

The Record

Ridgewood DJ experiment

Music tastemaker livens up a restaurant crowd

Wednesday, February 21, 2008

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WHO: Groove Wednesdays with Rafe Gomez.

WHAT: Nu jazz, chill, Latin, bossa nova.

WHEN: 7 to 11 p.m. Wednesdays.

WHERE: Blend bar, 17 Chestnut St., Ridgewood; 201-251-4343.

HOW MUCH: Free cover, \$10 per person minimum at tables.

WHERE TO HEAR: thegrooveboutique.com.

Maybe London, maybe Milan.

"It's very big in Europe," says Montclair's Rafe Gomez, a **DJ** from the late terrestrial radio station CD-101.9. "But it's never been done here. And we're going to bring it to Bergen County."

His **experiment** runs deeper than injecting a shot of Europe into North Jersey's cultural landscape. He is trying to take a radio show and incorporate it into a dinner setting. Next time you dine at Ridgewood's Blend bar on a Wednesday night, you'll get to watch Gomez at work.

"I've done performing in nightclubs and lounges around the country," Gomez says. "Restaurants, wine bars, martini bars ... they bring me in. It's an experience that is a great accompaniment to dining to conversation to wining and — possibly depending upon how energetic folks get — to dancing as well."

Gomez calls the experience "a live reflection of what I do on my radio show."

"My whole goal with the 'Groove Boutique' radio show is to satisfy that desire for melody but also to wed it with rhythm," Gomez says. "So the rhythm was everything from bossa nova to Latin jazz to contemporary funky jazz and even dipping back into stuff from the '70s and the '60s and mixing it all together."

Gomez says he has fielded calls from other restaurants and bars that were interested in making him an artist-in-residence. Few places appealed to him. Months ago, when Gomez first popped by Blend, he discovered a place to his liking. He reached out to Blend owner Lorie Montenegro to inquire about setting up an appearance.

"I thought it was an amazing place where something like this could be presented," Gomez says. "In fact, I got a lot of e-mails from listeners of mine who live in Bergen County that said, 'Man, you should get into the Blend bar.' "

"We have a lot of very, very big-name artists, a lot of popular **DJs**," Montenigro says. "I can say personally I think he is by far the best **DJ** I've seen live. I mean, really, what he did with my crowd Saturday night, I was so impressed."

A few Saturdays ago, a band's family emergency forced Montenigro to juggle her lineup. She put Gomez out there, and her regular crowd took to him. Gomez travels with thousands of songs. Montenigro says it's hard to sit still when Gomez is weaving those thousands of songs together.

"I'm really going to be reading the crowd and reflecting the energy of the room with the kind of stuff that I play," Gomez says. "I'm not going to try to create something and then have everyone follow along. If people are up to dancing, then I'll be playing some Latin jazz by Mongo Santamaria or maybe some funky stuff by a group out of England called Incognito. There's a group out of Italy called the Berardi Jazz Connection."

In other words, it's Europe in North Jersey.

- Mike Kerwick