

Posted on Mon, Dec 24, 2012 : 5:55 a.m.

5-day festival Mittenfest VII celebrates Michigan music and the New Year

By Jennifer Eberbach

There are numerous reasons why **Mittenfest** is a staple event in local entertainment. The 5-day Michigan music festival returns for the seventh time to ring in the New Year and be charitable, on **Dec. 28 through Jan. 1** at Woodruff's Bar in Ypsilanti's Depot Town.

For starters, the Michigan-wide festival features **50 bands** from across the state this year. Local bands like **Lightning Love**, **The Juliets**, **Matt Jones and the Reconstruction**, **Ghostlady**, and others tip the iceberg.

This year's festival features more acts from Detroit, including **Jamacian Queens**, as well as bands from Grand Rapids, Lansing, the U.P., and Michigan ex-pats who have moved out of state. It also does a good job of spreading out New Year's cheer over multiple days, which makes the holiday feel like it lasts a lot longer. At midnight **DJ Chuck Sipperley** will ring in the New Year with a dance party.

The fundraiser holds special importance to beneficiary **826michigan**, a youth writing and tutoring center, which receives 100 percent of the proceeds and tons of support from event sponsors. Around \$21,000 at last year's festival—a record breaker—went a long way in the hands of the non-profit youth literacy organization that is housed behind their Robot Supply and Repair storefront in downtown Ann Arbor.

To get people pumped up for the big festival, a **"Minifest"** will be held at Rush Street Lounge in Ann Arbor, on Dec. 26, care of long-time Mittenfest supporter **Andy Garris**. **A Vagrant Symphony**, **Nick Bertso & Little Traps**, and **Joshua Barton** will perform at this additional fundraiser for 826michigan.

As in the past, **Beezy's** in downtown Ypsilanti is hosting a special **brunch** on Sunday, Dec. 30, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and 8.26 percent of their take will benefit 826michigan.

The festival has come a long way since its birth. The brainchild of former Michigander **Brandon Zwagerman**, now a New Yorker, Mittenfest grew out of his knack for throwing shows when he lived in Ann Arbor. He says the festival used to be all about reuniting with old friends from the Michigan music scene, and that is still true to an extent.

"But it took on a life of its own," Zwagerman says. "It's almost like the cart and the horse have flipped." In some ways the festival runs on its own momentum. Bands from all over Michigan know of the event and seek it out; 200 applied this year. And they have a solid stable of volunteers and sponsors.

Event co-organizer and 826michigan board member **Jeremy Peters** has a lot of experience in the music scene as co-owner for Quite Scientific Records and licensing manager for Ghostly International, two Ann Arbor-based music labels. In his experience planning music for Mittenfest,



A crowd listens to MC Kadence at last year's Mittenfest.

Angela J. Cesere | AnnArbor.com file photo

PREVIEW

Mittenfest VII

- Who: Countless Michigan-based bands in various genres.
- What: Annual multi-day music festival to benefit 826michigan.
- Where: Woodruff's, 36 E. Cross St. in Ypsilanti's Depot Town.
- When: Dec. 28-Jan. 1, doors

bands from all over Michigan see it as a good opportunity to connect with Washtenaw County's fans and venues.

"A lot of the bands come to get their pulse on the music scene here and make connections. It's always possible that you'll see them again at the Blind Pig or some other venue after they play Mittenfest," Peters says.

At the heart of the event, it is a celebration of 826michigan's contribution to the community as much as it is a celebration of Michigan music. The over \$21,000 raised at last year's Mittenfest was invested back into Ypsilanti.

Amanda Uhle, executive director of 826michigan, reports that last year's money allowed the organization "to add a program coordinator position focused on Ypsilanti. We hired **D'Real Graham** to run our daily after school tutoring program at Ypsilanti Middle School and he also runs the drop-in writing at Ypsilanti's public library branches," she says.

Although donations raised at Mittenfest aren't allocated to specific aspects of 826michigan's work, the money tends to get used in Ypsilanti for a few reasons. Firstly, the event happens in Ypsilanti. It also turns out that "those funds usually just match up to what we need to run our programs in Ypsi, so we make that connection a lot," Uhle says.

The festival is also supported by a solid group of sponsors whose monetary and in-kind support make it almost free for 826michigan have the fundraiser, according to Uhle.

Peters' record label is a sponsor, and he shares his reason for giving support to the festival. "At least for my company, as an arts company, we saw the importance of coming in as a sponsor because 826michigan's kids could be the ones writing songs and lyrics in the future. It totally makes sense to support them because you never know if the next great songwriter is coming through a tutoring program at Ypsilanti Middle School or 826's other programs," he says.

opening at 5 p.m. each day. [Check out the full schedule here.](#)

- How much: \$10 per day, or \$82.60 for a festival pass.