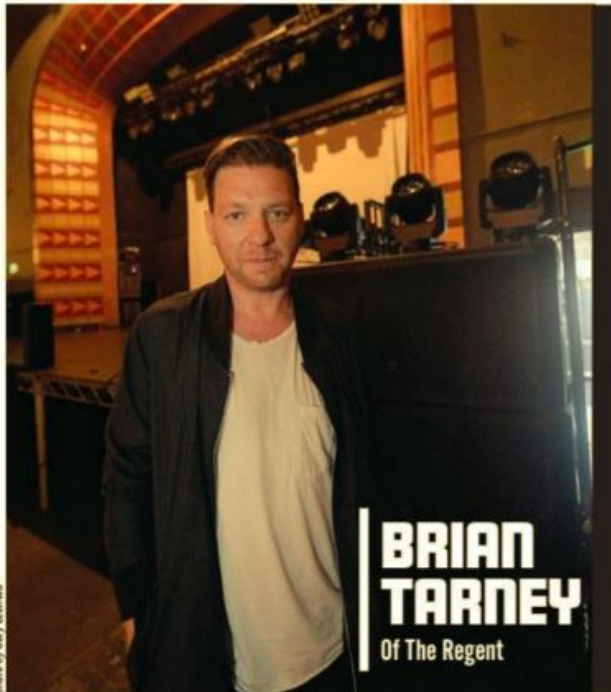


Behind THE MUSIC

Meet the People Who Bring the Bands You Love to Some of Downtown's Coolest Venues

By Emily Manthei



**BRIAN
TARNEY**
Of The Regent

photo by Gary Leonard

Age: 38

Title: Talent Buyer

He's Been There: About a year

Previous Experience: Tarney started playing in bands and DJing in Milwaukee in 2000. Five years later he moved to San Francisco and began booking bands for a club called Mezzanine. By 2010, Los Angeles was calling. "I wanted to be closer to the industry. There's so much more happening in L.A. in terms of music and creativity and art." He joined Spaceland Presents, where Liz Garo oversees a team of talent buyers who program numerous clubs and venues. Tarney focuses on the Historic Core's 1,100-capacity club The Regent. He also puts together underground nightlife events in Downtown with his own company, Restless Nites.

Collaboration Welcome: "We book a lot of different stuff at The Regent, but Downtown culture is really into the DJ scene right now. We do a lot of themed parties, like '90s nights, an evening with the Spice Girls, EDM nights with the promoter Insomniac. We try to feed off the culture and we love to collaborate with other promoters. The goth club The Lash is right next door. We try to fit in with them too."

Warehouse Music: Restless Nites concentrates on events in warehouses and art parties. Tarney says Dntowners are looking for hidden venues bouncing with techno, house and disco.

Personal Favorites: "I'm a child of the '80s. So anything with synthesizers and drum machines is pretty much my favorite. The first band I played with was a synth-pop new wave post-punk band."

Movie Night: Tarney was also drawn to L.A. by the classic movie culture of Cinefamily, Cinespia and other like-minded venues. "For many years, The Regent was a grindhouse cinema. All of the weird cult movies were shown here. So that's definitely a part of our history that we want to keep alive."

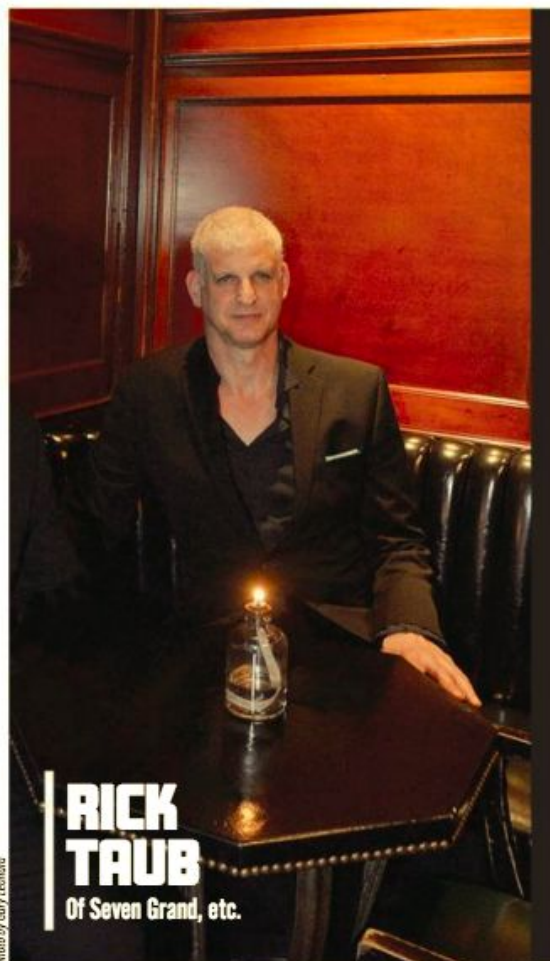
To that effect, The Regent co-hosts a monthly event with Austin-based Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas, which is opening a movie complex in Downtown this year. The first Sunday of the month at The Regent will feature classic and underground movies. "We're doing a *Tangerine Dream* theme in August and screening a 16mm print of *Firestarter*."

