

# the SCENESD



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**GREGORY  
PORTER**



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# JAZZ IN PINK

AT THE SAN DIEGO SMOOTH JAZZ FESTIVAL

Article and Photos By Vince Meehan

A very cool surprise at this year's San Diego Smooth Jazz Festival was a special performance by Jazz In Pink, an all-girl jazz ensemble based out of Los Angeles and put together by jazz powerhouse vocalist Gail Jhonson. These girls hit the stage and rocked the house with a full set of jazz, hip-hop and R&B. Led by the powerhouse vocals of Jhonson, these girls gave the male dominated line-up a run for their money, which she said was the idea. The girls were dressed in pink, and dressed to the nines as well. Jhonson put this ensemble together as a way for women to get a start into the Jazz scene and to get her musicians regular gigs at the events.

"Jazz In Pink is women making music a choice, we get together to empower, inspire and provide leadership and mentorship to have a good career, ya know?" Jhonson noted. "In this male-dominated business, we feel like we really want to make a space for women in jazz."

Jazz In Pink was a definite highlight of the San Diego Smooth Jazz Festival, and the crowd responded accordingly. The well-dressed crowd were dancing and grooving in the aisles while the ensemble powered through their set. They boasted the tightest rhythm section of the day with drummer Tiffani "Worldwide" Walker paired with bassist Kya Karine who really stood out with "in-the-pocket" grooves, accented with occasional slaps and pops to keep it legit. Jhonson's voice was part of a one-two punch, with her prowess on keyboards being the second pow. Her daughters joined her onstage and showed everybody that jazz chops do run in the family! Another highlight of their set was saxophonist Tomoka who absolutely killed it on stage and played flute on a few songs as well.

Rady Shell at Jacobs Park is probably the most beautiful venue in San Diego to see a concert, and the design and sightlines are stellar. Also on stage for a hot summer's day of music were Boney James, Alex Bugnon, Jeff Ryan, Greg Manning and San Diego kid Gregory Porter. The San Diego Smooth Jazz Festival is produced by Rainbow Promotions, a company that puts on Jazz festivals all across the west coast. This is the sixth festival here in San Diego and they are in their 36th year of hosting jazz festivals. The big news for Rainbow is that they are hosting their first festival in Palm Desert this October, which is set to rival the shows in San Diego and Long Beach. The 6th Annual San Diego Smooth Jazz Festival was another success and everybody is already looking forward to next year.

The set by Jazz In Pink solidified the fact that girls do have a place in jazz, and in this case, outperformed most of the men! Jhonson noted that Jazz in Pink also helps young women who want to break into jazz by hosting band camps as well as fundraisers to support the programs. She said she would be hosting her third annual Charity Golf Challenge at De Bell Golf Course on September 4 in Burbank. "We got a lot of jazz players, we play some straight-ahead, we play some funk, some hip-hop, but it's all about good music and good musicianship. And that's what I really try to encourage!"



(Left to right) Jazz In Pink's drummer Tiffani "Worldwide" Walker, The SceneSD's Roger Friend and Gail Jhonson

# SAN DIEGO

## TOP 5 CONCERTS / SPOTLIGHT EVENTS

**JULY 12**

**WAR / THE BELLY UP TAVERN, SOLANA BEACH**

Led by former San Diegan, keyboard player Lonnie Jordan, you 'll hear all the 1970's era hits, including "Cisco Kid" and "Low Rider," with the nights biggest sing-a-long sure to be for 1975's "Why Can't We Be Friends."

**JULY 12**

**EUPHORIA BRASS BAND / LOU LOU'S JUNGLE ROOM, NORTH PARK**

San Diego's hottest new nightspot, Lou Lou's, is located at the Lafayette Hotel, feature a great mix of music on their clamshell stage. On July 12 they'll welcome acclaimed New Orleans styled jazz group, Euphoria Brass Band, playing a mix of vintage classics and like-minded originals, setting Lou Lou's into party mode from the first note.

**JULY 14**

**JOSH WEINSTEIN / THE MUSIC BOX, LITTLE ITALY**

One of San Diego's finest keyboardists, Josh Weinstein is seen with many bands, but here he is concentrating on his own music, celebrating the release of his latest album, Mind the Gap. It's also the 20th Anniversary of his first solo release, Petty Alchemy. Opening acts include Chloe Lou and the Liddells and The Brothers Burns with special guests set to include Gregory Page, Johnny Vernazza, Earl Thomas, Jeff Berkley, Ariel Levine and Chloe Lou.

**JULY 17**

**THE HAPPY TOGETHER TOUR / HUMPHREY'S CONCERTS BY THE BAY AT SHELTER ISLAND**

A veritable jukebox of 1960's era hitmakers. On hand will be The Turtles with Ron Dante of The Archies / The Cuff Links, Jay & The Americans, The Association, Badfinger, The Vogues, and The Cowsills. if you've ever wanted to catch these wonderful performers in concert, now's the time.

**JULY 23**

**JEWEL / RADY SHELL AT JACOBS PARK, SAN DIEGO**

Touring in support of her new album, The Portal: A Meditative Journey, hometown heroine Jewel returns to San Diego for a show alongside Melissa Etheridge. At last count Jewel's 1995 debut album, Pieces of You, has sold in excess of 12 million copies in the U.S. alone, it's singles "You Were Meant For Me" and "Who Will Save Your Soul," are now standards in their own right.

By: Bart Mendoza



Josh Weinstein



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# BARLEY AND SWORD BREWERY

By Vince Meehan

There's a new brewery in town that is about to celebrate its first birthday. Barley and Sword is located in North Park alongside two other breweries in what amounts to be a beer lovers' picnic area off El Cajon Boulevard.



Mike Howell is the founder of Barley and Sword, which has a bit of a Medieval Times theme to it. This comes from his background in battle reenactments as well as a passion for European beers.

Barley and Swords' menu features Irish Reds, a London Brown, an Irish Oatmeal Stout and German traditionals including Helles and Kolsch. He even features a Berliner Weisse, a traditional German Sour where the drinker can choose from a selection of syrup to add to the glass. This place is a pub crawler's paradise with its collection of Bitters, Stouts and Ales.

