

The Miami Herald

December 10, 2009

Circulation: 210,884

Fest aims to promote Miami as music mecca

The ambitious, three-day Miami Music Festival will inundate 19 venues with the sounds of rock, hip-hop, Latin, blues, Caribbean and jazz.

BY JORDAN LEVIN

A festival that organizers hope will give a major boost to the Miami music scene kicks off Thursday night, with more than 250 bands playing around downtown Miami and Brickell in a sonic tidal wave booming through Saturday night. Rock, hip-hop, Latin, blues, Caribbean and jazz music will inundate 19 venues for the debut of the Miami Music Festival, which aims to raise South Florida's musical profile for audiences and the entertainment industry.

Will Edwards, who is producing the festival with business partner Irwin Kornfeld, said it will be a great occasion for bands and music lovers alike.

"The most important thing is that these musicians have an opportunity to play in a town that should be known for music and really isn't," said Edwards, who owns a recording facility and a company that publishes music magazines. "This is an opportunity . . . to get a really great palette of music in a short time."

Whether the ambitious effort will succeed remains to be seen. The event comes in the wake of the cultural tsunami of Art Basel, and has no big, nationally known names on the roster to draw casual fans.

Edwards and Kornfeld have touted their event as Miami's version of SXSW, the enormous, taste-making music festival that takes over Austin, Texas, each spring, garnering significant support from government and civic organizations.

There's plenty of Miami talent to promote. Latin-fusion bands such as Spam Allstars, Suenalo and Locos Por Juana; singer-songwriters like Rachel Goodrich and Jacob Jeffries; hip-hop acts such as Mayday and Art Official; and electronic artists like Panic Bomber have strong local followings, and some are attracting national attention.

But a number of those artists and the people who work with them say the festival is disorganized, and has left out some of the most important acts and venues in the music scene it aims to promote.

Some top local acts balked at paying the \$35 application fee, standard for these types of events, to be considered for an unproven event that doesn't pay.

"If we think it's worth the exposure, we'll play for free," said Juan Pedraza, an MC in Art Official. "But in Miami, where we have our own fan base and draw a crowd, there's no reason we should have to pay a fee and not be compensated."

Lauren Reskin, owner of Sweat Records in Little Haiti, a center of Miami's independent music scene, questioned why the festival, centered mostly around the Transit Lounge, a Brickell area bar owned by Edwards, does not include some of Miami's top music clubs, such as Churchill's in Little Haiti and the Vagabond near downtown.

"It's shortsighted of them not to take advantage of all the live music venues Miami has," Reskin said.

Edwards said the \$35 fee charged to bands was needed to offset costs, and that bands received a free subscription to Broadjam, an online music networking site, and admission to the festival conference at the James L. Knight

The Miami Herald

December 10, 2009

Circulation: 210,884

Center on Friday and Saturday. The use of establishments that don't normally host live music, such as Gordon Biersch and Red Bar, was done in the interest of grouping festival venues close together, Edwards said.

The festival was launched at a town hall meeting on the music scene in June hosted by the Miami-Dade Office of Film and Entertainment, which wanted to expand its focus to the local music industry. Edwards, who chairs the film office's advisory board, stepped forward.

“It's not just about the art for us, it's about economic development,” said Jeff Peel, director of the film office. “This could be a significant event people look forward to . . . and Miami becomes known as a hot music town.”

With the new high-rises blanketing Miami's center slowly filling with tenants, city officials are eager to draw attention and activity to the area.

“We look at live music and performing arts as downtown's niche,” said Robert Geithner, spokesman for the Downtown Development Authority, which gave the festival a \$20,000 grant. “Downtown is extremely different from what it was [a few] years ago. . . . People are looking for things to do in their neighborhood.”