Perks of the Job: Between brainstorming shows, dealing with bands and managers and reaching out to other promoters, Tarney gets to enjoy some top-notch music. "It's really fun to travel and see so many festivals and things happening all across the world. Then I get to bring all the cool ideas that I experience back to L.A. Spaceland Presents has been doing a series at the Santa Monica Pier, we're doing Desert Days in October, and we've even got a new festival in Alhambra. It's been fun growing into other avenues, like we've been growing Downtown. It's been awesome to see Downtown develop into something vibrant."

Best Night Ever: "We had a pretty amazing show a month ago with the band Sunn. They're a doom metal band from Seattle. It's all chanting and very loud droning guitars and they all wear cloaks. It was probably the loudest concert I've ever been to. Their fans are so irreverent and so into it that nobody had their phones out. Everyone was just in a trance, watching this band make this very different type of music. I like it when an artist really brings an experience. I sometimes get the feeling I've worked with everyone I want to, which is amazing, but then something else happens and you realize you haven't seen everything yet."

On the Other Hand: "I've seen some pretty crazy stuff. You've got your typical disasters, like production meltdowns and dealing with divas. I once had a tour manager in San Francisco pull a gun on me because I wouldn't give him a bottle of tequila. But one thing I've found, it's almost a rule: The people that are the coolest and nicest are always the best musicians and the best bands."

The Regent is at 448 S. Main St. or theregentheater.com.



**RICK
TAUB**
Of Seven Grand, etc.

Photo by Gary Leonard

Age: 51
Title: Partner in LA Music Booking
He's Been There: Eight years

Previous Experience: Before starting LA Music Booking with fellow musician Justin Kirk, Taub helped Downtown speakeasies book bands. That led to booking at the Redwood Bar, and then helping Kirk, who had started a music program at Seven Grand. Kirk's other gig as a touring guitarist with Earth, Wind & Fire prevented him from being around all the time, so a partnership was born. Now they book about 60 Downtown gigs per month at venues including Seven Grand, Las Perlas, Caña and Little Easy.

Roots in the Blues: Born in East Hollywood, Taub has spent most of his life in Los Angeles. He taught himself guitar and bass by playing with blues legends at Babe's and Ricky's Inn on Central Avenue, back when players like John Lee Hooker and Eric Clapton showed up for gigs. For 15 years, Taub was the house bass player. Today, his band the Midnight Blues Review features some of the Central Avenue players.

Early Adopter: "I moved Downtown 15 years ago, back when it was just a bunch of artists and musicians with no bars. And artists need to drink. There were a lot of *real* speakeasy-type places, and we just kinda flew under the radar. I met Justin at the MJ Higgins Gallery when my band played there."

Venue Matters: When booking bands, Taub and Kirk keep the venue's ambiance and cocktail menu in mind. Seven Grand, a whiskey destination, is their home base, with a jazz, blues and roots lineup on Monday-Thursday. Kirk's experimental jazz ensemble The Makers has a Tuesday night residency, while Taub's Midnight Blues Review plays every other Wednesday. Mezcal and tequila joint Las Perlas hosts Latin music, from mariachi to salsa. Caña, a South Park rum club, has an Afro-Cuban jazz vibe, and Little Easy hosts New Orleans bands, swing music and, of course, more jazz. "Although some of our bands do have their own following, that's not why we book bands. I love just about

everyone who plays. At our venues, patrons know they'll always hear something good and get really fine-tasting drinks."

All Friends Here: Taub books local musicians who play in multiple bands and often tour. But for the most part, he and Kirk draw from the Los Angeles music scene. "Justin and I have played so much, for the most part we know all the bands, or ask musicians that we trust to recommend bands for our venues. We pretty much have unlimited choices of bands to book, but once in a while someone contacts us to put them in the schedule and we do." Some favorites include all-female mariachi band La Victoria, the funky Vibrometers, traditional '20s jazz ensemble California Feet Warmers and jazz and blues vocalist Barbara Morrison.

