

Arts & Entertainment

A weekly guide to music, theater, art, culture, books and more, edited by Heather Zimmerman

The Showcase

in Mountain View gives local musicians a chance to shine

Curated monthly event at The Ameswell Hotel supports artists' songs and stories

By Karla Kane



Anna Hoch-Kenney

Musicians performing at the Aug. 2 edition of The Showcase at Roger Bar included R. Vega (above), Stevie McQuay (left) and Henri (top).

Playing at open mic nights has long been a way for fledgling musicians to try out new material and get comfortable performing in front of an audience. But what about when they're ready to take it up a notch? A monthly concert series, The Showcase, at Roger Bar and Restaurant at the Ameswell Hotel in Mountain View aims to offer an elevated experience for up-and-coming musicians and audiences alike.

The Showcase, held the first Friday of each month, is led by Maleli Raiyawa and Rafael de Ausen (aka Rafael Unplugged, whose brands include Clique SF and Sets in the City). The series, Raiyawa said, is meant to be a step up from typical open mic nights, designed for artists who

are gaining confidence and experience as they progress in their music careers. As such, it's a curated concert, with Raiyawa booking four to five featured artists for 20-minute sets per evening and interviewing them each after their performance slots.

"There are lots of different open mics in the South Bay. Our idea for (The Showcase) was to create a next-level sort of thing," Raiyawa said. "There are not a lot of places for people to play more than five minutes, or for the local singer-songwriters to showcase." The concerts at the Ameswell, he said, are a way to offer "a pipeline from the open mic proper to us, which is a little more of a showcase invitational."

The very start of the evening does still have an open-mic

element. Folks can sign up in advance to book short sets as part of the soundcheck, starting at 6 p.m., as the equipment — including a high-quality sound system and lights — is getting dialed in for the main event.

Raiyawa and de Ausen are musicians and friends who have both been very active in the local music scene, including at open mic nights, such as Red Rock Coffee's long-running event.

"I've volunteered and hosted a few open mics in the area. I've done quite a bit of music community building in Mountain View in terms of throwing these kinds of events," Raiyawa said. "I feel like that's the thing that everything stems from," he said of Red Rock's open mic, which is an institution of sorts for many locals.

De Ausen originally hails from Guam, where he owned a photo studio, and his technical and artistic

expertise is part of what makes his events especially desirable for musicians, as he strives to support up-and-comers with getting good photos, videos, live streaming and electronic press-kit materials so they can take their careers to the next level.

"We kind of help set them up for success after the show," he said.

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The Showcase

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De Ausen began his association with the Ameswell when they booked him as a performer. Eventually, the Showcase idea evolved and he brought Raiyawa on board to curate and host. The hotel has been enthusiastic and supportive, he said, and de Ausen is now responsible for booking all the Ameswell's Friday night entertainment.

"The Showcase was just this great success project ... 'OK, since First Fridays is going well, let's do music every Friday,'" he said of the Ameswell management's response. Those shows are now billed as "Fresh Friday," and feature various line-ups (including, sometimes, de Ausen and Raiyawa themselves).

Mona Dena is a songwriter, performer and music educator who hosts local open-mic and songwriter sessions in the area. She's also performed as part of The Showcase and found the experience rewarding.

"(De Ausen) really knows what he's doing," she said, of the sound quality and organization. She also appreciates the post-set interview sections and the care taken with helping promote the artists.

"I always want to know more about songwriters; What's their process? What's their experience? It's so varied," she said. "Maleli is so great at being an amazing emcee and announcing people and making them feel really special, and (Raiyawa and de Ausen) are really great at promoting afterwards. I've just been very impressed with who they are and how much care they put in."

Dena is currently hosting two open mics herself, both in downtown Redwood City. One, open to all ages, is held on the fourth Sunday of each month at Coffeebar. She's also begun hosting the open-mic night at The Hub on the second Monday of each month (the event is held weekly with rotating hosts). She said she's been inspired by the quality of the events at Ameswell



Anna Hoch-Kenney

Above: Host Maleli Raiyawa, left, chats with R. Vega after her set during The Showcase at Roger Bar on Aug. 2. Top: Jack Maryas plays guitar outside the entrance to Roger Bar as the monthly event The Showcase goes on inside.

and hopes to encourage some of that showcase vibe at other events.

"When I host I am really trying to encourage songwriters, to make it feel like a place where people feel like they can really share," she said.