Howell has been running the Barley and Sword by himself as well as working full time at his traditional job. That of course was a handful to do, but he now has help with the brewing operation. "Up until recently it's been just me," Howell explained while pouring an amber-to-dark-brown flight of beers for a thirsty patron. "From grain to glass, it was just me. But recently I've been able to add an assistant brewer, and that helps out a lot!"

Howell admits to having one and only one IPA, but he makes it in the original 80's style before things went all dank. He also pays homage to the original Anchor Steam beer with his Sawmill Steam California Common, so both of these beers are a throwback to a time in California's beer history that probably a lot of North Park hipsters would not know about.

Howell mans the bar every Monday evening after five so he can connect with his patrons and they can ask him beer questions. There is typically a food truck of rotating styles serving the small rooms and outdoor picnic tables that make up this unique beer compound. The area is both bike and dog friendly which makes it the perfect North Park destination no matter where you come from!



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EnterTalk Media &  
Local Umbrella Media

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The SCENESD is published for the entertainment fans of San Diego.

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# GREGORY PORTER ELECTRIFIES THE 5TH ANNUAL SAN DIEGO SMOOTH JAZZ FESTIVAL

By Roger Friend & Quotes from Vince Meehan Interview

The 5th Annual San Diego Smooth Jazz Festival, held on June 23, 2024, at The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park in San Diego, CA, was an event that will be remembered for years to come. The night was highlighted by the extraordinary performance of San Diego hero **Gregory Porter**. For many, including myself, this was the first live encounter with the iconic vocalist, and it can be described in one word: magnificent.

From the moment the band opened, with a slow, soulful groove, it was clear that this night was going to be special. The musicians, each a master of their craft, were focused on creating the perfect musical foundation for what was about to unfold. Gregory Porter, a vocalist of a new generation, then took us on a journey which was both musically and emotionally profound.

Gregory Porter, who hails from San Diego and attended San Diego State University, brought a unique blend of influences to the stage. His music reflects a depth and authenticity that can only come from years of dedication and passion for his craft. Speaking about his return to the San Diego stage, Porter said, "San Diego is part of my musical journey. It was an honor to be invited and we had a beautiful performance tonight."

Comparing Gregory Porter to other artists doesn't do him justice. He is a complex amalgamation of legendary soulful singers like Lou Rawls and Luther Vandross, with a hint of Nat King Cole. His smooth, soothing, and inspiring baritone voice, when amplified through the fine-tuned Rady Shell sound system, transcended the ordinary and became a spiritual experience. This performance was a highlight of the festival and an evening I will remember for a long time.

Each song was a new journey, both musically and emotionally. The band provided ample space for each uber-talented musician to shine. They weaved through verses, choruses, and solos with ease, never resorting to flashy arpeggios or slick licks. Instead, they delivered pure, expressive music that touched the soul. The Hammond B3 organ often transported the crowd to a place of spiritual reverence, while Tivon Pennicott's sweet tenor sax melodies added layers of emotion and depth. Every note, every melody was designed to elevate Porter's songs to an even higher level—not in terms of volume, but in spirit and soul, dynamics rarely heard or felt these days.



The chemistry between Gregory Porter and his band was palpable. The trust and camaraderie they shared on stage translated into a seamless and organic performance. Each musician was given the space to showcase their individual talents, yet they always returned to the collective groove that anchored the performance. It was a masterclass in musical interplay and a testament to the years of experience and mutual respect among the band members.

As a newcomer to Gregory Porter's live performances, I wish I had a set list to fully appreciate the titles in his library. However, the experience was no less impactful. Chip Crawford, Porter's pianist and arranger, showcased his brilliance not only as an arranger but also as a performer. Sometimes switching to a vintage Fender Rhodes keyboard, with its nostalgic analog tones, took us back to the golden days of soulful jazz.

Gregory eloquently introduced each song but also spoke about the influence of San Diego on his music, emphasizing the city's vibrant jazz scene. "San Diego has a versatile music scene including all different types of jazz. The sand, the sea, the energy, and the mix of cultures are super important. That energy in my music was cultivated here in San Diego over 20 years ago when I lived here," he shared. This sentiment was palpable throughout the performance, as Porter's music resonated deeply with this local audience.

The performance made it abundantly clear that this is what we, as a society, need right now. Uplifting, caring, and respectful music—creative, thought-provoking, generous, and real. Gregory Porter's music embodies these qualities, making him a beacon of hope and inspiration in today's music scene. This concert was not just a highlight of the festival; it was a reminder of the power of music to heal, uplift, and bring people together.

One particularly memorable moment was when the band shifted into a gospel-infused piece. The Hammond B3, with its rich, full-bodied sound, paired perfectly with Porter's voice, creating a soundscape that felt both timeless and contemporary. It was as if the audience was transported to a different place and time, where music was not just heard but deeply felt. Another highlight was the interplay between Porter and saxophonist Tivon Pennicott, as his tenor sax melodies were not just accompaniments but dialogues with Porter's voice. Their musical conversation added a layer of intimacy and immediacy to the performance, making each song feel like a spontaneous creation rather than a rehearsed routine.

Porter reminisced about his early days in the San Diego jazz community, expressing gratitude for the support he received. "A person who really helped me was trumpet player Gilbert Castellanos. He was super encouraging, pushing me to get on stage. The great Daniel Jackson, saxophone player, and many other San Diego musicians really helped me," Porter said. His heartfelt acknowledgment of these mentors added a touching layer to the evening.

In closing, Gregory Porter's performance at the 5th Annual San Diego Smooth Jazz Festival was more than just a concert; it was a transformative experience. His ability to blend soul, jazz, and profound lyricism into a cohesive whole is a testament to his mastery as an artist. For someone experiencing Porter live for the first time, like me, it was an awakening—a realization of the power of music to transcend boundaries and connect souls.

#### **About Roger Friend:**

*Roger's musical career spans over four decades of diverse experience. Touring in more than 100 countries, he has played with artists such as Tom Jones, ABBA, Tom Scott, The Rippingtons, BB King, and Dweezil Zappa. He has performed for kings, queens, presidents, and other distinguished audiences. Roger has won two Grammys and two Emmys, further solidifying his place in the music world. As an educator and percussion facilitator, he inspires aspiring drummers through private lessons and workshops, while also working with leading drum and percussion manufacturers. For more information, visit [rogerfriend.com](http://rogerfriend.com)*



Tivon Pennicott

Photo By Jack Cohen



# PACIFIC RECORDS COMMUNITY NIGHT

By: Bart Mendoza

The annual Concerts on the Green Summer Concert series at Kate Sessions Park kicks off on July 21 with Community Night, featuring the music of Point Loma-based Pacific Records. The free, all-ages, mini music festival will include performances from five of the label's recording artists: reggae favorites Sandollar, singer-songwriter Charlie Rae, funk and soul powerhouse Jonny Tarr, Hawaiian-themed combo Slack Key Ohana and songstress Kela Sako.

