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Personal Effects, including Bob Martin, left, and Peggi Fournier, played regularly at Scorgie's and will play at Friday's reunion show at the German House. (GARY BRANDT file photo 1985)

Scorgie's reunion will look back at the bedlam

Scorgie's reunion to pay tribute to chaotic legend of music club

JEFF SPEVAK • STAFF MUSIC CRITIC
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The only story that Don Scorgie insists on putting to rest is that, early on, he was planning on building a miniature golf course in the basement.

The rest of the Scorgie's legend? True enough. One of the best music clubs in America, Rolling Stone magazine proclaimed during Scorgie's magnificent run through the early '80s. Par for the course were hip national acts like the Ramones, the Cramps, Johnny Thunders, the Violent Femmes, the Los Angeles country-punk band X. And local acts. Lotus STP, the Clichés, the Hi-Techs, the Projectiles, the Fadeaways, Bahama Mama, the Bowery Boys and, "The Now, one of the great, worst punk bands ever," Tom Kohn says.



Kohn, Bop Shop owner and booster of all things indie and inspired, spent many nights descending the steep staircase into Scorgie's basement. With scenesters like Stan Merrill enthusiastically opening their dusty basement archives and memory banks to the effort, Kohn has taken on

the labor of love of assembling Friday's Scorgie's tribute at the German House Theatre, which roughly falls on the 30th anniversary of the club.

He settled on a night with three Scorgie's regulars: the Press Tones, New Math and Personal Effects. And a handful of surprises, like an appearance by most of the Targets ("We can't find the drummer," Kohn says) playing two or three songs during New Math's set. It's a soundtrack that lies somewhere amid the era's New Wave, punk and loud rock and roll.

The era — Scorgie opened the club on Feb. 4, 1979, although the live music didn't start until 1981 — will also be represented by a multimedia slide show of posters, photos and, between acts, music from the 45 rpm records that were in Scorgie's carefully considered jukebox. All three headliners have felt this resurrection run through their bones. New Math re-recorded an old song, "Garden of Delight." Personal Effects, which hadn't played together in 20 years, has prepared a collection of some of its old material. And the Press Tones have a new CD, *Not Any Older*, combining new and old songs.

But Kohn also wanted the anniversary to tell its own story, asking Web designers Paul Dodd and Peggi Fournier, also two of the key players in Personal Effects, to get www.scorgies.com up and running. "I wanted the site to lead it," Kohn says. "It needs to be its own person, with the stories and the handbills and the posters. From the beginning, the word was the most important thing."

“No matter what happens at the event, the Web site is phenomenal,” says Abilene Bar & Lounge owner Danny Deutsch, who managed Scorgie’s for a while and booked shows. “Just to see people connect or reconnect, who haven’t seen or talked to each other in years, is very cool.”

Indeed, the site is a vast blog, overflowing with sometimes self-indulgent recollections and photos and the vitality of the day — unlike the now-empty space that was Scorgie’s at 150 Andrews St. Scorgie re-opened the club for a while in the mid-’90s, including a run as a comedy club, and it was followed by a succession of unsuccessful venues. Today, the 61-year-old Scorgie works at an auto dealership. He’ll be at Friday’s show.

Not everyone will be. Some key players on the scene have moved far away. Some are gone, a few of them victims of the scene’s excesses. One of the club’s key DJs, Luke Warm, died of a drug overdose. Same for the talented songwriter Brian Horton. Roger McCall, the WCMF radio host Unkle Rog and an enthusiastic booster of local acts, was shot in a still-unsolved murder. A congenital heart defect caught up with Chuck Cuminale of the Colorblind James Experience.

Others climbed out of personal depths. Kohn, for one, who drifted away from the club in its later years after the death of his first child, channeled his love of music into his record store. “I focused my grief on creating something,” he says.

“The great thing is, a lot of us, we’re all doing what we dreamed we wanted to do. I’ve got the store. Danny’s got his bar. Paul and Peggi are still playing. It was so important to steering so many of us to where we are today.”

