

nitelife

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# New life for nightlife downtown



## Venues

- >> **Ground Level**, 1154 Fort Street Mall, 546-9998  
Punk/ska featuring the Hellbound Hounds Live and DJ Independent; Art Flx loft upstairs will feature films by Andy Warhol, John Waters, Fellini, Jacques Tati and more. Art exhibit featuring Roy Venters, the Mystery Cat, Rich Walker, Kenneth Brimer and Lanakila Kelliher.
- >> **Club Pauahi** at 80 South Pauahi St., 521-7252  
Reggae featuring the Eastside Wrecking Crew Live and DJs Lion and Pressure.
- >> **The ARTS at Marks Garage** at 1159 Nuuanu Ave., 521-2903  
Acid Jazz and Grooves from the Flower Pit Live! Plus "The Dragon Garden of Walter Liew" art exhibition.
- >> **The Club House** at 10 North Hotel St., 536-6966  
The Down Tempo lounge styles of DJ Maggie at the Cat.
- >> **Garden of Saigon** at 1041 Nuuanu Ave., 537-6971  
Hip-Hop with 420 Functions featuring DJs Epic and Shawn Murphy.

There was a time, before the trendy eateries, art galleries and Chinatown renovations, that the territory downtown bordered by River and Bishop streets was the last place any law-abiding citizen wanted to be caught after dark. A decade ago, downtown Honolulu nightlife consisted largely of adult video shops, dodgy pubs and late-night weirdo-watching.

While much of the area's re-emergence is credited to the city's beautification projects, the efforts of promoter Kristien Amer brought an entirely new clientele downtown. It was 1993 when the then-22-year-old saw new possibilities for several old venues. By persuading the management of Blaisdell Garden Cafe on Fort Street Mall to stay open longer on weekends and allow her to host evening rock shows, she unwittingly sparked a revitalization campaign of her own.

"The whole idea was to give my friends a place to play and give myself someplace interesting to go to," she said. "Some of my friends were in bands and back then there weren't many places for original bands to play. I didn't even realize at that point that I was a promoter."

By booking Frogchild and Tantra Monsters, two of Honolulu's biggest underground attractions at the time, her first function drew more than 400 people to a virtually unknown establishment in the sketchiest part of town.

As Amer coordinated collaborative events with adjoining venue The Fort, patronage in the area grew by leaps and bounds. "By the time Fast Zone



RICHARD WALKER / RWALKER@STARBULLETIN.COM

Some of the artists who will be participating in Saturday's "Wok On" event in Chinatown are from left, Eric Kaneshiro, Kenneth Brimer, event organizer Kristien Amer, and Roy Venters.

came around, that place blew up," she says, referring to Blaisdell Garden Cafe's successor, who used Amer's entertainment model and added touring mainland acts to its weekend lineup. Recognizing potential in the forgotten tracts surrounding Fort Street Mall, other promoters moved in.

IT WAS A timely occurrence that the venerable Wo Fat restaurant on Hotel Street soon approached Amer with an offer to use their facilities as a part-time entertainment venue. "The first time I walked up the stairs, I was just amazed," she recalls. "I really liked the building and the whole space. It's definitely a historical landmark."

Wo Fat, like its neighbors, saw a steady decline in patronage over the years and needed a shot in the arm. For Amer, it

was an opportunity to bring a positive influence to the troubled territory, in one of the city's most culturally bountiful neighborhoods. She held numerous events featuring local and mainland acts there over several years.

"That was always a dream that I had," she says wistfully. "If I ever could, I wanted to take over that building."

Although that prospect never panned out, Amer gained valuable experience over the years, relocating to Los Angeles in 1997 and organizing a number of events there before returning to Honolulu two years ago to continue what she had started. "You could make twice to three times as much there easily," she said. "But I just wanted to come back here and struggle because it's just worth it to me on some level."

"I feel better about what I do here because I feel like Hawaii needs it more. Every time I think I want to leave (for the mainland), my friends tell me, 'No, we really need you over here; you need to keep doing what you're doing.'"

Her Chinese New Year block party last year brought together a wide array of artists, musicians and patrons to such diverse establishments as Wo Fat, Havana Cabana, Indigo and Salor 5 in a multi-venue event. Tomorrow's Wok On Chinatown block party could be her most ambitious local production to date. For a single entry fee, nightlifers will have access to a number of art, film and music-related events at Ground Level (formerly The Fort), The ARTS at Marks Garage, The Club House, Garden of Saigon and Club Pauahi. All venues are within four blocks of each other.

"To get as many people from different scenes together in one place on one night like that means there's a need for these type of events here," she says. "I wish someone would organize one that I could go to!"

**'Wok On'**  
Chinatown Block Party  
When: 9 p.m. tomorrow, to 2 a.m.  
Admission: \$10 for a five-venue wristband, open to 21 and over at Ground Level; Club Pauahi and the Club House; 18 and over at Garden of Saigon; all ages at Marks Garage

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