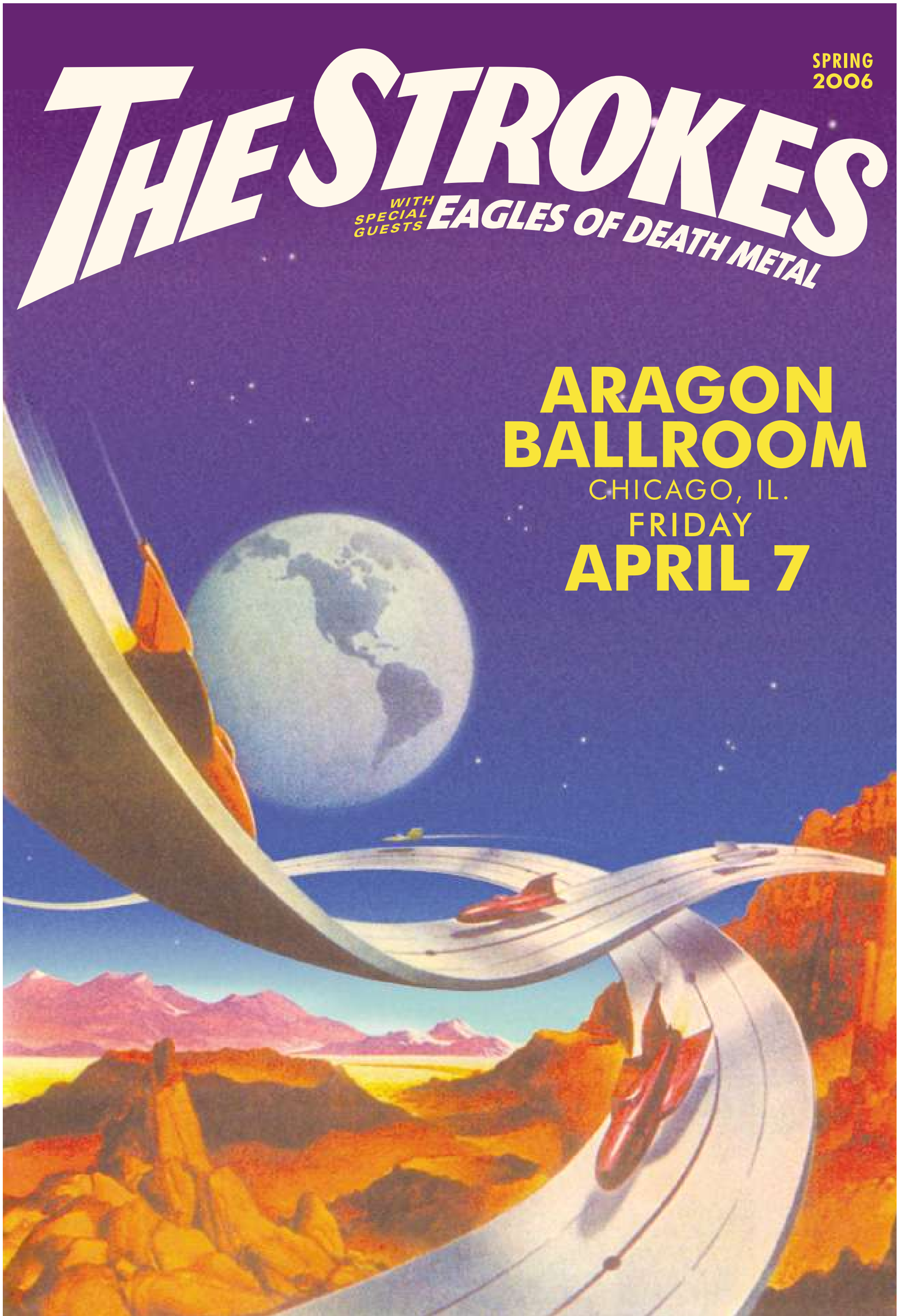


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A Fest to Say “We Exist”

The League of Chicago Music Venues announces its presence with the Hawk festival.

By Bob Mehr



Performing this weekend under the Hawk banner (clockwise): B.B. King, Friday at House of Blues; Mark Eitzel, playing with the Undertow Orchestra, Friday at Park West; Ariel Pink, Saturday at Schubas; Palaxy Tracks, Friday at the Hideout

This weekend the first Hawk Winter Music Festival presents 70-something acts at 11 venues. At first glance it's hard to tell what separates the fest from any other three days of music in Chicago—the bulk of the shows were booked months ago and only corralled under the festival's banner in the past few weeks. But the Hawk does have a theme: it's a coming-out party for the League of Chicago Music Venues, an association of local club owners and operators that so far represents Buddy Guy's Legends, the Double Door, the Empty Bottle, the Hideout, the HotHouse, House of Blues, Martyrs', Metro, Park West, Schubas, and Uncommon Ground.