Scorgie’s remains a chaotic legend, filled with artistry, drunkenness, brawls, fake IDs, inexplicably frequent ceiling demolitions and, most notably, the night Scorgie threw Elvis Costello out of the bar.

“It was a blur,” Kohn says of that brief, six-year period, “for a lot of people.”

Danny Deutsch: “It started out as this corner saloon downtown. A comfortable downtown room with a shuffleboard table, sandwiches and great people.”

Roy Stein, New Math drummer: “It’s like that ‘60s thing, ‘If you remember it too well, I’m not sure you were there.’ It was a heavy-drinking bar. Scorgie would always like to have a few pops and do some fighting with people. He was a tough guy.”

Don Scorgie: “It was a period in time where you had everything in place. The people, the music, the scene itself, the neighborhood conducive to a little, out-of-the-way club. You know, out of sight, out of mind. And you had the college radio stations, the music was new and they were promoting the living heck out of it.”

Paul Dodd, Personal Effects drummer:

“It only happened by default. I was in New Math at the time, and we used to go over there after practice. I remember one night we went down into the basement, and Scorgie was showing us his plans.

He was kind of a handyman, and he had this goofy nautical theme upstairs, with big, thick ropes. Downstairs, he had

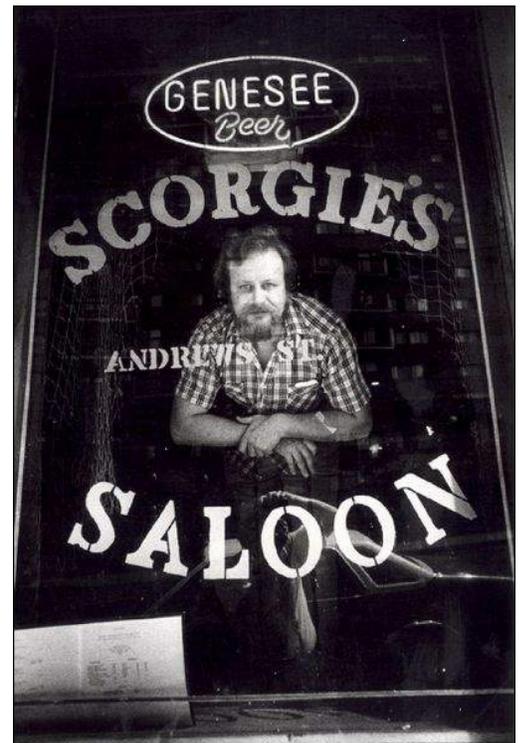
installed some green indoor-outdoor carpeting on one of the raised areas, and he was telling us his idea of having a putting green. We said it was the perfect place for a rock club. We were playing the Orange Monkey, the Electric Circus, Big Daddy’s, all of these goofy rock clubs. Everything was sewn up, it was impossible to get a gig, and nobody really wanted original music. Scorgie’s was the perfect place for it; it was just a bunch of misfits.”

Deutsch: “It was such a rich history. Aside from this period, here you had this guy born in County Cork, Ireland, and the first people he was booking were the Dady Brothers, Liam Magee. And jazz and blues guys, like Mose Allison, Sonny Fortune, John Lee Hooker, Joe Locke. And a healthy dose of reggae, which Scorgie didn’t know much about, but he really took a liking to.”

Stein: “Don was the right club owner, it was the perfect place downtown, the right ambience for that music — just dark, low ceilings, a pretty-good sounding room in the basement, with a couple of hundred people. Maybe 300 if it was really insanely packed.”

Deutsch: “There wasn’t hardly anything down there, just the bar. To this day, there’s just some kind of a great feel about going into a downstairs room like that for music.”

Dodd: “The no-chairs thing sounds like a little thing, but it was pretty intense when you had everybody crammed together.”



Don Scorgie, owner of the former Scorgie's on Andrews Street, became a legend when he threw Elvis Costello out. (BURR LEWIS file photo 1983)

Peggi Fournier, sax, keyboard player and singer for Personal Effects: “There were chairs there, but everybody would stand on them.”

