



Somerville NEWS

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The Arts in Somerville and around the Boston area

The Burren Project celebrates live, local music



Musician Chiemì strums a white Gretsch and sings at the Burren. Chiemì had a deep role in the making of *The Burren Project*, serving as production coordinator for Sammy James.

News photo by Neil W. McCabe

by Peter Yezukevich

Regulars of The Burren's open-mike night brought friends, family and admirers April 7 to celebrate the release of "The Burren Project," a new CD by Pedestrian Records that captures the magic of the seven year institution.

"The raison d'être for this was that I really wanted to record Hugh McGowan, who hosts the open-mike night and is a damn fine player of just about every instrument," said Sammy James, who conceived and led the project, a compilation of original songs from these local musicians, all produced by James at his home studio in downtown Boston.

The overall feel of the album can be traced back to James' production, and his synthesizer, which appears on nearly every song. "I'm fascinated with the atmospheric quality of the synthesizer sound; it's what drew me to make music in the first place," he said.

James cuts a striking image—too warm to be too in-

tense, and too even-keeled to be too wired—yet still all of those things. He spoke about the impetus behind the album. "Bill Johnston and Deep Care all on the CD, and since then, I saw so many other interesting performers here that it made me want to make the project more inclusive," he said.

"I've been performing on Tuesdays, the night of the open-mike, here for four years now, and it's been going on for well over seven years," he said.

"I would come in on Tuesdays and think 'I love this song' and I was pretty sure that these performers were not produced, not managed, so that was part of the idea," he said.

James, a former Somerville resident and still a member of the Chamber of Commerce, said he approached Burren owners Tommy McCarthy and Louise Costello about the project, and they were full of encouragement.

It's not unusual for live music to fill The Burren in

Davis Square. In fact, if one is so inclined, it can be heard every night of the week. But something in the air made the mid-week evening feel more like a weekend night.

As folks filled up on hearty Irish fare and washed it down with pints of ale and glasses of red wine as deep and dark as the rich oak furniture in this low lit room, one man sat

in a far corner, sipping from a Dunkin' Donuts cup, surrounded by boxes of CDs and various players' instruments.

When Brian Donnelly took the stage, James said, "He's awesome," and turned to watch the performance, a tour-de-force of acoustic guitars and drumming that complimented Donnelly's lovely Jeff Buckley-esque vocals.

Donnelly said he is a three-year veteran of The Burren's open mike scene. "Sammy was a regular here before I was, and I always enjoy seeing him onstage, like so many others do."

Donnelly was proud to be chosen for "The Burren

to join him the first time he did the open-mike, so few people showed up, he ended up playing three times over the course of the night to fill time."

"But soon after that, Steve Morse of the *Globe* wrote it up and after that about twenty people came. Then the whole thing really got rolling," he said.

Kennecally said he loves the vibe of camaraderie within the atmosphere of the open-mike. "People just break down their inhibitions and they come up and play."

"Last night an older guy about 55 played for the first time: I saw him in the bathroom beforehand, and he just looked so nervous. I said 'Are you okay?'

and he said he might throw up! So I just said, 'Don't worry, everyone is so supportive here,' and of course he did fine, and he got great applause," he said.

Somerville's Jordan Carp, who played a soulful set of acoustic tunes that had a pol-

ished, professional sheen, said he loves The Burren, and that it is one of the coolest live bars in the Boston area.

"I first played here about four months ago, and since then I've been coming back and also playing around New England promoting my own album which came out recently," he said.

James said a woman



Brian Donnelly performs at The Burren. Donnelly is Dr. Nemo Spaceman (*Prometheus of Vampires*, *Musician*, *Magician*, *Meta-physician*, *Herald of the Mythic Munky-bunny*, *Psychonaut*, and *Super-clown*).

News photo by Neil W. McCabe

known simply as Chiemì, one of the regular open-mike performers, really stepped up to help in the making of "The Burren Project."

"I collected pictures and biographies of the performers. I took some pics. It's really about the family here, that's what this scene is," Chiemì said.

"I recorded my own CD with Sammy, which I asked him to produce after working with him on the Project. I was impressed with how diligent he was to get just the right sound," she said.

Chiemì said she balances her career as a lawyer with her musical dreams and does not see any difference between her love for the law and for music.

On this night, true believers came out and applauded, among others, a lawyer and a trolley tour host. During the day, their lives are separate and scattered. But on Tuesday nights at The Burren, these performers share a mike, a stage and the spirit of live, local music.



Clockwise from left: Paul Erlich (foreground), Simon Snaize and Brian Donnelly introduced by host Sean Kerneally at the Burren. The group performed Donnelly's contribution to the Burren Project "Sister Synesthesia".

News photo by Neil W. McCabe

Project."

"My style is different than most others here, and Sammy thought it would be interesting to feature me on the album," said Donnelly.

Sean Kerneally, a roommate of Hugh MacGowan's, said he was hosting for MacGowan, who was away on tour with Boston's The Push Stars. "Hugh asked me

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