"We've been talking about doing a signature event for a while," says Metro owner Joe Shanahan. "And that was based on a conversation we had with Mayor Daley's office. They felt that a live music association was a good thing, and the city was interested in seeing what would happen. We're creating a dialogue with the city of Chicago, showing them that responsible business owners, responsible license holders, and responsible music presenters are involved in this."

The League of Chicago Music Venues owes its existence in part to the E2 nightclub disaster in February 2003 and the Great White club fire in Rhode Island later that month. City officials responded by toughening their enforcement of capacity regulations and licensing requirements, putting particular pressure on smaller venues. In May 2003 the city temporarily shut down the HotHouse because it didn't have the proper license, and in February 2004 inspectors pulled the plug on a Martyrs' show by Ojos de Brujo—sponsored by the city's own Department of Cultural Affairs—because of overcrowding.

During this time several club operators and promoters—including Shanahan, Martyrs' owners Ray Quinn and Kate Hill, Nick Miller from Jam Productions, and Marguerite Horberg, director of the nonprofit HotHouse—started holding semiregular meetings to discuss the problems they shared. But in April 2005, before a formal organization could develop from those talks, they became moot with the launch of the Chicago Music Commission—a group of music-industry professionals that included venue operators, artists, label heads, and studio owners. Hill was on the CMC's original board of directors, which also included Bruce Iglauer of Alligator Records, photographer Paul Natkin, and entertainment attorney Walter Dale, and

at least in theory the commission represented everyone who ran a club in town. It patterned itself after groups like the League of Chicago Theatres and the state-funded Texas Music Office, which publishes an exhaustive industry directory each year and has tackled issues like affordable health insurance for musicians. The CMC's mission statement describes it as an information clearinghouse, a networking center, and a "liaison between live performance venues and City agencies in matters of code and license compliance."

Last spring the CMC's board met with Sheila O'Grady, Mayor Daley's chief of staff—who suggested, among other things, that the group launch a music festival and form a subcommittee of venue owners and operators that would meet with her and various city commissioners. Hill undertook the task of assembling the subcommittee—but as it turned out, it wouldn't be part of the CMC. "We basically stopped hearing from her," says one high-ranking CMC member. "The venue committee decided to go out on their own, and that's what became the League of Chicago Music Venues." Hill resigned from the CMC board with a one-line e-mail.

"They're very into the idea that the only people who can speak for venues are venues themselves," says Natkin, the CMC's executive director. "I have the exact opposite thought. . . . For somebody to be an effective liaison they should not be so invested, but have a little distance." He adds that the CMC has no intention to abandon its efforts to mediate between venues and the city. "Our job is to help every member of the Chicago music community that needs help," he says.

Hill insists that venue owners will benefit from having their own organization—one that isn't spread so thin. "It's kind of like we're the restaurant association, while the Chicago Music Commission was more like a chamber of commerce," she says. "The business aspect is very specific to music venues, and we just felt that it would serve us better if we worked with each other rather than in a huge group."

The recent passage of Chicago's smoking ban, which Quinn says happened without any input from the members of the LCMV, persuaded them that they needed some way to make sure their common concerns would be taken into account in city politics. The Hawk Winter Music Festival is the league's first step in that direction, an attempt to legitimize itself in the public eye. Organizers have pitched the fest as celebrating Chicago's music scene and

"promoting venue safety and security," but Hideout co-owner Tim Tuten says, "We really decided, let's just put together an event to see if we can all work together. . . . It's kind of like deciding in order to get your house clean you're going to throw a party and that will force you to get your act together."

The fest does look hastily assembled, and not just in its lineup. A \$20 pass is good for all the Hawk shows you can get to on Sunday, but on Friday and Saturday admission is concert by concert. There are several sponsors, the *Reader* among them, but no plans to include concertgoers in the league's mission—not even an electronic mailing list they can sign up for to show their interest and support.

Plus, as Natkin from the CMC points out, "Eleven venues is a pretty small number. We've identified 260 venues in Chicago . . . from United Center to the corner bar that does open mike on a Tuesday night." The league's membership lacks diversity—only the HotHouse, Buddy Guy's Legends, and Uncommon Ground couldn't qualify as rock venues, and places that do hip-hop and club music are particularly poorly represented.

Hill says this will change as the LCMV finds its footing, and adds that the Abbey Pub—which hosts big-ticket hip-hop shows several times a month—is interested in joining. "Eventually we'd like it to be citywide and with everyone involved. But we're still kind of forming the agenda and ideas now," she says. "It's not that we want it to be limited, but we just all agreed for the first year it would be better to start something small and know it would succeed."

Much of the legwork for the Hawk festival has been handled by employees of the Metro, HotHouse, and Martyrs'—the league hasn't established an official division of labor or even a governing board. Tuten acknowledges that it hasn't decided what comes after the fest. But if the fest's goal is simply to announce that the league exists, as Shanahan suggests, then step two might be just to wait for a reply.

