



Rhythm & Blues

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Got Rhythm?

Oakland Showcase Opening Doors For R&B Acts

Kerry and Gian Fiero are enablers. And proud of it.

In the same vein as Universal Motown executives Shanti Das and Eric Nicks' R&B Live venture (Rhythm & Blues, Sept. 8), this Bay Area, Calif.-based husband-and-wife team is pushing live R&B in a supper club setting. And like R&B Live, the Fieros' Friday evening show—billed as the Strive for More Music Showcase—provides a much-needed platform for artist development. Especially for those newbies who don't know much beyond setting up a page on the Internet.

"Gian and I kept meeting artists who didn't have enough material or didn't have the resources to get a band," Kerry says. "An artist's live show is what he or she always owns, no matter what. So we thought, 'Why not put together a showcase?'"

Toni! Toné! and Keyshia Cole. "Oakland has a bad reputation, so people go to San Francisco to listen to music," Kerry says. "Although there are some nice jazz and hip-hop venues here, there aren't an abundance of R&B clubs. It was important to have a venue that appeals to everybody, whether you're 18 or 55."

Launched last January, the Strive for More Music Showcase features seven vocalists. Younger teen artists aged 12-17—coming out of the Oakland School for the Arts or the young musicians program at Cal State Berkeley—are slotted first. They're followed by several "headliners": more seasoned songwriter/performers on the Fieros' "who's next" radar.

To help the acts with their learning curve, the Fieros tapped Los Angeles producer Cori Jacobs (Beyoncé, Lauryn Hill, the Temptations) to be music director for the showcases. He and an accompanying band do one rehearsal the night before and a soundcheck the



GIAN and KERRY FIERO



PARRISH

So they drew on their own wealth of resources. Kerry operates artist management firm Strive Management in Berkeley, Calif. Gian represents producers and teaches music publicity and music career options at San Francisco State. Thanks to Kerry's booking of R&B artists (Musiq Soulchild, indie faves Anthony David and Julie Dexter) on Thursday nights at Maxwell's Lounge, the Oakland club became a logical choice as the host venue. Located in downtown Oakland, Maxwell's Lounge seats 250 or 375 standing. The venue offers a fusion of Caribbean and Southern food as well as cocktails served until 1 a.m.; at the showcases, a happy hour begins at 5 p.m., and the doors stay open until 2 a.m.

The move to secure Maxwell's was twofold: to further revitalize the city's nightlife vibe and support the local R&B scene—one that gave birth to such R&B/hip-hop acts as Tony!

day of the performance.

Among the artists who have struck a chord with the audience of friends, family, radio DJs, local press and music professionals are 12-year-old Kehlani Parrish (who has since been paired with a producer in Los Angeles to do some recording) and Niko Ellison (who tours with the Air Force Band).

The next showcase on Oct. 26 signals the end of season one. The finale will feature several new artists, including 16-year-olds Taylor Thompson and Rozzi Crane, as well as the best of those who performed previously. Next-season aspirants can submit their names via the Strive Web site. Down the line, Kerry hopes to spin off separate hip-hop and rock Strive components.

"This is a win-win for everyone," she says. "There are acts out here who have the talent. They just need some of the tools." ■■■