

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Rock your socks off

Seeking an alternative to country, Aggies find venues where they can rock out

By Will Knous
THE BATTALION

Brad Otts doesn't just listen to music, he experiences it. For him, rock music is his venue to self-expression.

"Rock is the most completely emotionally liberating expression I have found," said Otts, a senior recreation parks and tourism sciences major. "You don't have to be politically motivated to listen to rock music. You just have to enjoy music, at least be open to it and find the uniqueness in music. You can at least respect it."

Rock music is an outlet for passion and aspiration, it provides common ground for students and teachers, and sometimes it can be an opportunity for growth. But so much of the time, those opportunities don't come here at A&M.

When an outside observer travels to College Station and sees Texas A&M and its students, the last thing that enters the mind is, "This must be the rock music capital of the world."

Rock music does have a presence here, but it might just be a little harder to find at a school known for its agriculture and trucks.

"There is a rock culture everywhere — it is just that it is not as big at A&M," said Rani Haykal, a senior biology major. "There's going to be a rock culture no matter where you go."

Rock is not just about the sound of the music. "Rock culture has to do with the emotion of the music through bands that express it. It's supposed to be for feeling ... the way the music keeps you going — it's a drive," said Victor Lopez, a senior international studies major.

Haykal agrees. He wears clothing supporting the bands he listens to, attends their concerts and buys their albums. Endorsement can take many different forms.

"Why keep quiet about something you like?" Haykal said.

"Everyone else here has an opinion about something ... but I will wear band T-shirts and all that — wearing the clothes, listening to the music, going to the concerts. I try not to be too obnoxious about it."

Serious rock enthusiasts hold fast to their fixations.

"I'm not going to drop what I like to conform to what everyone else likes," Haykal said. "I liked all this before and did it all before, and I plan to continue as long as I like it."

Some students believe the lack of a notable rock scene at A&M to be the result of the surrounding community. College Station is known throughout the college world as a bastion of conservatism, and this might be at least part of the reason there is not much here for the rock community. However, some say the rock scene is still here, which is not surprising considering College Station's student friendly atmosphere.

"There is no serious rock culture here. Most people consider rock culture more liberal, and when you live in a conservative town it is not going to be out there as much, or you are not going to see it as much — it is going to be more of an underground thing," Haykal said.

Despite their devotion, rock fans often find little to support them in the surrounding community.

"I see more of a country scene here — it is very rare you see people into the rock scene, I guess because it isn't brought up here yet," Lopez said.

Due to the scarcity of outlets for rock music in College Station, rock fans must travel elsewhere to get their fixes. Just like fanatical baseball supporters take ballpark tours, faithful rock fans have always

made trips for their love.

"You have your guys who will drive to different cities for concerts because you know you won't get them here. So I, and a bunch of my friends, will go to Dallas or something to catch a show," Haykal said.

Haykal has been able to get up close and personal with some of his favorite bands.

"I was at a Toadies Halloween show and I met this dude in the crowd and we got to talking about how much we love the Toadies," Haykal said. "Anyway, right before the concert, he told me he was the Toadies road manager and he gave me and my sister backstage, all-access passes. I ended up watching the entire show on the stage and then got to chill with the Toadies, the Hunger and Vallejo after the show till around 5 a.m."

But most individuals still believe there is some rock culture at A&M, even if it is not particularly pronounced — and a few can prove it.

"You knew there was a rock culture here when the Toadies came to Northgate and it sold out in a couple of minutes — so it is here, just not much brings it out," Haykal said.

But there are some who do come out and preach their love of rock 'n' roll.

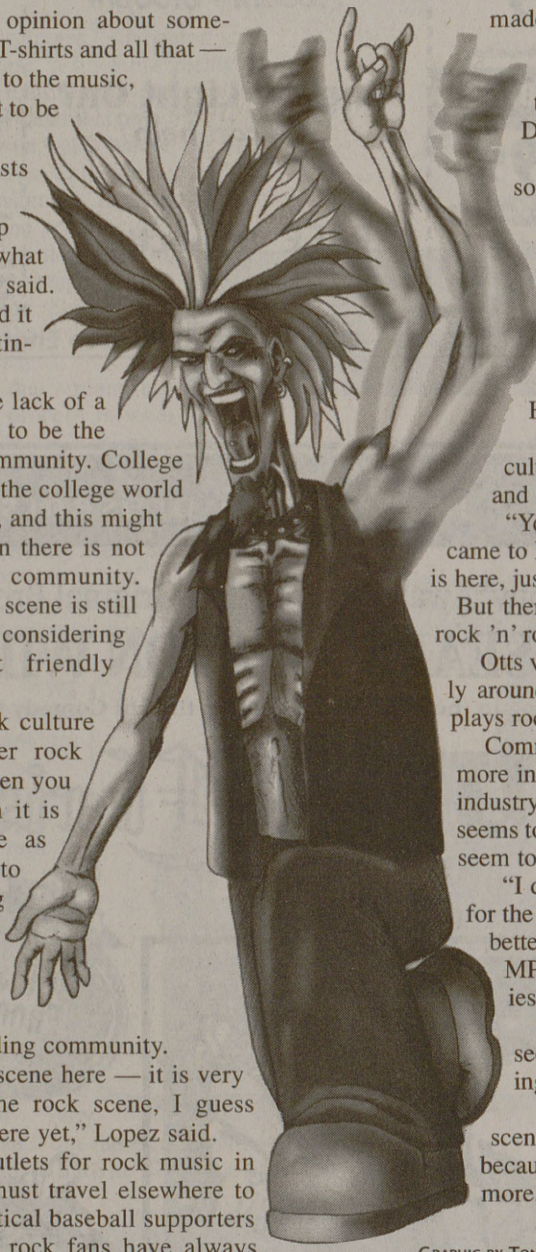
Otts vocally supports all types of rock music, playing regularly around Northgate and the College Station area. Otts says he plays rock music and supports it because of how it affects him.

Community is important to the rock music scene, but on a more individual level, one of the largest concerns for the music industry today is illegal file-sharing. But the local music scene seems to only benefit from downloading. Even A&M professors seem to be in downloading's corner.

"I don't think that MP3 file trading has done anything bad for the local rock scene. If anything I would say its existence is better for local bands. (A local band) can compress a disc into MP3s and get their music out there," said performance studies professor Harris Berger.

Students are even more receptive to downloading and see it as inevitable as well as needed to bolster the sputtering rock scene in College Station.

"I think (downloading) might help the local music scene, I mean downloading might turn some heads here because rock music needs to be brought here and recognized more," Lopez said.



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