

<https://www.facebook.com/RockRiverCurrent><https://twitter.com/RRCurrent><https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/><https://www.rockrivercurrent.com?bannerclick=160380&locationId=27/>

MENU

Rockford-Area Musicians, Regional Bands Keep Hard Rock Rocking Multiple Nights A Week

September 19, 2024 at 5:00 am Kevin Haas

[815 News \(https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/815-news/\)](https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/815-news/) [Arts & Culture \(https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/news/arts-and-culture/\)](https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/news/arts-and-culture/)[Featured \(https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/news/featured/\)](https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/news/featured/) [In Depth \(https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/news/in-depth/\)](https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/news/in-depth/)[Local \(https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/news/local-news/\)](https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/news/local-news/) [Rockford \(https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/rockford/\)](https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/rockford/)[Top Stories \(https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/top-stories/\)](https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/category/top-stories/)<https://twitter.com/rockrivercurrent> <https://www.facebook.com/rockrivercurrent> <https://www.reddit.com/r/rockrivercurrent> <https://plus.google.com/+rockrivercurrent> <mailto:info@rockrivercurrent.com> <https://www.linkedin.com/sharearticle?>



Valerie Soetermans of Stages (with Jeremy Eagle and Jay Soetermans off camera) perform Saturday, Sept. 18, 2024, on the Council Oak stage at Hard Rock Casino Rockford. (Photo by Kevin Haas/Rock River Current)

By Kevin Haas
Rock River Current

Get our free e-newsletter (<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/connect/be-an-insider/>)

ROCKFORD — When singer Valerie Soetermans first learned a Hard Rock (<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/2024/09/13/hard-rocks-august-numbers-illustrate-high-interest-in-casinos-rockford-debut/>) was being built here, she was delighted by the possibility of performing at an internationally recognized music venue right in her hometown.

“Then I thought, oh, they’re probably going to bring in everyone from everywhere else,” said Soetermans, who has toured with country musician Louise Mandrell and performed with stars such as Dolly Parton before returning to her hometown to raise her family.

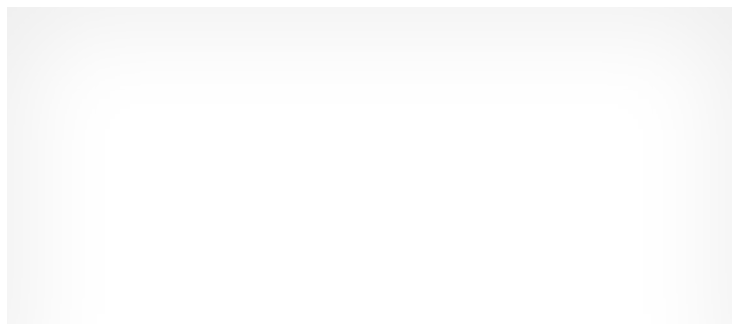
On Saturday, Soetermans and her band Stages took the Council Oak stage at Hard Rock Casino Rockford (<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/2024/09/06/how-will-rockford-spend-its-7-million-dollars-in-hard-rock-casino-revenue/>), joining a growing number of local and regional musicians to be featured at the three-week old casino (<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/2024/09/10/what-does-hard-rock-lives-arrival-mean-for-the-coronado-theatre-and-bmo-center-in-rockford/>).



(<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com?bannerclick=232090&locationId=24/>)

Nationally touring acts such as Teddy Swims (<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/2024/08/19/teddy-swims-to-rock-rockfords-new-hard-rock-casino-featuring-hometown-talent-on-drums/>), Brad Paisley, Joan Jett and Akon have grabbed attention and filled seats inside the Hard Rock Live music and event venue. But four nights a week musicians from inside the city and across the Rockford region fill two stages at the casino.

ADVERTISING



Local musicians say it provides them with a unique opportunity to pick up new followers at a venue that itself is a draw.

"To be able to hit a stage like Hard Rock, for us it solidifies the hard work that we've done around the Midwest," said Tina Renee (<https://www.instagram.com/tinareneesinger/>), lead singer of The Synergy Band (https://www.facebook.com/p/The-Synergy-Band-100094679285836/?_rdr). "It's exciting and it's monumental for a lot of our bandmates inside of the Synergy Band because now we're able to hit a casino that's known throughout the entire world."

