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Anthony Mrugacz: GM at Equinox

Sat, 21 February 2015 Post Weekend

In our new series My Phnom Penh we ask local characters about their favourite things in the city. First up is Anthony Mrugacz, 55, the general manager at Equinox, one of Phnom Penh's most popular drinking holes, live music venues and de facto art galleries



Leonard Reyes

BAND

"Bacano [it means 'cool' in Spanish] are a Latin rock band with a Khmer bass player, a Filipina on the drums and three gentlemen from South America. They sing all their songs in Spanish. But the reason I like them is that I'd seen them in other bands that were sloppy,

that weren't tight. They had some magic there but Chris, who leads the band, was too busy pushing the band and leading the band at the same time. Then they get this female drummer, Jet from the Philippines, and she just took this weight off his shoulders, provided this foundation, and the band just went [makes a whistling sound], and every show now they get tighter and tighter."



Photo Supplied

PRODUCER

"Jan Mueller, who goes by the nickname Professor Kinski, probably produces more music in Phnom Penh than anyone else. He's been here maybe 11 or 12 years, he speaks fluent Khmer. He's a music fanatic; a true artist. He's in the band Dub Addiction, plays drums in a punk band,

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talented and he just works with everyone. He produces a lot of different stuff and is passionate about it. It's his life. I don't know how he survives financially, but he does commercials, does videos, works with a lot of bands. If the music is the ink, he's the stamp."



VENUE

"It's a tie. I love live music, I've been seeing bands since I was 10 years old, so it's a toss-up between Sharky Bar and Oscars 51. I just like the vibe. Granted people have a stigma with these bars because sometimes there might be ... women there "of ill

repute"; I guess the old term is from the 19th century. But I really like going in there because I like the openness of their stages. One night, I had too many drinks and got up when the drummer was late and played a song. And I don't know how to play drums. People get up and sing. It's the spirit of the places. I don't think people should be too judgmental; they're great places for the musicians, they take care of the bands, they're friendly with the customers and they're also fanatical about live music."



LATE NIGHT SNACK

"There's this little late night Khmer noodle place on the corner of Sihanouk and Street 63. I don't like to hang around down on Street 51, because of all the drugs and the sketchy stuff that goes on there. This place is close by my house and it's got to be the most

interesting place in Phnom Penh for people watching. The other night at this little noodle joint, I saw a \$200,000 Mercedes sports car crash while speeding down the street showing off. The people are really friendly too. It's really traditional, does all the traditional foods: fried noodles, fried rice, soup. You don't have a lot of drunk barangs, mostly drunk Khmers; people getting off work. It's a nice thing to have after finishing an 18-hour shift in a bar along with a couple of beers."



ART SPACE

"What I think is cool is that Phnom Penh is decentralising, in the sense that by the lake there's a little arty scene popping up there. You go down by Russian Market and there's a lot happening there. Showbox, over by Tuol Sleng, is like the centre of gravity there

and does some great stuff. I really like Showbox a lot, I really like their avant garde-ness and their attitude. I think Equinox used to be something like that. But now our customers are a little more ... professional. Showbox is very transient and unexpected; very raw. It's cool in a really stupid way. I wish I had more time to hang out there. They constantly do, I don't want to call it crazy stuff, but they're experimental. I try to be more experimental here, but I have more expenses."



ARTIST

"Chhan Dina is a world class artist. She does sculpture and painting with vibrant colours, and you just

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it has a signature to it, it's got a certain style, but her personality

reflects her art. Dina is a very accessible person, friendly, outgoing. If you sat down next to her in a bar, you would just adore her after talking to her five minutes. And I get that same feeling being around her art. I'm around it for five minutes, it grows on me and then I adore it. Her personality and her art are very intertwined. It's very unique for an artist. Often artists can be, you know, reclusive. And it's nice to see a strong Khmer woman doing her stuff."

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