It's an amazing lineup of talent. Sandollar headlined the 2023 OB Street Fair and their album, *Under the Water*, won that year's SDMA for "Best World Music Album."

Meanwhile, Tarr's latest album, *The Rules*, took home a 2024 SDMA for both "Best Pop Album" and "Album of the Year." Additionally, Slack Key Ohana's song, "Nahenahe Ka Leo o Ka Wahine U'i" also took home a 2024 SDMA, for "Best World Music Song."

This concert is the result of a label-themed event held earlier this year. "A local industry exec / promoter heard about our showcase at Music Box," said Pacific Records CEO, Brian Witkin, who also performs with Slack Key Ohana. "The promoter wanted to do something similar to that showcase, but with a smaller lineup and more focused beach theme, because of the coastal venue of course. So, we tried to focus on the artists that fit that criteria and went from there to build out the bill with them."

A photograph of a band performing on stage. The band consists of several members: a drummer on the left, a guitarist, a keyboardist, a drummer, a trumpeter, a saxophonist, and a bassist on the right. They are performing under a large, illuminated sign that reads "SANDOLLAR" in a stylized, bubbly font. The sign is decorated with tropical graphics, including palm trees, a sun, and a city skyline. The stage is lit with purple and blue lights.

# SANDOLLAR

How did Witkin pick the artists to take part from such a large roster? “Well, it’s a team effort always and in this case the promoter had an idea of what they were going for, so we just connected them with what we thought would be the best fit.” The show will be great fun for the audience, as well as a way for these artists to promote their latest releases. “Both Kela and Charlie have new music out around the showcase date,” Witkin said.

“This is deliberate because we try to tie in any releases that artists have with other opportunities whenever possible. For an artist to launch a successful music release, it’s really important to have more than just a single or album dropping. Unless you are a superstar, dropping just an album or single on its own is not enough to get press or gain new listeners. So, label showcases are an opportunity for the label to provide added value to our artists.” Multi-band events are common, but label centric festivals like this are rare. “Well, I think we have a very diverse roster and that helps in a lot of situations, including this one. We have something for everybody at Pacific Records!”

All of the day’s performers will feature special material in their sets. Pacific Records latest signing, Charlie Rae will sing her new single, “You Gotta Know When.” Meanwhile, Slack Key Ohana will be joined by Kela Sako to perform the song, “Coming Home,” from their latest album, Hawaiian Cowboy. “We also will be performing brand new material that we haven’t released yet,” Witkin said. Tarr is planning to go big for this show. “Yeah. We are planning to be the first band on record to cause a major earthquake,” he joked. “I am just stoked that I’m going to be bringing my full tilt, eleven-piece electro disco ensemble, with horns and dance moves and all that caper. I recently added a three-piece brass section to the lineup again, so I feel like my world is complete.”

For Witkin this special edition of Concerts on the Green is the perfect mix of life and work. “I’m a self-proclaimed beach bum, so it’s always great when I’m able to perform and / or work by the beach,” he said. “Of course, I’m looking forward to performing the most. It’s going to be a great day. Nothing beats performing live.”

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**MUSIC NEWS**

By: Bart Mendoza

**The Slightly Dirty Summer Tour**, headlined by reggae heroes Slightly Stoopid (Pictured Above) kicks off on July 11 in Cleveland, OH, wrapping up on September 1 in Oklahoma City, OK. Meanwhile they will also be headliners at two festivals: Reggae Rise Up on October 5 in Las Vegas, and Closer to the Sun in Riviera Maya, MX on December 11 - 15.

**The Loons** are heading to Europe for a month-long tour! They open in Madrid on June 27 and wrap up on July 6 in Mardi Gras, Coruna.

**New band alert!** The Astral Stone Blues Experiment is a new all-star blues influenced quartet, featuring Gino Meregillano (guitar/vocals), Bob Sale (drums/vocals), Kurt Rosenbaum (bass/vocals) and Josh Weinstein (keyboards).

Blues combo, **The Linda Berry Band** is heading into the studio to record their debut single, "Going Back Where I Belong."

Congrats to Blink 182, who's 2004 single "I Miss You," was certified 2 X Platinum by the BPI last month.

**After more than three decades producer Jeff Forrest is closing down his iconic Doubletime Studios and heading to Europe.** The list of bands who have recorded there is massive, and includes the likes of Blink 182, Rocket From The Crypt, As I Lay Dying, Pierce the Veil and Agent Orange. A going away party is set for The Casbah on August 27. More details tba.

**Fuzz Huzzi** is hosting an album release show for their new disc, *Waiting on the Sun*, at The Ramona Mainstage on August 10.

**C. Gibbs** is celebrating the 28 year anniversary of his first album, with a short tour including shows on both coasts, Brooklyn (July 12) and San Diego (July 21) at the Casbah.

**The Dave Gilbert Band has released a new EP, 3**, featuring, appropriately enough, three new original songs. "I'm always writing, and I want to release as much material as possible," Gilbert said. "We never know when our time is finally up. I believe in the old adage 'Never Say Die' so I just keep at it," he continued. "Some days a person has to really push themselves and other days the magic just seems to happen. At one point I was playing covers so much that it felt like work and I needed to remember why I started playing guitar in the first place back in 1969. That helped rekindle my passion for writing, singing and playing. I've just always loved the electric guitar!"





**Guitarist Rob Shinno of Hemisphere is working on a solo album with jazz guitar legend Peter Sprague behind the board.** “(This new album is) a passion that has been burning since my 20's,” he said. “The album, to be released on March 1st, 2025, with our good friends Tinderbox Music, will be a collection of original 80's tinged pop-dream-rock tracks.” Guests on the upcoming release include Max Zape (keyboards) and Jon Hartford (guitar).