Dodd: “The audience was a lot more active at that time.”

Fournier: “They were younger. It was before they raised the drinking age.”

Stan Merrill, Invisible Party lead singer: “Because the drinking age was 18, you ended up getting a brief sampling of every high school in Monroe County. The reunion show could almost be a high-school reunion.”

Peter Anvelt, Press Tones guitarist: “It seemed to be a very popular place in that period of time. I met a lot of people there. I met my wife there. I saw the Go-Go’s, Tom Verlaine from Television, John Cale. I saw the Replacements on a Tuesday or Wednesday night. There were probably 50 people in the crowd, so they were just playing these Top-40 covers. Except they’d just play a few measures of it, and then they’d just stop. I think they had been drinking.”

Merrill: “People talk about what the Pythodd was here for jazz people. For rock and rollers, alternative-music guys, Scorgie’s was their Pythodd. You went to the Pythodd to see legendary jazz figures. You went to Scorgie’s to see legendary rock and roll figures.”

Kohn: “I saw Marianne Faithfull stumble into the men’s room, trying to figure out where the stage is. I watched her drink a quart of Jack Daniel’s onstage. And she was great.”

Stein: “She said — oh, what’s the English word for the bathroom? She says, ‘That’s the loo, it’s not the stage!’ It was almost like seeing Lucy on The Lucy Show, pretending to be someone drunk.”

Kohn: “I have a picture somewhere of John Cale setting his set list on fire.”

Merrill: “I saw Alex Chilton, a great show that nobody came to. John Cale, the Bangles, Joe ‘King’ Carrasco, he was always great. The Hoodoo Gurus. Personal Effects always put on a great show. Jet Black Berries, New Math, watching the evolution of the Chesterfield Kings, and all of the great shows that first lineup put on. And all of the microphone stands that Greg Prevost broke.”

Greg Prevost, lead singer of the Chesterfield Kings: “We used to chop it up pretty good. Don would say, ‘Don’t tear the ceiling out!’ and we’d tear the ceiling out, and Don would say, ‘Never again, you guys aren’t playing here again!’ Then a couple of weeks later he’d say, ‘Well, why don’t you guys come back and play again....’”

Kohn: “I remember the Cramps show, and Lux Interior ripping down the ceiling tiles....”

Stein: “Lux was in these tight, dinky black spandex pants, latex maybe, and somebody grabs his pants and pulls them down so he’s completely naked. He’s not wearing any underwear. He grabs onto something on the ceiling, his privates swinging back and forth, and one of the ceiling tiles fell. Lux gets the idea in his mind to start ripping out ceiling tiles. Rock and roll at its most primal.”

Prevost: “Yeah, that happened. Lux was ripping out the ceiling and Don came barreling onstage shouting, ‘That’s it, stop the show!’ Then Lux started to throw the drum kit at him.”

Deutsch: “I witnessed steam, just like a dragon, coming out of Scorgie’s head. He didn’t take it well. That was a milestone event. There was no live music for a while”

Kohn: “That Costello story has changed so many times, you really need Don to tell it.”

Scorgie: “He was a little verbally abusive and a little demanding. Words were exchanged. He had to walk the length of the bar to get out, pass the gauntlet, so to speak, but I think he got cheered pretty good going out the door. I think it was over something like a cigarette, or a lighter. Wrong place, wrong time for Mr. Costello.”

Deutsch: “He asked, or told, Scorgie to get him a cigarette, or a pack of cigarettes. Scorgie isn’t the sort of guy you ordered around.”

Merrill: “It was the characters that were there. I remember seeing the bouncer, Sonny Boy Willis, opening for Personal Effects. The incongruity of seeing this 350-pound, full-blooded Native American guy dressed up like Bobby Fuller, doing rockabilly. Only at Scorgie’s”

Kohn: “The good, the bad and the ugly always happen around a scene like that. But it was a thriving scene and a culture. Everything came from the right place.”

Scorgie: “Plus, I was a bit of an idiot, too.”

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