





We know
why we
can't have
beer at
Veishea.
Why can't
we have
good music?

by Bethany Kohoutek

Some people think that when alcohol disappeared from Veishea, so did good music. Some of us students are too young to remember, but “back in the day” music was actually a pretty big part of the festivities at Veishea. The Iowa State Center regularly booked acts like The Who, Diana Ross and the Supremes, Billy Joel, Aerosmith, Sonny and Cher, and John Denver to play during Veishea. And tickets sold like crazy.

Veishea was a huge draw for bands, and some of them rank among the most defining musicians of the last few decades. Ask anyone who was around back then — Veishea was nothing like it is today. They'll tell you about parties in the streets (and the elevators, alleys, Porta Potties, etc.), rampant school spirit, the abundance of alcohol, and believe it or not, great live music right here in Ames, Iowa.

“Live music has always played an integral part in Veishea,” says Corey Moss, staff writer for MTV News online and former Veishea committee music coordinator. “Like parades or food festivals, concerts tend to appeal to a large number of people.”

But now instead of looking forward to Veishea weekend and refusing to miss a second of the celebration, hundreds and maybe thousands of ISU students flock to Iowa City bars and other places for the weekend. Perhaps a large portion of the student body does need to have booze to have a good time. But maybe more people would be willing to

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stick around, drunk or sober, if there was a critically acclaimed yet popular band slated to play.

Take last year, for example. Only 500 people came to see the headlining act, Black Eyed Peas. Though hip-hop aficionados were down with the choice, most students had no clue who they were. Since then the Peas have enjoyed their first real radio hit. Had the Black Eyed Peas come to town this year, ticket sales may have been higher.

Last year was an example of everything that can go wrong when attempting to book a band to appeal to

everyone on the ISU campus. Right band, wrong year. Right band, wrong budget. Good intentions, but still scrambling at the end of March for whoever will come to Iowa.

"Last year was a mess," says Maintenance Shop coordinator Eric Yarwood. "[Booking a band] wasn't finished until seven days before Veishea."

This year's Veishea entertainment staff didn't end up on their knees begging bands to sign. Vertical Horizon was locked in as the headliner in November of last year, says Yarwood, who helps Veishea with the technical and business aspects of booking an act.

Veishea Entertainment Committee co-chairmen Matt Tripp and David Adickes, both seniors in agriculture, decided on Vertical Horizon as the center stage main act, with Five For Fighting opening the show at Hilton Coliseum on April 21. They say they took into account price, availability, and an online student survey when they made the decision. Other bands considered include Everclear, Barenaked Ladies, and 3 Doors Down, Adickes says.

"One of our goals was to find a band that would be attractive to the Cyclone family," he says, "and also to find a band that is up and coming and would be popular when Veishea rolls around."

Tripp claims Vertical Horizon has a broad audience that will fit Veishea well. "Vertical Horizon is a popular band," he says. "It's tough to get a band that will appeal to every student, but we tried to get a band that would appeal to as many as possible."

And they are certainly right about Vertical Horizon's place in the mainstream music world. Though you're probably not a diehard



This year's headlining act, Vertical Horizon. Yes, they're as boring as they look.

fan, chances are you've heard some of their stuff. They've made a name for themselves with three popular radio hits, "Everything You Want," "You're A God," and most recently, "Best I Ever Had." Switch on local radio stations like 105.1, 102.5, 107.5. Listen for an hour, and you're pretty much guaranteed to hear at least one of those songs.

And ticket sales, which were at about 900 as of mid-March, have reflected the band's popularity, Yarwood says. Well, at least in comparison to last year's dismal showing.

"We've sold more tickets already this year than we did for the entire show last year," he says.

"As far as I can see, I think the students seem happy," Tripp adds.

Of course, 900 people is not exactly a roaring crowd in the 14,000-plus seat Hilton Coliseum, and not everyone is eagerly standing in a Ticketmaster line ready to snatch up the \$12 tickets to see a band many feel is an unoriginal, unchallenging, mainstream dud.

Conor Bezane, arts and entertainment editor of the *Iowa State Daily*, described Vertical Horizon in an entertainment column published in February as "clean-cut," "middle of the road," and a "flash-in-the-pan pop act" that doesn't even come close to "pushing the envelope."

"Though it's great that they've booked a band with mainstream popularity, the Veishea Entertainment Committee has left a hole for those of us who like to go beyond the limits of prepackaged pop in our music listening tastes," wrote Bezane, a senior in journalism.

Moss, who coordinated the music for

Veishea for three years and is a former *Daily* arts and entertainment editor, says Vertical Horizon is not the kind of band students clamor for.

"Does the Iowa State Center really think people are going to give up a good night of partying to see Matchbox Horizon and Five For Twenty, or whoever they are? Not only are those bands the same, but that style of music is so boring," he says.

The music of Vertical Horizon falls into the adult album alternative or adult contemporary

category, Bezane wrote in his column, and that is a problem.

"We're not adults in the adult contemporary sense of the word — we're college students," he wrote.

However, David Stuart, an ISU music professor who teaches History of Rock and Roll, says there is no one way to describe college music. One of the things his class discusses is musical labels, such as "popular music" or "college music." Everyone has his or her own definition of these labels, he says. One person may define college music as the Dave Matthews Band, while another may see it as Ben Harper or The Beta Band. Still others may categorize U2 as college music. And none of them would be wrong.

