

In Marin

CELEBRATING THE PEOPLE, PLACES AND CAUSES OF THIS UNIQUE COUNTY

NIGHTLIFE

STRIKE UP THE BAND

*Marin's dynamic music scene
is well on its way to a revival. »*

BY DANIEL JEWETT • PHOTOS BY TIM PORTER



The Cream tribute band Cream of Clapton entertains guests at the Southern Pacific Smokehouse.



MARIN NIGHTCLUBS THAT gave bands and musicians like Chris Isaak, Huey Lewis and the News, John Lee Hooker, Elvis Costello, Carlos Santana, Bonnie Raitt, Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead a place to play and made the county a destination for live music fans are — after a long drought and many closures — once again taking center stage.

➔ **Open Just Over a Year: George's in San Rafael**

After walking past the shuttered New George's one too many times, Todd Ghanizadeh finally decided that if nobody else would reopen the nightclub — which has entertained locals in one way or another since 1927 and enjoyed a heyday as a live music venue in the '80s and '90s — he would. "I wanted to go back to the original idea: a place where people could come have a good time and dance," Ghanizadeh says about his club, which dropped the "new" and is now once again just George's.

Ghanizadeh gave the interior a new look with a stylish 1940s theme, two bars, blue neon and stainless steel tables and began booking acts such as the Roy Rodgers Band, Pride and Joy, the Monophonics and Vinyl. He scheduled comedy, too, with Will Durst, Arj Barker and Scott Capurro. Ghanizadeh survived the first year — which included a small fire and flood and even a personal battle with cancer — and says the club is doing very well, attracting some 100 to 150 people a night. So well, in fact, he just added jazz and salsa Thursday evenings to the weekend schedule. "We are building slowly; it takes time," he says. "But people are thrilled to have the club back."

smoked in a 2,000-pound Ole Hickory smoker while listening to live rock, jazz, blues and country music three or four nights a week in a room with a state-of-the-art sound system and stage lighting. The experience rounds out with a grand bar specializing in Manhattans.

"We are overwhelmed by the positive response from Novato and Marin; people here want live music," Rimedio says. "Everyone in Marin is used to driving over the bridge for live music; it is nice to draw people the other way."

➔ **Coming Soon: Sweetwater in Mill Valley** While details are hard to come by, it is clear that Mill Valley's Sweetwater — a venue that many considered the heart of the Marin music scene before it closed in 2007 — is going to reopen, maybe as soon as this month.

The classic club with the nationally known name is set to reopen in the 107-year-old Masonic Lodge on Corte Madera Avenue. The venue was being operated by Ged Robertson (also the owner of Mill Valley's Small Shed Flatbreads) as The Woods Music Hall until it closed for renovations earlier this year.

It now appears that major renovations, including a state-of-the-art audio upgrade, are under way in the 311-seat hall, and a new ownership group with rights to the Sweetwater name is in place. Robertson, who will remain involved, would only say that the club is going to be "awesome." In what looks like another good sign for the new venue, local KR Holt will be handling the booking and management, and — with her years of experience at Goldenvoice, Slim's and Bill Graham Presents — she could make the club a stopping point for nationally touring acts.

➔ **Not To Be? Terrapin Crossroads in Fairfax** A plan by Grateful Dead and Furthur bassist Phil Lesh to build an 8,250-square-foot music barn in Fairfax has been put on hold. Lesh and his wife, Jill, submitted the plan for the 500-person-capacity venue on August 1, which is also Jerry Garica's birthday. But it seems that Lesh and his project manager Bruce Burman got cold feet after public opposition was raised at a forum in Fairfax and realizing what the approval process might entail. At press time, Fairfax town manager Michael Rock confirmed that no application has been submitted.

Even without Terrapin Crossroads, Marin's live music scene seems to be heading in an exciting direction, and for Bay Area music fans it is certainly an encore worth waiting for. **M**

Above right: At George's, Petty Theft plays the songs of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Below: A cocktail from the Southern Pacific Smokehouse.



➔ **Open Just Under a Year: Southern Pacific Smokehouse in Novato**

When general manager Nick Rimedio and his partners began looking for a place to open their new restaurant and live music venue, they weren't thinking as big as 9,100 square feet with 100 seats for dining and 120 seats for live music — but that's what they got. "We were looking all over Marin, and the shopping center [Vintage Oaks] approached us with a totally gutted blank canvas," he says. "It was a little bigger than we originally intended."

But the partners — who include PlumpJack CEO Rick Reese and Nashville recording artist Philip Claypool — quickly embraced the idea. Now, guests can enjoy food