Synergy, whose seven members come from the Rockford region as well as Milwaukee and Chicago, brings its high-energy blend of soul, funk and R&B to the Hard Rock Cafe stage at 10 p.m. Saturday night. Renee said the show will be a highlight for many in the band.

"If we can show up and show out at this one, hopefully they'll book us at others," Renee said.



The Synergy Band is slated to perform at 10 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 21, 2024, at Hard Rock Cafe in Rockford. (Photo by Antwon DJ Rated AG/Provided by The Synergy Band)

While the 1,600-seat Hard Rock Live venue is used for major acts, as well as banquets and big events. Two smaller stages showcase talent from here and across the region. The Hard Rock Cafe stage is just behind the center bar, where bands perform for guests who are dining, passing time between gambling or there to see the show.

The Council Oak stage, which is at the casino's steak and seafood restaurant, gives a jazz lounge vibe with a more intimate setting.

"I really, really like when I can look at somebody's eyes and I can see them and not just be blinded by stage lights," Soetermans said in between sets on the stage Saturday. "The intimacy is super great. I feel like I can engage with the audience more that way."

'Part of the Hard Rock DNA'

Acts on those stages will largely come from the Rockford region as well as Chicago, Madison and Milwaukee, said Steve Platcow, during a tour of the facility (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vub2FR74J9s&t=155s>) on opening day.

"We might even throw in a surprise and delight national act," he said.

The lineup is a diverse mix of genres from classic rock to pop, soul, R&B, funk, jazz, country, acoustic, and even ukulele. The later of those came from Todd Lorenc (<https://www.facebook.com/toddlorencukulelemusic/>), a Rock Falls resident who plays classic hits and covers on acoustic and electric ukuleles.

"I think it's going to spotlight a lot of regional artists," Lorenc said after his set Saturday night on the Hard Rock Cafe stage. "I was honored they asked me to play. I was pretty excited about that. It seemed like it went really well, there was a good reception and I got some good exposure, I think."



Todd Lorenc performs Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024, at the Hard Rock Cafe stage at Hard Rock Casino Rockford. (Photo by Kevin Haas/Rock River Current)

The two stages have bands playing four nights a week, from Thursday through Sunday, with local and regional acts filling many of those spots.

"Entertainment and music are part of the Hard Rock DNA," said Geno Iafrate, president of Hard Rock Casino Rockford. "I've got nine different windows every week that I can feature local, regional entertainment."

The big stage of Hard Rock Live is filled with touring acts, but this Friday it blends a bit of both. DeAndre Hemby (<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/2024/08/19/teddy-swims-to-rock-rockfords-new-hard-rock-casino-featuring-hometown-talent-on-drums/>), a Rockford native and Auburn High School graduate, tours with Teddy Swims as the band's drummer.

"It feels really good to come home to perform with Teddy and the guys," he told the Rock River Current's radio partner B103 earlier this month (<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/2024/08/19/teddy-swims-to-rock-rockfords-new-hard-rock-casino-featuring-hometown-talent-on-drums/>).

Iafrate and his team tapped local musician and producer Vince Chiarelli to help keep the two smaller stages booked. Chiarelli was initially booked as a performer, which he'll do again at 6 p.m. Thursday. But now he's helping bring in other talent, too.

"I think people see multi-international conglomerate company and think maybe it's going to be all behind the scene and someone in a big ivory tower pulling the strings," Chiarelli said. "I have not seen that at all. This is very grassroots. Local. They're using as much local talent, local labor as possible."



(<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com?bannerclick=229348&locationId=26/>)

Chiarelli is the owner of Vincent Records, a record label started by his grandfather. He's continued to develop it as a production company focused on events, bookings and management.

He said eventually there will be a larger influx of Chicagoland bands, but he wants to keep the local presence in the mix.

"The more we can get live entertainment and actually help fuel the entertainment world and give the bands another place to perform, that's really the collective goal here," Chiarelli said. "Let's get as many local Rockford bands as possible. So at least they get a shot."