"Popular music' is a really generic term," Stuart says. "It is a blanket term that can be applied to techno, electronica, rap, ska, any of these things."

But though it may be varied in style, Moss thinks there are a few fundamental things that set college bands apart.

"College music is fresh and edgy," he says. "It may not be someone new. College music is not too commercial, but not too underground." And it would be fair to say Moss does not ascribe these qualities to Vertical Horizon.

He says bands like Blink-182, Beastie Boys, and the now-disbanded Soul Coughing are all the type to fit the Veishea bill. Bezane suggested Moby, who walks the line between mainstream-name recognition and musical integrity.

Without a solid definition of what the average college student wants to hear, the key to a successful Veishea concert lineup might be

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a mix of bands. "The lowest common denominator isn't always the best," says Andrew Seitz, music director for Iowa State's radio station, KURE. "They should go for more of a variety. It would get more people involved."

Obviously, there are a number of different musical tastes represented among the students and faculty at Iowa State. Why not book a cross section of bands that will appeal to more than one type of student? Seitz, a senior in art and design, suggests keeping a mainstream band like Vertical Horizon at Hilton Coliseum, but adding a smaller act at the Maintenance Shop to please those with more alternative musical tastes.

"For example, Frank Black," he says. "If they would advertise it as Vertical Horizon and former Pixies member Frank Black, I'd be more inclined to go."

And variety has proven to work well in the past. In 1998, Moss booked Tonic, The Crystal Method, and The Flaming Lips for Veishea. Tonic appeased the conventional masses, while The Flaming Lips brought in discerning music fans less impressed by a handful of popular radio hits. The Crystal Method rounded out the lineup by attracting techno listeners.

The 1998 show also packed one extra punch: It featured a local band as an opener. "35" Mudder [a local group that has since disbanded] provided a fix for the harder rock fans," says Moss.

Although Veishea 1998 boasted an impressive diversity of bands, it exceeded the \$75,000 budget set aside for signing entertainment. In response, university administrators and the Veishea committee decided it would only allocate a concert budget if the Iowa State Center was involved in the booking process. And the Iowa State Center only books bands that are on tour together, Moss says. For example, Vertical Horizon and Five For Fighting are touring together. The 1998 lineup clearly wasn't.

This practice has led to some major disappointments for ISU music fans. In past years, Veishea Entertainment Committees were close to booking acts like Ben Folds Five, who have generated substantial mass appeal while retaining the qualities that made them popular in underground circles. To many, knowing that Veishea was close to bringing in acts like this just makes going to a Vertical Horizon show seem that much gloomier.

"Before they made this decision [to only book tours], I was talking with Beck's people about bringing him to town," Moss says. "When the Iowa State Center took over, they

ditched that idea and went straight for tours. The worst part about bringing a tour in to play Veishea is that you are not going to get variety. The best way to do a concert that appeals to a wide range of people is to find two or three different kinds of acts and fly them in. Yes, it is more costly, but it is worth it."

And cost was one of the biggest factors in making decisions for the Veishea 2001 entertainment roster.

This year about \$50,000 was allocated for the Veishea Entertainment Committee to spend on bands, Yarwood says. "Lots of people wonder why we can't get big bands like the Dave Matthews Band," he says. "But we don't have that kind of money to spend. Dave Matthews probably pulls in about a half a million per show. People just don't realize how expensive some acts are."

Moss estimates Veishea could earmark \$150,000 for the music budget and easily make good on the investment — if a few things were changed.

"The money issue is tricky, because it all depends on if the university wants to make it back or not. They could put up \$150,000 for the Beastie Boys — plus stage and venue costs — and they would easily make it back if they opened it up to the public and charged \$20 a ticket."

That's another one of the key problems the entertainment staff faces: closed shows. In 1998, university administrators invented the "Cyclone Family" rule, allowing only ISU students, their families, and Ames residents to attend Veishea concerts.

This closed show policy seems to be in contrast to the whole point of Veishea. Veishea's official Web site boasts, "From its meager beginning in 1922 until the spectacular event it is today, Veishea has served the campus, the state, and the Midwest."

It is difficult to serve the entire Midwest when only ISU students and their families are allowed into Veishea's most popular events. Students from other colleges and people from other parts of Iowa may or may not care about Veishea's cherry pies and open houses, and they may or may not care about going to see a popular band. But if the right act is booked, it is hard to believe an open concert wouldn't attract thousands. In the years before the Uri Sellers murder, bands booked by the Iowa State Center (Veishea at that time didn't need to pay for bands to beg people to stay) drew sellout crowds. A great band with a consistent following playing a concert open to all would do a lot more to revitalize Veishea than a crowd of barely

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David Adickes,
Veishea Entertainment
Committee co-chairman

1,000 packed into Hilton.

Other factors also come into play. Some bands just aren't available at the right time.

"A lot of bands take the month of April and the beginning of May off to get ready for summer tours," Yarwood says.

And even if they are available, he adds, most would rather play a larger city like Minneapolis or Chicago, where the market drives ticket prices higher. With all of these obstacles to work around, "it's tough to get a band that appeals to everyone," Tripp says.

"There's a lot of people who have their own taste," Tripp says. "Some of those other bands might have been great, but we did the best we could with what we were dealt with. We put in a lot of time. It's a tough job."

Once again, we all collectively yawn.

Bethany Kohoutek is a staff writer from Swisher. This is her second cover story for Ethos.

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