

The School of Rock: UC San Diego's Concert Scene Explodes

Campus is hub for live music with new venues and student organized concerts and music festivals

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The University of California, San Diego is known for its Nobel laureates and cutting-edge research, but the campus also has become a hot spot for concerts and a variety of live musical performances. On Sunday, Sept. 26, the popular alternative rock band, the Pixies, are playing at UC San Diego's RIMAC Arena.

Concert bookings on campus have dramatically increased over the years and several alumni such as Bill Silva of Bill Silva Entertainment, Marc Geiger of William Morris Endeavor Entertainment and Jaime Sarachit of the Recording Academy/Grammy Awards have successful careers in the music industry through their experience organizing concerts at UC San Diego.

"I worked for the University Centers Marketing and Programming Office and booked more than 100 shows in three years," said Brooks Roach, who graduated from UC San Diego in 1998 and now works at The Agency Group, one of the world's largest booking agencies. "Through my contacts and professional development at UC San Diego, I was able to secure internships for agencies and now I am doing what I love working in the music industry."

Alumni such as Silva and Geiger are just a few of the many UC San Diego graduates who are members of the UCSD Alumni Entertainment Alliance which is comprised of alumni working at all levels in television, film, music, theater, gaming, performing arts and media.

UC San Diego's University Events Office works with the university's Associated Students organization to provide programming for students including a growing number of live music events, according to Martin Wollesen director of the University Events Office. "We have gone from having 20 concerts a year to 250-the assortment of shows has spiked. On the west coast other schools are looking at UC San Diego as a model since we've been able to grow the number of live shows so well."

One of the university's most revered traditions for students is the Sun God Festival, an annual concert established in 1984 that has evolved into one of the largest student-organized music festivals in the United States. In 2010, a record 20,000 UC San Diego students, alumni and guests attended the event which featured three stages, comedic acts, a dance tent and the popular hip-hop artist, Drake.

With the support of the University Events Office, Associated Students hosts music festivals every fall and winter and Sun God every spring. On Oct. 15, hip-hop artist Big Boi of Outkast, the rock band, Mutemath among others will play this year's Fall Fest. In addition to general campus concert bookings, each of UC San Diego's six colleges has its own annual music festival.

Roach said that campus' various concerts and music festivals have created a sense of school spirit for UC San Diego students.

"We don't have a football team," he said. "But the campus comes together for a lot of events like Sun God that create really memorable experiences and give students a sense of pride to be a student at UC San Diego."

The Che Café and Porter's Pub were among the first concert venues at UC San Diego, now music acts can be caught at the Price Center, RIMAC Arena and The Loft, a night club, restaurant and performance lounge. UC San Diego's ArtPower! program, which provides multidisciplinary art programs for students and the San Diego community, also sponsors classical, jazz and contemporary performances.

The exciting new increase of concerts has enhanced UC San Diego's nightlife and helped create an identity for the university's students, according to Wollesen. "New venues, such as The Loft have really brought so much activity to campus and the additional programming has engaged a lot of students and enhanced student life at UC San Diego."

Many students have been a driving force in the growing concert trend and organizing live shows has become ingrained in UC San Diego's culture, according to Alex Kushner, a 2004 alumnus and campus events manager for the University Events Office.

Kushner got his start as a concert organizer for the campus' annual Fall Fest. "In 2004, I had just booked Queens of the Stone Age when the single 'No One Knows' came out and then the band exploded," he said. In his current position, Kushner books bands for RIMAC Arena and has helped bring acts, such as Phoenix and the Pixies to campus. Bands such as Massive Attack and Thievery Corporation are slated to perform in the arena this fall.

In 2008, the campus opened the doors to the Conrad Prebys Music Center. The facility's crown jewel—a world-class, 400-seat concert hall designed by Seattle-based LMN Architects in collaboration with Cyril M. Harris, Ph.D., one of the most respected acoustical engineers in the world—is considered one of the finest small concert halls in the world.

Since moving to the Conrad Prebys Music Center last year, UC San Diego's Department of Music has vastly expanded its concert offerings to 150 for the 2010-2011 academic year. The music center is part of an emerging pedestrian friendly village at the heart of campus centered around the Price Center. The area is designed to provide a lively cluster of restaurants, shops and evening attractions such as music department concerts. The Loft at the Price Center provides a wide variety of provocative performances, art films, various arts openings and special events.

Kushner said through RIMAC, UC San Diego has formed stronger relationships with a lot of booking industries, such as Nederlander Concerts and Live Nation and students can look forward seeing more popular artists perform at the venue.

Although concerts at RIMAC, The Loft and Porter's Pub are open to the public, because they are located on the campus of UC San Diego, there is often reserved seating and discount pricing for students.

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