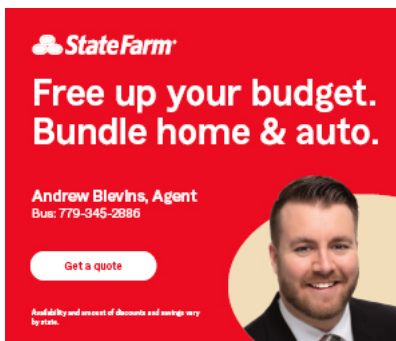
'Friendly faces'



John Cwiok plays bass on Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024, with the Pino Farina Band at Hard Rock Cafe inside Hard Rock Casino Rockford. (Photo by Kevin Haas/Rock River Current)

Musician Clark Kelly (<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com/2024/05/04/rockford-musician-clark-kelly-hands-out-free-popsicles-along-riverfront-path-in-rockford/>), a Rockford native who was booked by Chiarelli to perform this Friday night on the Cafe stage, said it was a smart move by Hard Rock to have a local producer booking talent. Similarly, he said having locally-owned Luxe Productions on hand to run sound gave him confidence that the mix will come out right.

"It's just a lot of familiarity to maybe combat that idea of, oh this big company that's coming to town," Kelly said. "It feels very welcoming and friendly with these friendly faces kind of representing them."



(<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com?bannerclick=215500&locationId=24/>)

Performing at the Hard Rock isn't without its challenges. Musicians are often competing for attention with all the hustle and bustle of the casino.

It's easy for a performer to fade into background music.

"I appreciate the challenge," Kelly said. "I go into these sets prepared. I have a lot of different songs, so if something's working or I see I've engaged people or they're staying, I want to keep them there."

On the flip side, playing Hard Rock comes with its own built-in audience and an opportunity to win over new fans.

"I just want the chance to get up and do my thing," Kelly said. "Hopefully win people over and turn some people on to what I'm trying to do."



Emilio Salinas of Rockford shows his excitement for performing at Hard Rock Casino Rockford before a show earlier this month. He's slated to perform at Hard Rock Cafe in Rockford again on Friday, Oct. 4, 2024. (Photo provided)

Emilio Salinas, a singer and musician who uses his acoustic guitar and looper pedal to create a one-man band, said the cafe stage setup offers a good balance for musicians.

"It's a good spot because it's kind of in the back, so it can be its own thing and people can enjoy the casino without being bothered too much by the main stage of the music," he said. "I like this Hard Rock Cafe stage because it's a good balance of separation between people who want to do their own thing or gamble and people who want to have a bite to eat and jam out to some music."

The 26-year-old, much like Soetermans, hoped for the opportunity to play Hard Rock one day after he heard it was coming to town. The opportunity came sooner than expected.

"Literally a week after it opens they're already texting me saying, 'Do you want to come out and play?'" he said.

He said he held back a little on his first performance earlier this month, which was a last-minute booking. But he's looking forward to returning on Friday, Oct. 4.

"Definitely next time I'm going to let full loose and see what happens," Salinas said. "Next time I'll be inviting all my friends and family and anybody else who wants to come out: I'm going to try to give them 110%."



(<https://www.rockrivercurrent.com?bannerclick=215498&locationId=24/>)

'A dream come true'



Pino Farina of the Pino Farina band sings Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024, on the Hard Rock Cafe stage at Hard Rock Casino Rockford. (Photo by Kevin Haas/Rock River Current)

The bands that perform on the stages inside the casino are more than a sideshow, they're also a draw.

Take for example Pino Farina Band, a Chicago-based alternative rock band that took the Cafe stage on Saturday. They arrived with their own following of supporters who danced to the songs decked out in band merch.

"You'll have your followers with these bands, and they will follow the band wherever they go," said Jenny Nanzer, a Pino Farina fan who traveled about an hour's drive from Peru to see the show.

"I'm just here for the music. I'm not a gambler," she said.

The band plays a mix of covers and original songs, something lead singer Pino Farina relished the opportunity to do on Hard Rock's stage.

"It's kind of a dream come true to play an original song in the Hard Rock," he told the crowd.

Kelly, Renee, Chiarelli and others said they've seen excitement from local fans when they book a show at the Hard Rock. It also gives fans an opportunity to see the bands without paying a cover, something that is commonly asked, Chiarelli said.

That enthusiasm shows them that Hard Rock will prove to be a solid venue for local musicians.

"Yeah, you've still got the people in the background gambling, but I'm seeing even in the first two weeks there's a lot of people just going out there to see the performances," Chiarelli said. "I can tell because of the messages I'm getting from performers, which is always, 'We've got people asking is there a cover.' ... That tells me right there people are actually coming to see the music."

September lineup | Hard Rock Casino Rockford

Here's a look at the rest of this month's lineup at Hard Rock Casino Rockford and Hard Rock Live.