**Trey Hill** has a new EP due September 14, *The Search For Something Good*, first single; “Coast Highway,” out now. “The debut single from the new EP, is a track written after a decade’s long battle with cocaine and alcohol,” he said. “Now, sober, the EP is a musical novel about the depths of addiction, and the sweeter life that follows.” The Trey Hill Band next performs on August 16 as part of the Dinner & A Concert free music series at El Cajon’s Prescott Promenade.

**Metal favorites As I Lay Dying** head out on tour this summer, opening on July 9 at the Catalyst in Santa Cruz and wrapping up at San Diego’s The Observatory in North Park.

**Reggae favorite Skyler Lutes** wraps up a two-week tour with *Fayuca* on July 27 at Mrs. Olson’s in Oxnard.

**Singer-songwriter Charlie Rae** has signed with Pacific Records, with her first single, “You Gotta Know When,” out on July 19. This fall she’ll be appearing in the Stella Artois Lounge at Pechanga Arena prior to Kacey Musgraves show on October 1.

**Rocket from the Crypt** will be taking part in the first Little Steven’s Underground Cruise, happening May 9 - 13, 2025, sailing between Miami and Nassau.

Hard rockers **Scarry Garry** are making a horror / comedy / rock concert film. “We are looking for volunteers to be in our movie,” said the band. “Kill shot victims, monsters and extras are needed.” Contact [ScarryGarryshow.com](http://ScarryGarryshow.com) for more info

On June 12 **Mojo Nixon** was posthumously honored with a display at the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, OH. In attendance were many of his musical friends, including members of Joan Jett & the Blackhearts, The Pogues, Jason & The Scorchers, and The Georgia Satellites.

Hitmakers **Switchfoot** has added a European leg to their Beautiful Letdown World Tour. North American dates wrap up on October 19 in Minneapolis, MN, with European shows kicking off on November 4 in Belfast, Northern Ireland and the tour ending on November 11 in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

A new **Pete Townsend (The Who)** box set, *Live in Concert 1985-2001*, out July 26, collects seven previously released complete concerts from the legendary British guitarist. Notably the box includes both volumes of the *Live: La Jolla Playhouse* set, 22/06/01 and 23/06/01 across four discs.



After more than forty years on San Diego stages, guitarist John January is finally performing and releasing music under his own name, with a new album, *True*, just out. On July 13 he'll be celebrating the recording's release with a special show at Aquarius Bar & Grille, noon - 3 p.m. Amongst the groups January has performed with over the decades are little monsters, Michele Lundeen & Blues Streak, The Gloomcookies, Men of Clay, and most recently, The January Berry Band.

He is enjoying his new musical format, both onstage and in the studio. "I'm leading my own band now and enjoying fewer limitations," January said. "With the blues as a springboard, we're indulging our different influences to take it somewhere new," he commented. "There are hard rock elements, Latin-Rhumba, Gospel and even some Alternative rock going on. Additionally, my guitar is prominently featured, and the same band of four musicians, which is myself, Jim Beck (bass), Pam Rowen (keyboards), and Steve Ussery (drums), is on every song of the new album. We all collaborated on the music and two of the songs we co-wrote together." *True* also includes several guest performers, including John Chambers of the The Bayou Brothers (accordion), Alicia Previn (violin), Bill Hoaglin (harmonica) and Bill Fish (violin).

