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AGGIELIFE

THE SOUND OF MUSIC MSC Town Hall helps local bands, brings national acts to A&M



J.P. BEATO III • THE BATTALION

Country megastar Garth Brooks blasted in to Reed Arena atop a white piano and charged the audience with "Back When the Old Stuff Was New."

By Nishat Fatima
THE BATTALION

Many would argue that College Station isn't a mecca for live music fans, garage bands don't have a chance to get exposure if they are from Texas A&M and a "concert" in College Station consists of a fake cowboy singing Dolly Parton covers at the Dixie Chicken.

These people haven't heard of MSC Town Hall. Although at first glance, the organization may seem like a group of Aggies who love music, Town Hall has a goal and purpose that strives for much more.

Formed in 1950, MSC Town Hall is an organization with a rare mission — to bring together Aggies who have a common love for music and bring local and nationally renowned musical performers to the A&M campus.

Brian Donohue, a senior electrical engineering major and executive of Student Power Amplifier Member, said Town Hall's purpose comes from its association with the Memorial Student Center.

"We are a part of the MSC, and they are also our sponsor," Donohue said. "Part of the mission statement of the MSC is to promote art and culture. Our specific mission in Town Hall is to promote live music."

Donohue said Town Hall aims to be an outlet of exposure for local bands.

"If there is a student band that wants to be heard, we do all the publicity work for them," he said.

Donohue said all types of musicians are welcome to approach Town Hall for a helping hand.

"Most of the time, bands come to us," Donohue said. "We try to help all kinds of musicians, because ultimately, we don't see music as a competition."

Clayton Sheppard, a junior accounting major and director of University programs for Town Hall, said one of the club's purposes for helping local performers is to give A&M music lovers a dose of local variety.

"There is a lot of music in this town, and we are the organization that wants people on campus to hear it," Sheppard said. "We want to get music fans plugged in to the local scene."

Sheppard said many Town Hall events are geared toward giving local bands a chance to expose their talents.

"Once a month at Rumours we have an open-microphone acoustic coffee house event, twice a week we have "Lunchbox" where live musicians play at Rudder Fountain at noon, and several times a month we have "Battle of the Bands" events," Sheppard said.

Sheppard said other on-campus events that Town Hall has produced are the Fish Talent Show, the Hip-Hop Free Style contest and its main 30-act "Battle of the Bands" which is held each semester.

Mikey Powe, a senior psychology major and member of the band Fly, Mordecai said local bands benefit greatly from Town Hall.

"They circulate flyers for bands, put out notices and basically get the word out for gigs," Powe said. "Helping locals artists is a big deal

for them."

Powe said Town Hall helps members in ways other than publicizing their bands.

"You don't have to be in Town Hall to get help from them," he said. "If you are a member though, you have the chance to be a part of a large community of other musicians. Personally, I met members of my band in Town Hall."

Powe said without the assistance of Town Hall, it would be difficult for student musicians to get known on campus.

Sheppard said although one of Town Hall's purposes is to help local acts gain recognition, that the organization also focuses on bringing famous performers to Aggieland.

"In the past, we have helped bring musicians such as Nickelback, Live and Garth Brooks," he said. "We have also hosted performances by a variety of people, including Everclear, Jimmy Fallon, Dixie Chicks, Robert Earl Keen, Lyle Lovett, Jars of Clay and Caedmon's Call."

Sheppard said while Town Hall does not have a specific criteria for inviting bands to play at A&M, that the organization does keep the Aggie audience in mind while choosing performers.

"We try to get bands that are good for our market," he said. "We want to get performers that can make money, and are fairly mainstream, since College Station isn't accessible to many underground bands."

Sheppard said although Town Hall strives to promote live music, that ultimately the club and its members are avid music fans who came together to share their musical tastes.

"In Town Hall, people can just chill out and listen to music together," Sheppard said. "It's also a good way to meet other music fans and talk about different artists. Our purpose is to promote an atmosphere of music in the serious environment of academic stress."

