



An audience at a home in Reno enjoy a recent show through Sofar Reno, which hosts small venues and house concerts featuring local and traveling bands. COURTESY/SOFAR RENO

Music up close

Sofar Reno

True listening rooms are hard to come by in any town, let alone the bar-centric Reno music scene. A new series of shows with roots across the pond is aiming to change that, and with a twist that brings some fun mystery to the party.

Sofar Reno began on Aug. 30 and has already cultivated a loyal following of music fans willing to go along with its concept. You go to sofarsounds.com/reno and see what shows are coming up. Then you apply to get tickets to the show—all without knowing who the artists are or even the location, which is announced to your email 36 hours before it happens.

That sounds pretty elaborate, but Chelsea Rangel, the curator of Sofar Reno, believes it's part of Sofar's appeal.

"What people find interesting about it, not only here in Reno but all over the world, is that they want an experience," Rangel said. "They like the fact that it's invite-only. I love that people trust us with that, with curating shows. Even if you don't like all the artists, almost every guest finds at least one artist that they like and start following and supporting."

Sofar is actually a loose acronym for "songs from a room." Rangel said the concept for Sofar started in London 10 years ago, when two music fans were at a bar and couldn't hear the artist playing, so they decided to host their own show with eight of their friends in their living room.

It's grown considerably from there, with 444 cities worldwide hosting events, and close to half of those cities signed on to the Sofar site within the last two years.

Rangel also still runs Sofar in San Jose, California, which she started three years ago. She moved to Reno about a year ago.

"I knew that when I moved here that I wanted to start it in Reno," Rangel said. "It's such a prime city for it."

The first show, hosted in a backyard in Northwest Reno, featured two local acts—SoSol and Lumbercat—as well as Chief, a Santa Cruz, California, singer-songwriter who is a veteran of Sofar shows in the Bay Area. Rangel said that it was hard to find Reno artists to play that first show, but she's now receiving about seven requests to play a week from the Sofar Reno site.

"I'm not looking for an artist with a big following on a website," Rangel said. "I want to know, 'Can you play in a living room or to a crowd of people and hold them in the palm of your hands?' I'm really looking for raw talent. A lot of people get all flashy with what they present or they have Spotify links, but I always ask for links to them playing live, even if they can just send me something from their phone."

Because it's a literal worldwide network, it's possible for a Sofar artist in one town to book a whole tour just of Sofar shows. "That's one of the main goals, to help the artist use it as a tool for that," Rangel said.

Sofar shows feature a different venue every time, although there may be repeaters in a city over the course of a year. For instance, We Olive & Wine Bar in Reno hosted the September show and was interested in doing another Sofar show down the road, Rangel said.

Rangel said she's been happy with the Reno artists she's booked. "Everyone has exceeded my expectations," she said. "I truly want to go with that gut, or ear, or whatever you want to call it." □

The next Sofar Reno show is Nov. 23 at a secret location. If you want to attend a show, host a show or play for Sofar Reno, you can get more information at sofarsounds.com/reno.

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