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Living the alt music dream at olde club

by Samantha Herron · November 12, 2015



I grew up in Miami, Florida. The music scene, if you can even call it that, is uninspired. Nothing in Miami exists that is analogous to the underground house show scenes of Philly or Brooklyn or Portland or some other hip American breeding ground. A dismal public transportation system demands dependence on personal vehicles (so lame!) and honestly, I can't really conceive of an area in Miami dingy and indie-cool enough to support a hypothetical music culture. So, with no

means of travelling to music venues that don't exist, I was robbed during my upbringing of any opportunity to stand in dark rooms and nod my head along to skinny guys playing the guitar. So in my high school days, I reassured myself that college, for sure, would be rife with head-nodding opportunities.

Obviously, I'm in college now, but unfortunately, I'm far less interested than I was in high school in being someone who cares about local bands. The entire city of Philadelphia (the best punk rock scene in America, says Vice) is at my disposal, but last night I was too lazy to even plug in my phone to keep listening to Taylor Swift's "Wildest Dreams" on repeat. I'd be really hard pressed to actually leave campus in search of DIY basement shows and PBR-sipping camaraderie. Luckily, however, my indifference to seeking out bands has been a matter of little importance — Olde Club brings live music to me anyway.

Swarthmore's Olde Club, an all-purpose space located in what used to be a frat house, functions most regularly as an intimate music venue for Swattie and non-Swattie performers alike. The space is ideal: its narrow room, dark floors, and vague patina of dirt lend themselves easily to the facilitation of a cozy

moodiness, perfect for toe-tapping, chitchatting, headbanging, swaying, or whatever else it is people do to music these days. The main room is sparse but for a stage usually covered in cables and monitor speakers and cute people holding instruments. The only wall adornment besides some drafty windows is a hyperactive flashing light grid thing that distracts me when I'm drunk. The staircase creaks, the bathroom sink sprays water everywhere, and the basement is boarded up, but Olde Club feels worn-in, not run-down. Nestled into the well-groomed bastion of academia that is Swarthmore College, Olde Club stands as a testament to the clumsy, the sweaty, the loud.

While upperclassmen love to tell me Olde Club “used to be so cool” before the 2014 alcohol and party policy changes, before the renovations and the sealing off of the fabled basement, I have no barometer besides my own enjoyment for what makes a music space cool to begin with. Prior to college, I'd never been to a venue smaller than The Fillmore Miami Beach — a big, bureaucratic, 3000-seat theater with plush chairs and chandeliers where I once saw Vampire Weekend in ninth grade and hated it because people kept squishing me in the pit. While I get the sense that people more deeply entrenched than myself in the classification of “cool” and “uncool” music venues

might be less interested in playing a dinky stage for a meager-ish audience of kids destined for grad school, Olde Club is the closest I get to my high school-era hipster daydream.

Though the policy changes and interior renovations were certainly speed bumps last year, students have been working hard this fall to revive some of Olde Club's lost energy. So far this year, Olde Club has already hosted two student band performances, an open mic, and most recently, a line-up of non-Swattie acts: Joy Again, Shakai Mondai, and Furnsss. A WSRN Hip Hop Showcase is set for this upcoming Friday and the rap duo EarthGang is slated to perform the Saturday after. In addition to stage performances, the space has been used for parties thrown by student organizations: RnM, SASS, SOLIS, and SQU just this semester. Unlike the beer-sticky darkness of the frats, and the cutesy dance party tone of Paces, Olde Club boasts a coolness and versatility that allows a variety student efforts to, both literally and figuratively, take center stage.

Honey Pickup, Modern Rhombus, Altair, and SIDENAIL make up the bulk of the college's music scene and gave strong performances at both student band shows this fall. While any of our bands, by my assessment, could hold their own on some off-campus stage, part of Olde Club's appeal, I think, is that the

band members are so often familiar faces. My extended friend group crowds near the front to, duh, listen to some sick tunes, but also to dance in support of our other friends on stage. Olde Club gives me the space to simultaneously be both the alt music dream girl I never could be in Miami and a proud Swattie who gets psyched about watching her schoolmates kill it on stage.

The low-key cigarettes-and-standing-around vibe of an Olde Club show offers a very different scene from the frats or Pub Nite. Instead of bracing myself for a high energy night of Top-40 tunes and bearing witness to dance floor make outs, I can feel assured that enjoying Olde Club will require little of me. I can socialize outside by the WRC, mosh by the stage, or stand alone and stare at the performance. The mood changes with the genre of music, with the ebb and flow of the audience, with the steady intake of beer. After chitchatting with friends about the bands' sets, the night usually ends for me with a mild buzz and pizza delivery. While Olde Club's edgy talent show feel only inches me slightly closer to the local music connoisseurship I dreamed about, I'm always looking forward to its next event.

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