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A&C



The Bon Voyage Blue Lamp show is
Saturday, Dec. 21 at 8 p.m.

PHOTO BY MAXFIELD MORRIS

Goodbye Blue Lamp

Artists mourn loss of venue

BY OLIVIA MONAHAN

As 2020 approaches, Sacramento prepares to wave goodbye to one of its longtime staples of live music. The Blue Lamp is hosting its last event on Saturday, Dec. 21: the Bon Voyage Blue Lamp party.

For a little more than six years, Gabi and Ben Garcia have acted as a cornerstone of Sacramento's independent music landscape with their all-inclusive venue, the Blue Lamp, which they acquired in 2013. Originally a strip club in the 1960s and '70s—hence the lack of eye-level windows and blackened walls—the venue in its varied incarnations has welcomed some of underground's finest in a wide variety of genres.

Nef the Pharaoh, Hobo Johnson, the surviving members of The Ramones, '90s hip-hop legends Souls of Mischief—there has been no shortage of headliners willing to perform on Blue Lamp's weathered stage in front of its intimate, die-hard crowd. For some, it was not the history of the place that drew them; it was the people who ran it.

"Gabi and Ben didn't just run a venue, they made that place a home," said local artist April Walker, who performs as SpaceWalker. "They are the only spot to welcome everyone in. Whether it was some crazy death metal, or hip-hop, or some clown telling jokes and juggling fire, they just wanted to see folks happy and watch their city thrive."

By the way, the fire-throwing clown? That happened. So did an all-male revue show, the Black Arts Matter burlesque shows, the Drunk Poetry shows, the Stephon Clark fundraiser, the Planned Parenthood show ... the list goes on. With a dedication to the local art scene, the Garcias rarely found a show they didn't like, an idea they wouldn't try or a local act that they wouldn't give the opportunity.

"Loading in your equipment felt like showing up to your parents' house for dinner," reminisced Vinnie Guidara, who has thrown a variety of shows there.

Now the dynamic duo is relocating. A year ago, they purchased Cafe Colonial, the historic Stockton Boulevard venue that was in danger of closing for good until the two swooped in. They'll continue to impact Sacramento music, art and culture for years to come in one of the few all-ages venues in the city.

Gabi and Ben Garcia have provided welcoming spaces, especially within ignored music communities.

"Sacramento doesn't love us like that," local hip-hop artist Flossalini recounted. "They see hip-hop, and their brain immediately goes to whatever awful stereotype they have in their head—and because of that, a lot of local venues just wouldn't touch us. But not Gabi and Ben. They stood with us by giving us a space to perform."

While the fate of the building is currently a mystery, it is already sold. Gabi says this final show will be a send-off into the pair's next chapter.

"We're looking forward to moving on, the youth that we'll get to affect," Gabi said. "It's our Bon Voyage. We promise to send Sacramento a postcard from the other side of the world after we sail away on our yacht."

Get out to Blue Lamp on Dec. 21 to wish it a proper goodbye. There will be yacht rock playlists, finger foods, strong drinks, tons of laughs and probably a lot of tears.