

Conservative Expressionism

This story was written for The Signpost - Weber State University's newspaper. I received the *Best Correspondent Story* award for this article.

Conservative expressionism

Local arts venue offers musicians and audiences an outlet for values

By **Connie Scott**
a&e correspondent | *The Signpost*

Since June 2007, Salt Rock Coffee has offered more than coffee. They provide a platform for local artists to showcase their talents, and a clean, positive atmosphere to the community of Ogden, Utah.

"Everyone who takes the stage here has to follow a basic set of guidelines," said Kyle Hill, owner of Salt Rock Coffee. "They have to be passionate about their art, passionate about supporting this community, have a good attitude on and off the stage, and keep their act clean, positive and non-political. Oh, they should be talented too."

Every weekend something is going on at Salt Rock. Friday night hosts The Mars Hill Project. Visitors can hear an inspirational message and live music from local singers.

"We just played at the Salt Rock last night for the Mars Hill service with an attendance of around 150 people," said Jeff Hummel, pastor of Lifesong Community Church. "The one thing that I can attest to is that they are reaching their targeted audience and creating an atmosphere that people feel welcomed and comfortable in."

Both secular and Christian artists can take the stage on Saturday nights, and styles range from singer/songwriter folk music to rock. Performers include local bands, solo artists and comedy teams, as well as out-of-state musicians.

"A big benefit I see in allowing both Christian and secular groups to play," said Steven Lam, vocalist and guitarist for the band Steadfast, "is that it gives an

opportunity for exposure to people outside of your normal setting. We've enjoyed all of them and plan to play again in the near future. Beyond the great coffee and the comfortable atmosphere I really like the owners a lot."

By the end of February, Salt Rock will be completely moved into the Genesis Project building, their new facility at 186 20th Street in Ogden.

"We'll still have Mars Hill Project on Friday night," Hill said, "but Saturday will be Salt Rock Saturday, where both stages will have live performances going at the same time. The big stage will seat up to 500 people, so we're really hoping to get some bigger names performing there."

This move will provide the coffee house with nearly 14,000 square feet of space and two stages. Salt Rock's goal is to feature live performances every night of the week and hold larger events on the weekends, giving college students and the community a place to go.

"The atmosphere is very hip and cool," said Brian Donahue, Ogden resident and musician. "It's nice to go there, chill on one of their couches, watch the news or surf the net. The entertainment they bring in is always original and refreshingly unique."

Hill and his wife Holly said they won't deny that they run a Christian coffee house, but said their primary focus is on building relationships with people and impacting the community.

"Sure, there is a business side to this," Hill said. "We sell coffee. But, most important to us are the relationships that we've built with our customers and what we've been



PHOTO SOURCE: KYLE HILL

Local musicians perform at Salt Rock Coffee every weekend for audiences looking for conservative entertainment that is still artistically engaging.

able to do to support our community. It's not about stuffing our beliefs down people's throats, but letting people know we care and providing a place for them."

The Hills said they have used the coffee house for fundraisers and other events that support Ogden. At a recent fundraiser, Salt Rock brought in four bands and "Off The Wall" Comedy Improv to help 7-year-old Alexis Johnson raise money to remove a tumor on her pituitary gland. The event raised more than 25 percent of the funds needed for the March 2008 operation.

"If we never make a profit at doing this business," Hill said, "it will be completely worth it, because we've been able to invest in our community and show God's love to people."

With the move to the Genesis Project building, the Hills said they hope to use Salt Rock to further assist those in need, as well as offer a place for local artists to perform, and audiences to enjoy.

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