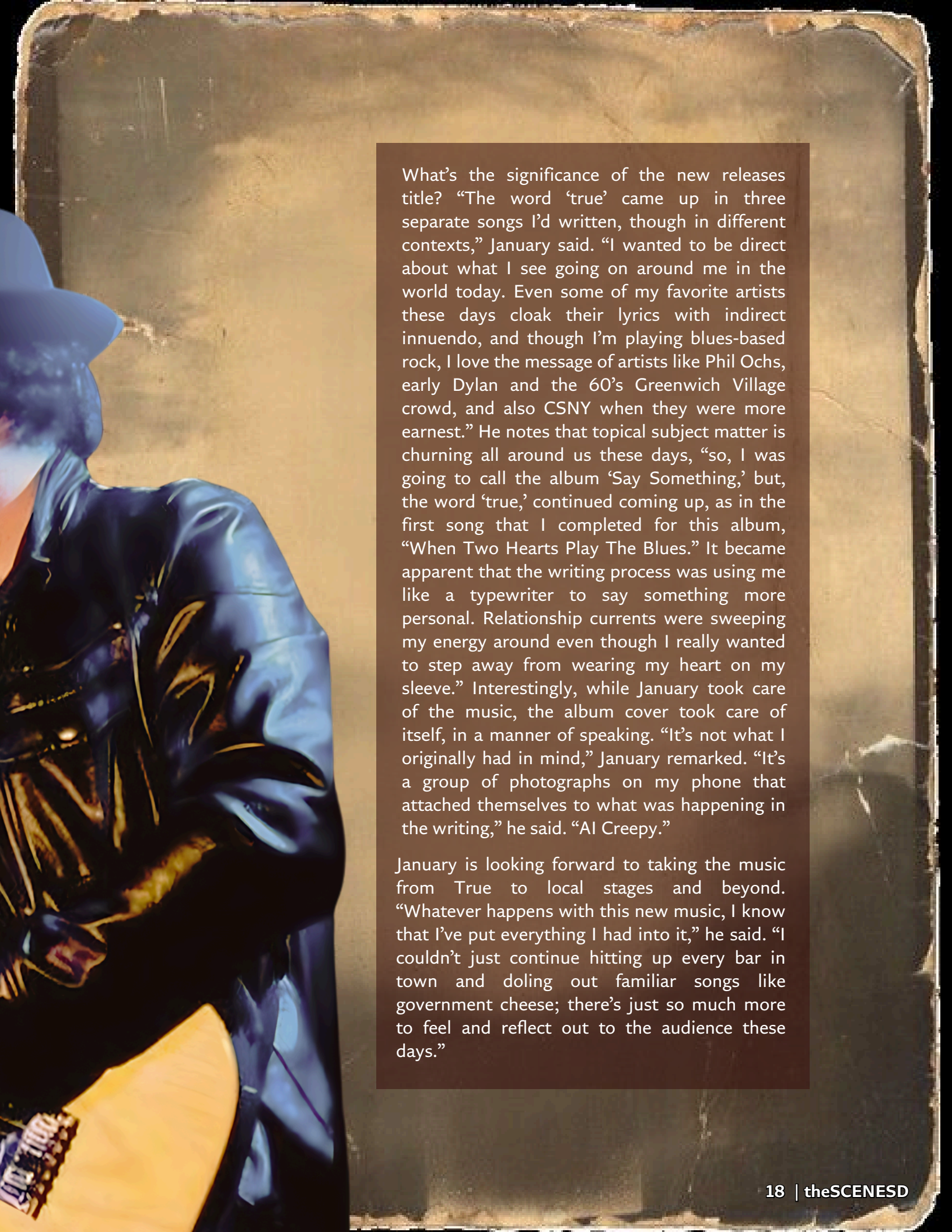
# John January

## IT'S TRUE

In addition to the newly minted originals, *True* also includes one cover, UK band Savoy Brown's 1971 single, "Tell Mama." It's performed as a duet with Rowen. "I've always loved that song," January remarked. "It's the first slide song I've performed in an open tuning, though I've got several on the album now, including the opening track, "So Much Going On" and a tune called "Otay Mud."

By: Bart Mendoza





What's the significance of the new releases title? "The word 'true' came up in three separate songs I'd written, though in different contexts," January said. "I wanted to be direct about what I see going on around me in the world today. Even some of my favorite artists these days cloak their lyrics with indirect innuendo, and though I'm playing blues-based rock, I love the message of artists like Phil Ochs, early Dylan and the 60's Greenwich Village crowd, and also CSNY when they were more earnest." He notes that topical subject matter is churning all around us these days, "so, I was going to call the album 'Say Something,' but, the word 'true,' continued coming up, as in the first song that I completed for this album, "When Two Hearts Play The Blues." It became apparent that the writing process was using me like a typewriter to say something more personal. Relationship currents were sweeping my energy around even though I really wanted to step away from wearing my heart on my sleeve." Interestingly, while January took care of the music, the album cover took care of itself, in a manner of speaking. "It's not what I originally had in mind," January remarked. "It's a group of photographs on my phone that attached themselves to what was happening in the writing," he said. "Al Creepy."

January is looking forward to taking the music from True to local stages and beyond. "Whatever happens with this new music, I know that I've put everything I had into it," he said. "I couldn't just continue hitting up every bar in town and doling out familiar songs like government cheese; there's just so much more to feel and reflect out to the audience these days."

# KIMMI BITTER / OLD SCHOOL

By: Bart Mendoza

For fans of classic country music, it doesn't get better than Kimmi Bitter. Influenced by the sounds of 1960s artists, Bitter has crafted music that touches on the past, but still has a modern feel, with great harmonies, melodies and song hooks. It's a winning combination that saw her take home the trophy for "Best Country or Americana Artist" at the 2023 San Diego Music Awards, topping that achievement at the 2024 edition, with a "Song of the Year" win for her song, "Aquamarine." Bitter and her band, The Westside Twang, featuring Willis Farnsworth (guitar), Ben Neal (bass) and Justin De la Vega (drums) will be on a nationwide tour in support of her latest album, *Old School*, wrapping up in Los Angeles on July 21.

**Originally from San Jose**, Bitter moved to San Diego when she was thirteen, "and just going into high school," she said. "I'm a Californian native. Oceanside is where I consider my home, and the majority of my life has been there. But I was born in San Jose and lived there until 8th grade."

Her inspiration to be a musician came early. "I wanted to be a singer-songwriter since I first found out adults had to get jobs," Bitter said good-naturedly. Another San Diego singer-songwriter served as her early motivation. "(Being a musician) was always what I aspired to become," she commented. "I wanted to be like Jewel in elementary school. I asked for a guitar for my 3rd grade Christmas gift but could not figure out how to teach myself at such a young age. These were pre-internet days. I didn't re-pick it up again until I was 18 and forced myself to play every day until I figured it out. I started off with immense stage fright and didn't do my first performance until I was 22 years old, but I've been performing ever since then."

How did the album title *Old School* come about? "I wasn't sure what the album was going to be called until my producer Mike Gurley and I co-wrote the song, "Old School" together," Bitter said. "It's a song simply about my obsession with old-school music and since the album is a collection of my favorite sounds and styles from 1960s country, it just made sense to make that song the anthem of the album."

What is she happiest about with the album? “I’m happy that it doesn’t sound like what’s currently mainstream, yet has a familiar feeling,” Bitter said. **Her favorite song on the album is “Aquamarine.”**, “We almost didn’t record it, but threw it in last minute on a whim,” Bitter commented. “It captures exactly the vibe I was hoping to accomplish on that particular song: a sailor’s paradise set in the early sixties.”

What inspired her love of 1960s-era country music? “Patsy Cline with the Jordanaires songs,” Bitter said. “They’re just so incredibly good. Everyone loves Patsy Cline, whether you’re a country fan or not. You don’t hear those kinds of thought-out harmonies and song structures anymore. That was “pop” music then. I don’t know how we went so astray. To me, music peaked then. I’m hyper-obsessed with the art of the 1960s. I’m constantly studying it, from the recording sounds, to the fashion styles, to the color grading of film and photography from that era.”

**How did it feel to win that initial SDMA in 2023?** “It was such an honor and a total hometown milestone for me,” Bitter said. “I remember the first SDMA show I went to, about 10ish years ago. I was so green and had such intense stage fright, that the thought of being a nominee seemed so far out of reach. But it was a goal of mine. When I found out I was a nominee for two of the categories in 2023, I honestly didn’t think I would win because I was a bit out of touch with the San Diego scene and had spent the majority of the previous year’s vagabonding it on the road.” In fact, Bitter’s win provided one of the event’s highlights, as captured in the awards show’s TV broadcast. “I was strolling in late and heard my name over the speakers when I was in the parking lot. I ran to the stage completely out of breath and had no idea what to say. However, the award sits proudly on my piano in my bedroom.”

Hopefully, Old School will score another SDMA nomination for Bitter in 2025. In the meantime, the album and its songs are drawing notice, showing up on numerous radio charts and in publications such as Billboard Magazine.

