

Madison Will Participate in BandSwap

BY RICK TVEDT



Sexy Ester was recently chosen to participate in BandSwap, a program of the SpokesBUZZ organization based in Fort Collins, Colorado. Sexy Ester is one of the most popular bands in the Madison area. They have won several Madison Area Music Awards over the last couple of years, including Artist of the Year in 2012 and Female Vocalist of the Year in 2011, 2012 and 2013. That Artist of the Year win gave them the opportunity to perform at the Wisconsin Area Music Industry Awards (WAMIs) in Milwaukee earlier this year where they stole the show. The band has established themselves as hard working, committed musicians with capable communication skills and a solid image.

Nominations for BandSwap were announced by the Madison Arts Commission in late July. About a dozen artists were eventually submitted. The final choice was based on several factors, among them musicianship, creativity, showmanship, professional dedication, career aptitude, social marketing savvy, collaborative spirit, availability and fit.

The charge was led by MAC's Karin Wolf who put together enough sponsorships to cover the \$5,000 participation fee when the city failed to lend support. New Belgium Brewing, Majestic Live, Wisconsin Distributors and the High Noon Saloon all stepped up to plate. Though the city expressed budgetary limitations over the \$5,000 nut, it had no problem funding the Make Music Madison event to the tune of \$25,000, a move that was questioned by many (click here for that discussion). I think BandSwap is a program far more worthy of the city's support and hope the city adopts this model. The goals of SpokesBUZZ are to amplify local music, develop professional artists, promote the Fort Collins region as a progressive cultural destination and to grow local economies, and these are goals that Make Music Madison largely fails to accomplish. The one percent set aside from municipal capital projects and other recommendations in the Cultural Arts Plan just approved by Madison Common Council are certainly moving in the right direction.

SpokesBUZZ is a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2009 and has been hosting an event in Austin at the massive South by Southwest Music Festival. The organization has been a key force in developing Fort Collins as the most happening music destination outside of Denver by taking part in the city's three-day Bohemian Nights at NewWestFest and the two-day FoCoMX festival. These events feature 100 to 200 acts and most are local.

BandSwap is a logical extension in the quest to fulfil the SpokesBUZZ mission. While the band swap concept is nothing new to musicians, the notion of using it as a vehicle to promote economic development and develop the arts on a city-wide level is brilliant. Madison will join Denver; Asheville, North Carolina; Lafayette, Louisiana; Chico, California; Portland, Oregon and Nashville as a host city. Fort Collins will send one of its chosen representative acts to each host city to perform with the host city act. The show will bring awareness to the project and will feature an informational seminar earlier in the day. The host city bands will then travel to Fort Collins where they will represent their city in a series of BandSwap events taking place October 3-5. Each member of the host city bands will receive a \$600 stipend from the BandSwap budget to cover travel costs. Other earnings are a function of the individual events and door receipts.

SpokesBUZZ founder and executive director Dani Grant says, "The theory behind BandSwap is if we orchestrate reciprocity and establish strong relationships with venues, civic partners, music industry folks, local artist support organizations, like MAMA and emerging artists that the power of the network built will offer an exponential return for the stakeholders involved. We will foster city relationships and will make performances in our network of cities much more fruitful. Our program is intended to be inspiring and we hope other organizations or cities copy this format and create networks like this to do the same. This is the new dynamic

for touring, with community support and reciprocity among like-minded regions. For example, Herman Astro, our swap band from Milwaukee last year, is touring this year and is using several locations that were on the BandSwap list of venues last year as well as playing with other bands that participated in 2013 BandSwap. They didn't play those venues or with those bands last year, however their connection to BandSwap and the relationships they made at homecoming gave them opportunity. That is the goal."

The Madison BandSwap event will take place at the High Noon Saloon on Sunday, September 22. Details are still being worked out and alternative rock band Common Anomaly will represent Fort Collins in Madison. A possible opening act is also being considered so we will update as things progress.

