

Lincoln concerts lack star quality

BY JOSH KRAUTER
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The 1998-1999 academic year was a dead one for live music.

Sure, plenty of bands came through Lincoln and Omaha (Collective Soul, Mötley Crüe, Everclear, America, Third Eye Blind, Jackyl, Vanilla Ice and Digital Underground twice), but there wasn't anything awe-inspiring, jaw-dropping or even, well, good.

There was nothing close to Jon Spencer Blues Explosion's intensely physical show at Sokol Hall or Beck's musically adventurous bill, in which he was joined by Atari Teenage Riot and the Roots, both in 1996. The Ranch Bowl, now a haven for bad teenybopper metal and ska bands, brought Pavement, Mike Watt and Dinosaur Jr. in the same three-month period. Los Lobos played a great set at Pershing Auditorium. The Lincoln-Omaha area was bringing at least five or six great national acts a year. What happened?

There were a few exceptions, of course. Sleater-Kinney played a great, if slightly subdued, set at the Sokol Underground in Omaha, but with two local bands opening and a starting time of 9:30, the band wasn't able to play a very long set. The Spinanes came to Knickerbockers early in the school year, but they almost didn't make it.

The band was a few hours late because they were scared of a rainstorm. This coming from a band who made their live reputation in the Pacific Northwest. Arriving tired, they played a short, lackluster set.

Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock gave a great performance at the Great Plains Music Festival, but few students were there to see it.

That's where one of the major problems lies. Our student population doesn't seem to support live music. Bars are half-empty when bands play, and bands don't come back after playing to empty houses. Cities comparable in size to Lincoln, such as Lawrence, Kan., and Columbia, Mo., consistently draw great bands and most of this is due to student attendance.

There's a lot more to the picture than lackadaisical concert attendance. Lincoln lacks a good midsize venue. In Lincoln, bands can play in either arenas or bars. Bands who are too big for one and too small for the other, such as Jon Spencer Blues Explosion or the Afghan Whigs, aren't going to be stopping here anytime soon.

Tom Lorenz, assistant executive director at Pershing Auditorium, says it's tough to consistently book live music.

"We buy very few shows, because it's a risky business," he said. "It's hard to find someone willing to take the chance at a loss."

Geography and band's tour schedules also played a hand in this lackluster year. Our Midwest locale means a lot of bands ignore Nebraska. Denver, St. Louis, Kansas City, Mo. and Chicago usually get the nod when bands come through the Midwest. And many great live bands simply weren't on tour this year. They were in the recording studio. When a lot of these bands did hit the road, they went to Europe first.

Things don't seem to be looking up this summer, either. Lorenz said it's hard to book bands from May to September.

"In the summer, bands go through what we call sheds-outdoor venues," he said, adding that things look grim at Pershing. "They don't play this type of venue."

A glance at the Web sites for Pollstar (<http://www.pollstar.com>) and Ticketmaster (<http://www.ticketmaster.com>) reveals not much happening in the months ahead. The summer concert season is going to be even worse.

The Royal Grove is bringing in Molly Hatchet, Sister Machine Gun and Candlebox. And in what is probably the biggest promotional coup of the year, the venue is hosting the quadruple threat of Bulletboys, Bang Tango, Enuff Zuff and Pretty Boy Floyd (hold your breath) on the same bill.

The Ranch Bowl's highlights include the perpetually annoying Kottonmouth Kings and the perpetually



boring Verve Pipe.

Some venues, though, are atoning for scheduling sins by including something good. The State Fair loses points for scheduling Def Leppard and Chris Ledoux, but earns them back for getting Willie Nelson. And Aksarben Coliseum may be bringing Rick Springfield to town, but makes up for it with World Championship Wrestling. Still, the concert scene seems to be a dried-up river at the moment. There's not much that can be done to combat a lack of good concerts, but when a good band comes to town, show up. Convince the promoters, bar-owners and bands that Lincoln is a good place to have shows.



ABOVE: THIRD EYE BLIND came to Lincoln as part of an MTV college campus tour in October. COURTESY PHOTOS

ABOVE LEFT: COLLECTIVE SOUL let its dim light shine at Pershing Auditorium this semester. It was one of a few major groups and major disappointments to play in Lincoln this past academic year.

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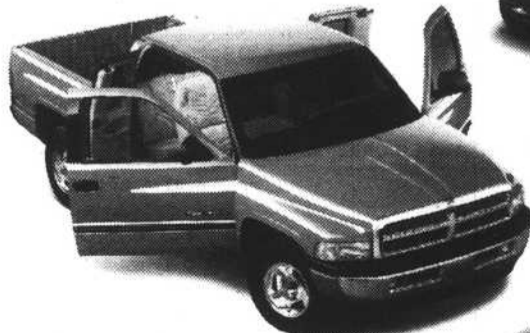
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