What’s Bitter’s favorite thing about being a musician? “So many things,” she said. “I love performing and creating. (As a musician) you’re always creating, and it’s not just always music that you’re creating. It’s the poster designs, the flow of the set, the branding, the stage outfits, the video content, the songwriting, the merch.... It’s just a whole bunch of creating. It’s constant stimulus, adventure, and change and that’s what my soul craves.” She points out that there’s an infinite amount of growth being a musician. “It’s hard work but you get back what you put in,” Bitter said. “There’s no limit. In a corporate world, you can work your way up a ladder and eventually become vice president or something, but that’s the cap. With music and being your own boss, you can always push the boundaries and reset your goals to be what’s uncharted, even if it’s just personal “accomplishments.” While her sophomore album is just out, Bitter is already looking ahead. **“You can infinitely get better and there’s really no end,”** she said. “It’s such a challenge to “make it” with music and I’m addicted to the challenge.”



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# SMOKE

+ MIRRORS SOUND SYSTEM



*C'mon Every Beat Box!*

By: Bart Mendoza

**Ska favorites Smoke + Mirrors Sound System** are keeping busy! Following up on recent single, "Joggin," the group releases, *No. 10 Dubbing Street*, a tribute to British group, Big Audio Dynamite, this month. "It took a year and a half and a few thousand hours to create these tracks, based on the pioneering Big Audio Dynamite's "No.10 Upping Street," said the group's head honcho, John Roy. The original album's best known song is likely the 1986 hit, "C'mon Every Beatbox."

"There are so many great players involved in this album. Just the credits alone are a good paragraph," Roy continued. Amongst the musicians involved are David Lally (Blindfold Monks), Israel Maldonado, and Matt Hensley (Flogging Molly). "I'm thankful that these great musicians let me capture their performances and pay homage to Jones, Letts, Dreadzone, and Strummer." The two-disc album is available on colored vinyl, with liner notes by original Big Audio Dynamite member and reggae icon, Don Letts. Meanwhile, the artwork is once again provided by acclaimed graphics artist Michael Buchmiller, aka Prof. Miller from Satanic Puppeteer Orchestra.

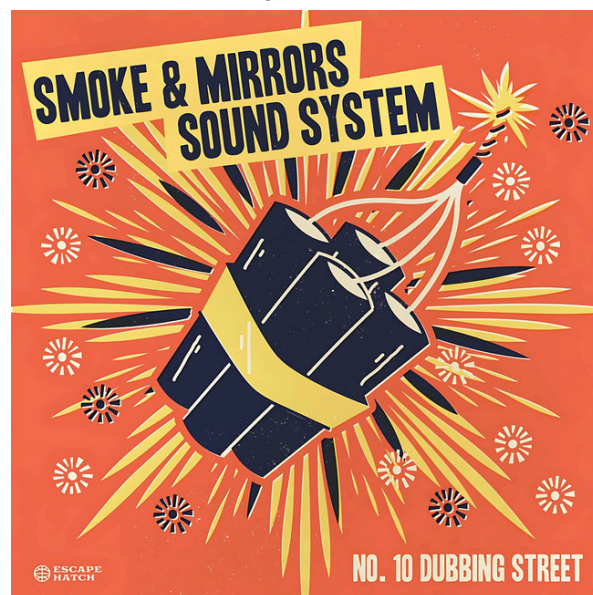
In further Smoke + Mirrors news, a new single, "So Like Candy," will be out shortly. Notably the tune is a cowrite by Elvis Costello and Paul McCartney.

Additionally, main man John Roy will be sailing aboard Flogging Molly's Salty Dog Cruise, taking place from February 17 - 22, 2025.

"They booked me to warm up for main acts, similar to a DJ slot," Roy said. "Five performances over five days. I'm doing all live dub mixes of over 60 tunes that I've recorded."

It's the great unknown for me. I'm working on getting all of my gear fx/ mixer/ laptop/interface, spring reverb, sampler, dub siren, tape delays, into two rolling cases that my wife and I can roll around a cruise ship." Roy continues to practically live in his recording studio. Upcoming projects include a pair of singles that feature violinist Alicia Previn amongst the players.

[smokeandmirrorsoundsystem.com](http://smokeandmirrorsoundsystem.com)



## NEW AND UPCOMING SINGLES

- A Lens to the Sun - "Escape Room"
- The Beard and the Bird - "Dust if You Must"
- Cathryn Beeks - "Ode to Billie Joe"
- Blair Gun - "The Thief"
- Daring Greatly - "Something Coming On"
- Trey Hill - "Coast Highway"
- Jewel - "Goddess of Love"
- Kilfeather - "Running Blind"
- Skyler Lutes - "Riding High", "Time to Rise Up"
- Mrs. Henry - "Everybody Wants Peace and Love"
- Obsidian Hearts - "A ConsQuest"
- Matthew Phillips - "Time Fades Love"
- Pierce The Veil - "Karma Police" (Radiohead cover)
- P.O.D. - "I Got That"
- Rogues of Chaos - "I Believe"
- Kela Sako - "Who are You" (July)
- Smoke + Mirrors Sound System - "Joggin"
- The Spell [feat. Kenny Marquez, Tara B] - "Everything I Own" (Bread cover); "Smoldered Out"
- Ryan Valenzuela - "Once Again"
- WeAreJackStrong - "Out of This"
- King Whisker - "Utopia"
- Sean Witkin - "In the Air Tonight" (Phil Collins cover)

## NEW AND UPCOMING ALBUMS & EP'S

- Good Times for a Change (September)
- Blair Gun - There Are No Rival Clones Here
- The Blue Kush - tbs
- Dapper Daygo - Mr.coldgame
- The Film Company - We Were Promised Rockets
- Tasha Smith Godinez - A New Day
- Kilfeather - Etcetera
- Trey Hill - The Search For Something Good
- Los Saints - Certified
- Mrs. Henry - Keep On Rising
- Planetarius - s/t
- Stone Horse - High Places
- The Brad Steinwehe Jazz Orchestra - On a Clear Day
- Suede Grenades - Heaven Must Be Grey
- Swami And The Bed Of Nails - All Of This Awaits You
- Taking On Water - Social Insecurity
- True Stories - She's Magic (September)
- Various Artists - Discover The Artists Making
- A Splash on Pacific Records (July 21: Sandollar, Jonny Tarr, Shane Hall, Kela Sako etc.)