Best Night Ever: "One night I was playing with [blues singer] Mickey Champion. Buddy Miles sat in with us on drums. Mickey, as she was singing, just started crying. The audience was so moved. It was a really special night because Buddy died soon after that — and Mickey too. It was one of the last gigs for both of them, and they were legends."

It Might Get Loud: "One time there was a little communication breakdown with a band we didn't know. When they got here and started playing, we realized we had booked a heavy metal band. Let's just say they turned it up to 11, and everybody went home."

Crossing Borders: Taub fondly recalls his days on Central Avenue. Now, the clubs he books host some of those same players. "Downtown Los Angeles is a special place right now. It's one of the most creative places, where there are so many great musicians around. There are still a few places on Central Avenue, but I'd like to think I've moved a piece of that scene to Downtown."

Seven Grand is at 515 W. Seventh St., Las Perlas is at 107 E. Sixth St. and Caña Rum Bar is at 714 W. Olympic Blvd. All three are managed by 213 Hospitality, (213) 817-5321 or 213dthospitality.com. Little Easy is at 216 W. Fifth St., (213) 628-3113 or littleeasybar.com. LA Music Booking is at lamusicbooking.com.

Age: 30

Job Title: Talent Buyer

He's Been There: Six months

Previous Experience: "I worked for Spaceland Presents for four and a half years. They operate the Echo and Echoplex, The Regent and a bunch of other places. I had pretty much every job there — first an usher, then working in the box office, then managing the box office, then becoming a booker. I learned everything there."

Music in His Blood: Smith grew up in Loomis, Calif., and moved to Los Angeles from New York City in 2009. "I knew I wanted to work in music, but I didn't know how. I've always loved going to see live music — at the Fonda, El Rey, larger venues, but also the local, DIY stuff: The Echo, Non Plus Ultra, all of those. Eventually I thought, if I'm going to go to all these shows, I'd like to get paid for it!"

How He Got Here: Smith met the owners of Resident, which opened late last year in the Arts District, when they were managing a band he had booked at The Echo. When they invited him to check out the space, he thought he was just going for a chat. "When I got there, I saw there was a special vibe, and they were really doing something completely different than what was in the market. I felt like this was an opportunity for me to be involved in defining the culture of Resident."

Mixing It Up: Smith books bands, comedy shows and DJ parties seven nights a week at Resident. But the venue is just as likely to have free or low-cost events as ticketed shows with touring bands. "My main goal is to keep it as diverse as possible. It's what's special about Downtown," he says. "We'll have a punk rock night, followed by hip-hop, electronic music, comedy, whatever. There's so much going on culturally on any given night in this city, you can't afford to bury your head in the sand and only be one thing."

Love for Locals: Smith receives booking requests from agencies

and managers of touring bands, many of whom he knows from his Spaceland days. But he also gets pitches from local acts that are just starting. He listens to everything and, if it catches his ear, he tries to schedule it. "I don't know if people from L.A. appreciate how much there is going on in this city in terms of genres and subcultures. There's a ton of great local music! Ideally, I'll get a great artist on tour with a local fan base, and pair them with a local band that is going to develop new fans. We like to create new connections."

Great Night: "The first time we had a proper ticketed touring act at Resident was great. They were NoBunny, a garage punk band from San Francisco. The lead singer is a crazy dude who wears a dirty bunny mask that looks like it hasn't been washed in years, leather jacket and underpants. After a couple of months of toiling and making connections, we finally got to see the club enjoyed the way it was intended, by kids who were singing along and moshing and treating the place like a proper venue."

On the Other Hand: "The first show I had the opportunity to book at The Echo was the worst. I booked an artist who was signed to a major label and looking to develop a live show as the headlining act. She had a song that was really prominently placed in a big movie, so I thought it was a slam dunk — but it was a terrible show. The artist was fine, but the audience made it feel like a parody of a concert. It didn't feel like a genuine cultural experience. I learned that you can't try to do things because they look good on paper; you have to do them because of public demand, and because people care about the artist."

Come One, Come All: "We had a band called PrinceRama. The band is a pair of sisters and a third musician. They are these really weird, arty, good, special people. It was one of those shows where you really felt their connection to the audience. At their encore, they invited anyone that felt like it to sit down on the stage. So there were their fans, cross-legged, mouths agape, just enjoying the band."

Resident is at 428, S. Hewitt St, (213) 628-7503 or residentdtdla.com.

