

Harmony and Heartbreak: 40 Years of Lupo's

At the risk of making much of our readership feel old, Lupo's Heartbreak Hotel just turned 40! Music nerds and concert fanatics like myself tend to measure their lives by the great shows they've seen, which is why institutions like Lupo's become hallowed ground to the community. If you've had your existence redefined by a show in Rhode Island, chances are founder Rich Lupo had something to do with it.

For me, it was in the middle of my high school Jack White-worshipping phase (2005, I think?) when I was front row for The Raconteurs. At the time it was the greatest moment of my life, and seeing Jack's weirdly ripped biceps is something I'll probably remember long after I'm blanking on the names of my own children.

Rich Lupo opened the club at 377 Westminster Street on Sept 5, 1975, at the tender age of 26. "I wanted to do it ever since I was about 17, but I always thought it was just a fantasy." Despite having no formal business education (he got a B.A. in psychology from Brown) he decided to take the plunge. "Back then the total cost to open the place was about \$35,000, and I think I had about \$15,000 saved up. I got a loan from the bank, a friend lent me some money, and I leased all the equipment."

Lupo soon discovered the key to the club's success. "I opened the place mainly as a jukebox joint where people could come and listen to records, with live bands only once or twice a week. We realized within the first two weeks that we were utterly successful when we had live music and totally empty when we didn't."

In the early days, Lupo's was a blues club, but by the '80s they were booking heavy on the rock 'n' roll as well, hosting bands like Mission of Burma and the Dead Boys. The blend of styles wasn't what Lupo originally intended, but he says he's proud of the club's legacy as a place where all kinds of styles can find an audience. "I actually think some of the reggae shows have been some of the best shows we've had!"

You may think the life of a club owner is all about hanging with rock stars and counting fat stacks, but it hasn't all been smooth sailing. In 1988, Lupo's was forced to close to make way for condos. The club reopened down the street in 1993 where they hosted bands like Radiohead, Green Day and Foo Fighters. Also in that year, The Met, described by Lupo as "a fabulous little shithole," was annexed onto Lupo's.

In 2003, the city made Lupo's move a second time, to make room for development of the Peerless Building. This location shared space with a dance club, becoming "Lupo's at the Strand" (now the Roxy). When asked about the partnership, Lupo replied, "I'd rather not get into the politics and legal stuff, but I'll just say that it's been very difficult for both parties to share a space like that."

In 2010, Lupo and his wife Sara opened The Met, Lupo's sister club in the Hope Artiste Village in Pawtucket. "It's a very tough time for the music business, but The Met is hanging in there. It's actually a kind of tribute to the old Lupo's, so it has been really fun for me to see people enjoying themselves like it was the '70s. It just reinforces to me that people don't really change."

The Met has also been a way for Lupo to finally enjoy the little things. "A very, very long time ago, when

Lupo's was a blues club, I used to book bands, but all our booking is currently done by Jack Reich and [*Motif* columnist] Mike Delehanty. These days, I'm more of an operations person at The Met. After all I've done, things like checking the paper towels are what's pleasurable for me now!"

If you're a long-time attendee or a Lupo's newbie, you can help celebrate 40 years by attending up to four shows at The Met to celebrate 40 years of music. "Jack [Reich] and I reached out to the bands and every one of them was interested, so the lineups pretty much wrote themselves. These bands are a part of RI history, and I'd like to think some younger people will stop by and check out some of the state's best talent."

The lineups are as follows:

October 7: Max Creek

October 8: Tribute to 40 years of Rhody Blues (featuring original members of Roomful of Blues)

October 9: The Schemers, Neutral Nation, Jungle Dogs, Rash

October 10: Rizzz, Members of the Wild Turkey Band & Friends

October 11: The Young Adults, Georgie Porgie and the Cry Babies

Forty years is long time to be in the music business, and despite the fights with the city, being punched in the face twice, and the constant uncertainty, Lupo insists that it's all been worth it. "I feel extremely fortunate, and I can't see myself doing anything else. There have been multiple opportunities to get out of the business and I never wanted to take them. I just consider the alternatives; what else would I do?"

He certainly has been through a lot, and he certainly never thought it would last this long. "As far as I'm concerned, everything after the first Lupo's was gravy ... I never even thought we would reopen!" The truth is, without Rich Lupo the Providence music scene in the past four decades would be vastly different, and not in a good way.

To join the party, head to The Met at The Hope Artiste Village located at 1005 Main St. in Pawtucket from Oct 7 - 11.