## NEW AND UPCOMING VIDEOS

- Mike Keneally and Marcelo Radulovich - Paper Airplane
- Eve Selis - See Me With Your Heart
- Slack Key Ohana - The Making of Hawaiian Cowboy
- Smoke and Mirrors Sound System Featuring Chris Dowd - So Like Candy

# SAN DIEGO

## MUSIC RELEASE NEWS

By: Bart Mendoza







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# Nostalgia and Flavor A New Era at Madi Diner

Step into the nostalgic charm of a classic diner at Madi in Normal Heights, where tradition meets indulgence in every bite.

by Vince Meehan

At the heart of Madi is Matt Sieve, co-owner and operator, whose roots in the restaurant industry run deep. From a young age, Matt worked at his family's 100-year-old diner in Minnesota, working the griddle at Travelers Inn alongside his father and brothers.

[www.brunchlikemadi.com](http://www.brunchlikemadi.com)



Madi's menu has recently undergone an exciting transformation, introducing over 25 new dishes and recipes that pay homage to the classic diner fare that Sieve grew up with. Among the new menu items are the beloved pancakes, which bear the legacy of Grandma Helen's 70-year old pancake recipe. New pancake flavors include Orange Cinnamon Roll Pancakes, cinnamon swirl buttermilk pancakes covered in an orange glaze drizzle and the Very Berry Swirl Stack, buttermilk pancakes with mixed berries and raspberry sauce swirl. Additional diner-style items include, the Chicken Fried Steak & Eggs, Wedge Salad, and a selection of \$8-\$10 sandwiches on white bread, including an Egg Salad Sandwich, Hot Ham & Swiss and a BLT.



And if diners are judged by their smash burger, Madi delivers with their interpretation of the Oklahoma Onion Smash Burger earning the Normal Heights' restaurant a spot on the list of San Diego's best burgers. Served on a brioche bun, this burger bliss features grass-fed beef smashed with a pile of thinly sliced white onions, topped with melted American cheese, and finished with a perfect drizzle of burger sauce.



Additional new menu standouts include, the Posole that calls back to Sieve's first San Diego restaurant job at Chef Isabel Cruz's Isabel's Cantina, where he met and worked alongside Madi GM, Tricia Rowley, Greek Fries, BBQ Pork on a Bun, and Corned Beef Hash and Eggs. Madi encapsulates the essence of a classic diner experience but in a vibrant and modern space, where each visit feels like a journey back to consistent and simpler times. From the nostalgic flavors of Grandma Helen's pancake recipe to the hearty warmth of the Posole, every dish on Madi's menu tells a story of tradition.



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ENCINITAS

# TEMAKI BAR

**Sebastian Sevilla** is the Executive Sushi Chef of Temaki Bar, a recent addition to the Highway 101 strip in Encinitas. The Chula Vista native has spent over ten years perfecting his craft and specializes in hand roll sushi, which is not as common as it sounds. While a lot of sushi is rolled – and some by hand – Sevilla’s unique hand rolls are designed to be eaten as soon as he hands them to you.

Sevilla’s Southern Californian upbringing has made him an aficionado for all things spicy, but that does not mean that he has abandoned the formal and traditional roots of true Japanese sushi. Luckily for him, he was able to receive that training right here in San Diego.



by Vince Meehan



“Traditionally, people would go to Japan. Luckily – by the time I started learning – a lot of the chefs from Japan had migrated to the U.S. My sensei James Hanzo Evans was born in Japan and came over to the U.S. on a naval base and I learned from him. But California sushi is a real thing! There’s a lot of Baja vibes here – I myself, grew up in Chula Vista – so there’s a lot of spice and stuff. And that’s what I grew up eating; I didn’t grow up eating the traditional Edomae-style sushi. So I translated that from what I learned and I just kind of evolved – and my philosophy is that I’m forever a student.”

Sevilla was able to obtain a head sushi chef position at Lionfish Downtown for six years under Chef JoJo Ruiz. In 2022, both chefs brainstormed the idea for Temaki Bar, a downscaled sushi bar that felt more like a beach bar than a traditional sushi place. Temaki Bar features all sorts of beach art and imagery combined with Asian pieces and architecture. The bar is the main feature and is huge, encouraging guests to come sit with the chefs. In fact, there are no tables until later at night when some are brought out. At that point, the lights come down and the music comes up for a totally different kind of vibe.

Huge roll-up doors are open during the day to draw in that ocean air, as well as welcome people to pop in. People walking by can clearly see in, and Sevilla says that creates an inviting atmosphere that lets the beach lovers recognize that this is not your typical sushi bar, but actually a fun beach hangout. And Sevilla promises to push the envelope by adding new spices as well as influences to keep Temaki Bar visitors coming back to see what’s new.

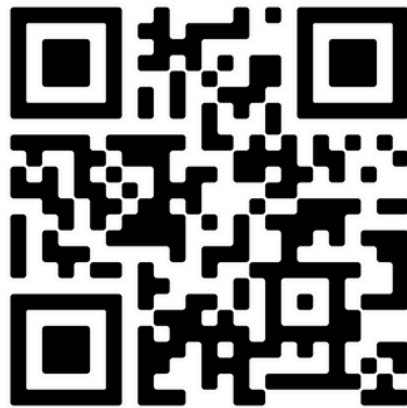
*“New cuisines inspire me you know? I’m a big fan of Korean food, so going from traditional Japanese food to Korean is somewhat unheard of, and now it’s very much a thing. So I’m super happy to have that inspiration and fire in me continuously growing.”*



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## The Beach Break Sessions: Amplifying San Diego's Sonic Pulse

By: Florentino Buenaventura

Beach Break Sessions, the brainchild of The Music Company (TMC), is shaking up San Diego's music scene with its vibrant live-performance series. Drawing inspiration from iconic series like NPR Tiny Desk Concerts and KEXP Sessions, Beach Break Sessions offers a killer platform for both local and national artists to showcase their jams through slick, professional-grade multimedia EPs. This initiative doesn't just help artists expand their reach—it puts a spotlight on San Diego's unique sonic landscape.

Beach Break Sessions sprang from a desire to carve out a San Diego-flavored version of the beloved live performance series. Ted Pawela, one of the masterminds behind TMC, shares, "We've always been fans of live session formats like NPR Tiny Desk and KEXP Sessions. We wanted to bring that concept here and give it a local twist. It's been amazing to see how it's evolved and the attention it's brought to the artists and to TMC."

