

Sean Leary: Redstone Room will impress Q-C music lovers

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It's go time for the River Music Experience.

This weekend, the Davenport venue officially will debut its premier performing space, the Redstone Room. It's the third of what RME officials call their opening triad of draws for the place -- the first being the museum attractions, the second being the River Roots concert held last fall.

RME officials admit that while the first two have done pretty well, neither has been a smash hit. The Redstone Room, on the other hand, could turn out to be the thing that not only helps keep the RME afloat, but defines it as well.

If that ends up being the case, it'll certainly be appropriate. Music is ultimately about performance -- raw and vital, with an immediacy and an intimacy that's lacking in the hallowed grounds of a museum or even the larger sprawl of a concert in the park. While both of the latter hold their own charms, there's nothing quite like the palpable power of a gig at a smaller venue.

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Every act at one time or another has cut its teeth in a club environment. Capturing that lightning in a bottle, that indelible mark left by an evening that never will be repeated, an artwork that never can be fully duplicated, is, in essence, what live performance is all about. Whether you're packed in a sweaty throng of hundreds or one of a half-dozen die-hard stragglers mesmerized in front of the stage, you develop a bond with a performer in a club that's rarely duplicated in a larger venue.

The Quad-Cities long has had an electric history of those moments and the joints that became synonymous with them -- from the stages of still-vibrant clubs like RIBCO to the legendary haunts of old like Sebastian's.

But there's always room for one more outpost to broaden the diversity of the local music scene. Judging from what I've seen so far, the Redstone looks like a promising addition. The 250-seat venue provides something the area has been lacking -- a spot similar to Gabe's in Iowa City, a little bigger than RIBCO, but smaller than The Col. From my perspective, anything to help broaden the local arts scene is a good thing, and the Redstone, if it lives up to its potential, definitely will do that.

Last week, Ellis Kell, director of marketing and promotions for RME, and Devin Hansen, operations manager for the Redstone Room, took me on a tour of the place. I fully admit both of these guys are longtime friends of mine, so I may be a little biased, but I think anyone objectively looking at the Redstone will agree -- this is one cool place.

The first thing you notice is the sleek layout -- including a gigantic video screen along one wall, other monitors throughout, and a massive mural of a guitar on the far end. The stage and backstage area should thrill bands, and a small "VIP room," where patrons can go to have a quiet chat while watching the show on closed-circuit TV, is awesome. The Redstone also is outfitted with state-of-the-art sound, light and video systems.

All of the amenities should impress fans who check out the two grand-opening shows by Martin Sexton on Friday night. Sexton, a highly respected cult singer/songwriter, has a huge underground audience here, and booking him was an extremely savvy move by Devin. Given his smart taste in music and open-mindedness to suggestions, I doubt it'll be his last.

So, the only question remaining is: Who would you like to see play the Redstone? Devin and Ellis said they'd be happy to hear your suggestions. Contact them through www.redstoneroom.org or email me at sleary@qconline.com, and I'll write a column featuring your picks in the future.

Let's hope the third trick will be the charm for the RME, and the local scene will have another great venue to offer fans. It all starts this weekend.

Entertainment editor **Sean Leary** can be reached at (309) 786-6441, ext. 293, or by e-mail at sleary@qconline.com. For more commentary, check Sean's blog at <http://seanlearyblog.blogspot.com>.