hivemind are diametrically different. But, in many ways, the events are the same. They're both organized and executed by cohorts of creatives all riffing off of each other's dynamism. Both events are building momentum through their contagious energy as well, with more attendees expected at each new event.

Zac Haley and Niles Quinn both envision a day when they can take their shows on the road, exposing Reno-based artists to communities beyond the 775. But neither of them envisioning selling-out in the financial sense. The money these events make at the door is just enough to keep the sound system on, so to speak. □

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