The mission? To give artists a top-tier platform where they can record, produce, and release high-quality content for free. This lets bands focus on what they do best—creating music—while TMC handles the nitty-gritty of production, helping them reach new fans and gain the spotlight they deserve.

TMC was created by a dynamic father-son duo, Ted and Jack Pawela. Ted, the father, brings his business acumen to the table, ensuring that TMC runs smoothly and sustainably. Jack, the son, runs the production side, channeling his passion for music and technical expertise to create top-notch content. Their combined efforts and complementary skills make Beach Break Sessions a standout success.

Beach Break Sessions has been a game-changer for the local music scene. By offering a professional setting and top-notch production quality, TMC helps artists create standout content that gets noticed. Bands often report a surge in gig bookings and fan base growth after their sessions drop.

Many of the bands we've featured tell us that they've gotten more gigs and better gigs as a result of booking agents seeing their Beach Break Session," says Ted Pawela. "They also tell us it has helped them grow their fan base as new people discover their music. It's incredibly rewarding to see the tangible benefits our sessions provide."





Picking bands for Beach Break Sessions is a mix of personal recommendations, local show scouting, and artist referrals. Each session is a big investment for TMC, so they ensure bands are ready by catching their shows or rehearsals. This careful selection process keeps the sessions fresh and diverse, true to TMC's commitment to quality.

"We're all musicians here, so we go to a lot of shows and listen to a lot of music," Pawela explains. "We also ask every Beach Break artist who they're listening to, which helps us discover new talent. Our goal is to support a diverse range of artists and introduce our audience to music they might not have heard before."

### Notable Sessions and Success Stories

Beach Break Sessions often capture those magical moments where everything clicks—lighting, energy, cinematography, and music. These sessions create unforgettable experiences for artists and audiences alike. "There have been so many notable moments that it's hard to pick out just one or two," says Pawela. "Sometimes the lighting, performance energy, cinematography, and the music itself all find some sort of synchronicity that really embodies the magic of artistic creation. It's not something that you can create a formula for; it's kind of the music version of being 'in the zone.'"

TMC isn't just about killer sessions and amazing music. It's a nonprofit with a mission to foster an inclusive community for musicians and aspiring music industry professionals. TMC offers a recording studio, music community center, and coworking space—all designed to be accessible and affordable. This unique setup provides a resource-rich environment where local creatives can connect, learn, and grow.



Ted Pawela elaborates, "Our ultimate goal is to level the playing field for those with limited resources and help build San Diego's reputation as a world-class music destination. We measure success by the impact we're able to make—whether it's through providing affordable studio time, hosting educational workshops, or our community-building events."

Looking ahead, TMC is planning to take Beach Break Sessions out of the studio and into some of San Diego's iconic locations, adding even more local flavor to their productions. This move aims to offer even more unique and engaging content for their audience. "I'm particularly excited about taking Beach Break Sessions out of the studio and into some iconic San Diego locations," says Pawela. "We're in talks with local businesses and I'm optimistic."

By: Bart Mendoza

# FLOOD AID / SAN DIEGO MUSICIANS HOST FUNDRAISER TO HELP FLOOD VICTIMS

This past winter's torrential rains are over, but a lot of folks still need help recovering from the accompanying flood damage that affected many areas. In response, three San Diego music groups have banded together for a special concert, Flood Aid, set to take place on July 28, at the Jackie Robinson YMCA in Southeast San Diego. The outdoor event will feature performances from All Fired Up (A Tribute to Pat Benatar), Supreme Legacy (A Tribute to Diana Ross & The Supremes), Laurie Beebe Lewis & Electric Underground (A Tribute to Mamas & Papas plus 1960's classics).



Laurie Beebe Lewis

"All of the proceeds raised will go directly to the San Diego flood victims," said event organizer, Tamara Shoemaker, who is also lead singer with All Fired Up. "Our goal is to raise as much money as we can, they still have a long journey ahead of them." She notes that Flood Aid's venue, the Jackie Robinson YMCA, was also impacted by the rains. "Their campus was right in the middle of the flood zone, and their

soccer field was completely flooded as well," she continued. "The Y had done so much for the survivors already; it was an easy decision to stage the event there."

While Shoemaker wasn't personally affected by the floods, experience with other recent weather issues prompted her to action. "Just watching it happen on TV during the storms this past January, it struck me how tragic it became for so many families. My Running Springs/Lk. Arrowhead home encountered "Snowmageddon" last year and I remembered the many city government political hoops we, as local homeowners, had to jump through to get the snow and other weather obstacles finally taken care of. I had truly hoped that my hometown of San Diego would be different. But as the days, and weeks had gone by San Diego was, unfortunately, not any different than what my other home had gone through. Watching the continued negligence in helping residents, and businesses in those areas of San Diego that had flooded I knew I had to do something. Keep in mind, I'm just your typical middle-class individual and just so happens to be a musician with a Pat Benatar Tribute band. I knew I had to do something to help."

"I turned to my two absolute best musical girlfriends, Laurie Beebe Lewis, and Stellita Marie Porter," Shoemaker said. Each is a headliner in her own right, with Lewis a former member of both The Mamas and Papas and The Buckingham's, and Porter, of Supreme Legacy, a veteran of such acclaimed local groups as Detroit Underground. "The show evolved into a "ladies female fronted" night, organized to help those flood victims who needed help the most."

She hopes this grassroots effort to help our community will "make our hometown of San Diego proud," Shoemaker said. "We got this! Plus, providing great music for everyone, hopefully, helps flood victims along in the healing process a touch. It's a day of music from San Diego's top female entertainers and some of the very generous, San Diego's



Supreme Legacy

based businesses who are also helping and doing their part to contribute love, concern and financial assistance to those who need it at this time."



Shoemaker notes that beyond the musicians performing, it's a small core of people that are staging Flood Aid. "In addition to myself, Stellita and Laurie, Anna Arancibia and Paula Dunn and everyone else at the Y are my A team." The Barona Band of Mission Indians is a sponsor for this benefit "and we are hoping that more will jump on this magnanimous bandwagon, with all proceeds going towards helping those who lost so much during the flooding."



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