

Making Winooski hip, one band at a time

BY LEE J. KAHR

The comeback of the Waking Windows Music Festival

Is this the year that Waking Windows will celebrate a decade in Winooski?

Answer: Fingers crossed.

Organizers hope May 2022 will bring a chance to get outdoors and safely enjoy some music in Winooski, Vt. Cancelled for the last two years due to the pandemic, the annual Waking Windows Music Festival is hoping to catch a break and welcome both established and up-and-coming bands back to the Onion City. The weekend-long festival is scheduled for May 13-15. Performances will take place at more than 10 different venues including outdoor shows at Winooski Falls Way and in Rotary Park in the middle of the Winooski rotary.

The Monkey House bar and music venue in Winooski was the launching pad for the festi-

val, says Monkey House General Manager and Waking Windows management team member Ali Nagle. She and her husband, Brian Nagle, are two of the five-member team behind the festival.

Waking Windows began in 2009, the brainchild of Paddy Reagan and Nick Mavodones, who started Angioplasty Media. Reagan was the first booker at The Monkey House and the Waking Windows festival was concocted as a 12-day, "anti-jazz festival" that summer — a reference to the Vermont Jazz Fest, the long-running and dominant Green Mountain State event that has also been recently sidelined by COVID.

Their first effort was not that successful, Nagle says with a laugh, "but they really had a lot of fun doing it." The following year, Reagan and Mavodones decided not to try and compete with the Jazz Fest during the summer. They picked



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Thousands of music lovers descended upon the 2019 Waking Windows (top, middle and bottom photos). That was the last time the new music festival was held, thanks to the pandemic. Organizers are hoping to mount the event as usual this year, May 13-15.

a weekend and used The Monkey House as the main musical venue. The name “Waking Windows” came from Reagan, Nagle says, and it aptly described the festival’s mission and purpose — to wake up Winooski’s vacant storefronts and show the town some love with music. And while there are fewer vacant spaces and darkened windows in the city since the town’s 2004 redevelopment initiative, the festival still celebrates Winooski, a town that’s often overshadowed by neighboring Burlington.

The Monkey’s second booker, Matt Rogers, joined the organizers that second year, and it was a natural fit. Brian Nagle is a DJ and the current booker for The Monkey House. Rogers has his own booking and promotion company, MSR Presents, and has been a fixture in Vermont concert promotion for over a decade.

“It just kind of continued to grow,” Nagle says. The event kept taking over more business spaces for music and exhibit spaces. Then, once the businesses returned they asked if they could continue to enlist them as performance spaces for the weekend. “And so far, most people are pretty down with it,” she says.

That’s not to say anyone is getting rich off the festival. Most years, they break even, Nagle says, but everyone involved does it out of love for the music and the city.

“It’s just a bunch of friends,” she says, but adds that the idea has taken on a life of its own. “I mean, we still all have full-time jobs, so we like to call it a full-time hobby. It’s a lot, but we’re still doing it, and it’s bigger than we ever imagined it to be. It really just started as putting on some fun shows and acting as a liaison from the indie rock fans to stop in Burlington rather than just going from Boston to Montreal.”

The location is part of the attraction, but it’s the vast selection of under-discovered or burgeoning bands that makes Waking Windows so popular. That is a testament to the bookers, who Nagle says have deep connections to the indie rock world. But there’s a good time to be had whether you are already hip to the bands or not.

“There are a lot of people that don’t know the bands, and they love the experience of the festival,” Nagle says. “We sometimes call it the Discovery Festival,” she says, since it’s such an eye-opener to the indie rock talent pool.

“So a lot of people know the bands and then a lot of people just go knowing that they’re going to hear a lot of really good music, and we built the trust there.”

Based on that reputation, and on the pent-up desire of Vermonters to get out and enjoy some life and culture, it’s looking like Waking Windows can finally celebrate its 10th anniversary, 12 years after it began.

Visit www.wakingwindows.com for more information.



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