Musician Melinda Kausek has been active on the local music scene since 2023, has recently begun recording and releasing singles, and has participated in a number of events at the Ameswell. She got to know Raiyawa and de Ausen through attending open mics including at Red Rock and Mama Kin (in San Jose) and, like Dena, has been a Showcase artist.

"I really appreciate how Rafael, Maleli and the rest of their team, they are creating opportunities to help emerging artists break out of the regular weekly mics. Everything from the venue to the sound system to the videography puts these events well above the typical open mic, but they are also more accessible than getting this kind of gig on your own," Kausek told this news organization in an email. "I have also found them to be super supportive, which honestly boosts my confidence and makes it easier to put myself out there even more."

Kausek "is the type of artist we really want to showcase because she's putting in the work of getting

her music out there," Raiyawa said. "We want to help promote that in any way we can."

He said that the lineup for the Sept. 6 edition of The Showcase would feature Amour de Seine, David Hobbes, Hannah McDonald and Redemption Breaking.

For Raiyawa and de Ausen, it's all about supporting the local musical community and harnessing their respective skills and interests to do so.

"The Showcase has become Rafael and I's passion project. I really wanted a podcast or interview type show, Rafael had the showcase idea and we just kind of merged the two," Raiyawa explained. "So many people in general have phenomenal wild stories. If people have a story to tell, we want to be the stage so that people can share that." ■

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The Showcase takes place the first Friday of the month, 6-10 p.m., at Roger Bar and Restaurant, The Ameswell Hotel, 800 Moffett Blvd., Mountain View; rogerbarandrestaurant.com/event/friday-night-live.

Worth a Look

Kings Mountain Art Fair

A longtime Labor Day weekend tradition (since 1963), Kings Mountain Art Fair showcases the work of many artists in a redwood forest setting. The volunteer-run event offers breakfast (from 8-10:30 a.m.), lunch (11:30-4:30 p.m.), kids' art activities, and artists' booths with a range of wares, including some from local makers. Local artists participating in this year's fair include Xuan My Ho, Sheena Mawson, Vibeke Christensen and many others. Proceeds go to the Kings Mountain Volunteer Fire Brigade and Kings Mountain Elementary School. The fair, according to its website, also boasts the "world's largest cookies" for sale.

Aug. 31-Sept. 2, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; 13889 Skyline Blvd., Woodside; kingsmountainartfair.org.



Vivian Cromwell

The Kings Mountain Art Fair takes place over Labor Day weekend in Woodside.

Thirty Seconds to Mars

Jared Leto is an Oscar-winning actor and he's also the longtime frontman of alt-rock band Thirty Seconds to Mars (which also counts his brother Shannon among its members). The band is hitting the road for its first headlining tour in five years, in support of its most recent record "It's The End of The World But It's a Beautiful Day!" California rock band AFI, singer-songwriter/YouTuber Poppy, and singer-songwriter KennyHoopla will perform as supporting acts at the Live 105-presented show at the Shoreline.

Sept. 4, 6 p.m., Shoreline Amphitheatre, One Amphitheatre Parkway, Mountain View; ticket prices vary. livenation.com.

John Fogerty

Rock icon John Fogerty, founder of the band Creedence Clearwater Revival, is known for classics like "Proud Mary" and "Bad Moon Rising" and has been hailed as one of the greatest songwriters, singers and guitarists by Rolling Stone. He's on tour with his two sons in celebration of gaining ownership of his song catalog, performing many of his hits. George Thorogood, rocker of "Bad to the Bone" fame, and rock band Hearty Har are also joining Fogerty for his "Celebration Tour."

Aug. 31, 6 p.m., Frost Amphitheater, 351 Lasuen St., Stanford; \$79-\$173; live.stanford.edu.

Charlotte Cheng

Local author Charlotte Cheng comes to Books Inc, where she will read from her picture book "Roar-Choo!" about a feisty dragon and a gentle phoenix coping with a nasty cold. It's a tale about friendship, empathy, respecting differences and the importance of taking a break. Some of Cheng's other books for children include "Night Market Rescue," "BoBo Loves Dumplings" and the brand-new "I Miss You Most," a comforting tale about memories of a beloved grandpa and dealing with grief, which will also be featured at the event.

Sept. 1, 11 a.m., Books Inc, 855 El Camino Real #74, Palo Alto; booksinc.net.