Danny Montemayer, a sophomore philosophy major and member of Town Hall, said one of the best aspects of the organization is that membership is open to anybody who loves music.

"I don't even play any instruments," he said. "Being in Town Hall gives you the ability to share a passion for music. The club also means sharing and getting exposed to all kinds of new music."

Melissa Cox, a senior marketing major said, she has learned a lot about music since she joined Town Hall.

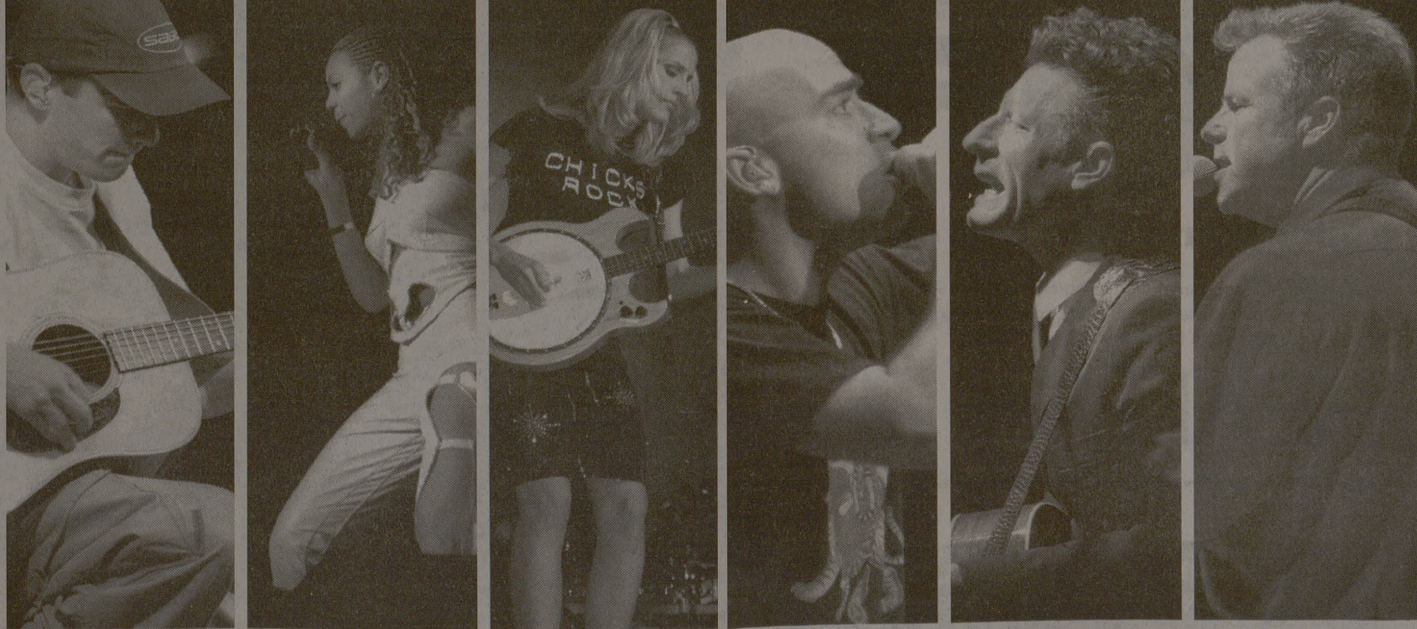
"When I first joined, I wanted to learn about new bands," she said. "(Now), I like to come to talk to other people about music. Town Hall is a great outlet for sharing and expanding your musical variety. I never knew so much about the local music scene either until I joined."

Cox said Town Hall events that focus on exposure for bands are effective because they reach the student body in different ways.

"The Lunchbox concerts in particular give bands a lot of exposure," she said. "Since a large number of people pass through the MSC area during lunchtime, many often stop by the performance area to relax and enjoy the music," she said.

Applications for Town Hall are accepted every semester in January and September. Students who are interested in joining Town Hall or are a part of a local band and wish to receive assistance from the organization can call 845-1515 for more information.

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