"Ultimately, when it comes to live music, us being part of a cultural fabric of the city of Chicago, there is a voice here, and a voice that needs to be heard," he says. "We hope to see the day where the city would call us and ask our opinion if there's ever an issue that's going to impact licensed music venues. We've got history, we've got experience—why not have a dialogue?"

For the complete schedule of the Hawk Winter Music Festival, see the sidebar on page 36. **A**

The Treatment

A day-by-day guide to our Critic's Choices and other previews
friday17

GINUWINE His fifth album, *Back II Da Basics* (Epic), has yet to sell as well as his last four (all of which are at least platinum), but Ginuwine is still doing Ginuwine as only Ginuwine can. The record's first single, "When We Make Love," features several sung orgasms and promises from him to keep them coming—all night. Since the release of his breakthrough single, "Pony," a decade ago, perhaps no one has done sensual R & B slow jams quite as well. While R. Kelly continues to slip toward the bidonkulous, Ginuwine has never strayed from his mission—makin' baby-makin' music—which he imbues with gentlemanly class and finesse even when he's singing a paean to ass like "In Those Jeans" ("You the shit / You the bomb / All I wanna know is can I have what's in those jeans?"). Jagged Edge, Donnell Jones, and Case open. **►** 8 PM, Star Plaza Theatre, I-65 & U.S. 30, Merrillville, Indiana, 773-734-7266 or 312-559-1212, \$45-\$55. **A** —**Jessica Hopper**



Kaki King

CC KAKI KING Most people's idea of a young female solo artist with a rabid fan base looks a lot like Avril Lavigne, not a fingerpicking wunderkind who doesn't even sing. Kaki King's guitar technique puts her someplace between Leo Kottke and Don Caballero's Ian Williams, but though she rightfully earned praise for 2004's *Legs to Make Us Longer* (Epic), major-label reshuffling left her in limbo. "I'm assuming I'm dropped, as everyone I knew at the label does not work there anymore and I have not heard from them in months," she told me. "I should not have been on a major in the first place." She's been in town off and on for the past month working on a new album with John McEntire; tonight she's ditching the acoustic and debuting some new songs on electric guitar and pedal steel, opening for another queer guitar innovator, Bob Mould. See also Saturday. **►** 8 PM, Old Town School of Folk Music, 4544 N. Lincoln, 773-728-6000 or 866-468-3401, \$28, \$24 seniors and kids, sold out. **A** —**Jessica Hopper**

POISON ARROWS *Trailer Park* (File 13), the 2004 debut EP from this project led by Atombombpocketknife's Justin Sinkovich, is a revelation, combining swoopy, loopy electronic pulsations with an aggro-pop structure and sensibility. The disc includes a remix by Martin Rev, but the Suicide influence is actually stronger elsewhere—electronic beats with a rock 'n' roll heart, unnervingly dense and repetitive tracks played with a crooked smile. An EP with a new trio lineup is due later this year. Sterling headlines and Odiorne plays second. **►** 10 PM, Subterranean, 2011 W. North, 773-278-6600 or 800-594-8499, \$8. —**Monica Kendrick**

RUINERS Rick Ruiner, the front man of this Detroit sleaze-punk outfit, once told an interviewer that "writing music is preparation for the performance. The performance is preparation for the stories that follow the performance by the people who were there." He went on to list a few tales involving household appliances, costumes, sweat, and all sorts of goofy debauchery, but for all his humility about how (un)important the music is at a Ruiners show, the songs aren't afterthoughts. The Ruiners' tattooed rockabilly has a ziggling and zagging danceability; they're like the Cramps' kid sibs who felt they had to overachieve at public spectacle making to get noticed. This show is part of the Hawk Winter Music Festival; see page 36 for a complete schedule. The Quitters play second and the Hard Lessons open. **►** 10 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, 773-276-3600 or 866-468-3401, \$8. —**Monica Kendrick**

CC STARS, THE ELECTED On paper the **STARS'** blend of pink-cheeked youthfulness and booze-added wistfulness sounds risible—it's hard to take indie-pop musicians seriously when they feel compelled to point out that they drink and do drugs "quite a lot." But you might change your mind if you give a listen to the third album by this Montreal-based band, *Set Yourself on Fire*, released last spring in the States by Arts & Crafts (and yes, three members have played in Broken Social Scene, just like practically everybody else in Canada). Their carefully plotted songs of love gone wrong, rich with strings, synth, fuzz guitar, breathy girl-boy vocals, and the odd French horn part, make them sound a bit like David Gedge's Cinerama. (They may not appreciate yet another comparison to yet another pop hero—on their Web site, under "ten things you may not know about Stars," they've continued on page 6