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MUSIC PREVIEW: Yard Rock finds a home in Quincy's Holy Ground

By JAY N. MILLER
For The Patriot Ledger

Quincy will once again have the blues.

Barely a month after the city's venerable Yard Rock blues club had to shut its doors, weekly "Yard Rock Nights" are being launched every Thursday at The Holy Ground, a restaurant and bar at 1600 Hancock Street.

Former Yard Rock owner Joe Hajjar is producing the series, and has secured a top notch attraction for tomorrow night's premiere, with the popular swing septet The Love Dogs. With three albums of their original, updated take on classic swing, blues and r&b, the Love Dogs have been touring nationally for several years and are returning after spending much of January performing in Florida.

Hajjar said that The Holy Ground in the city's downtown is not only a prime location with ample parking, it also offers a real chance to recreate the unique clubhouse atmosphere his cozy shipyard pub had. Shows will begin at 9 p.m. in deference to fans who have to work the next day.

"The entire place is wood, from wooden floors to wooden wall trim, which is just beautiful and makes for a nice, warm sound," said Hajjar. "Our old place was just too small to make a profit in, but this room has a capacity of about 150, which should make a big difference while still retaining the intimate feel."

"There are 20 seats at the bar and a large standing area, so I think our existing blues community will love stopping in and hanging out here."

Hajjar is just back from a trip to Memphis for the national finals of the Battle of the Blues Bands, featuring 76 groups chosen in regional contests.

Boston's Matthew Stubbs Band, a regular Yard Rock act, finished third in the prestigious competition, although Hajjar felt they deserved even better.

"I was so proud of them," he said, "and I know from the reception they got playing at B.B. King's club there, the band will be getting lots of work down there after this. They are also being courted by Alligator Records of Chicago, the top blues label, and I think there's no doubt they've graduated to big time status. We'll be having them play at our new home on Feb. 26, and local fans don't want to miss it."

Hajjar also announced that next Thursday's show will feature the Steve Murphy Band, March 4 will be Toni Lynn Washington, and in keeping with his club's tradition, every third Thursday will offer the Boston Blues Society's Showcase, hosted by Brian Templeton.



The Love Dogs will open "Yard Rock Nights" at the Holy Ground tomorrow.

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Faced with a month without a club of his own, Hajjar said he has enjoyed visiting other area venues, like Chan's in Woonsocket and The Dodge Street Bar and Grill in Salem.

"I've been to some really fun places, but I'm a Quincy guy at heart," Hajjar said. "And we have heard constantly from our regulars how much they miss our place. Even the owners of the Holy Ground were Yard Rock regulars, which made this whole process come together very easily."

Hajjar also expects to promote occasional weekend shows at larger venues around the area.

Yard Rock Nights - At The Holy Ground, 1600 Hancock St., 9 p.m. Thursdays. This week: The Love Dogs. 617-773-4334. \$5 cover charge.

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