

# PARITY CRASSHER

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Local bands have been forced off the stage and into seclusion by the novel coronavirus, but even a global pandemic cannot silence Southwestern College rock musicians.

Shelter-in-place orders have closed music venues, cancelled concerts and eliminated raucous rehearsals in garages. Even so, guitars and drums are blazing in preparation for a return — whenever that is.

No shows means no ticket or merchandise sales, but it does not mean bands have to go quietly into the night. Technology and social media are keeping the creative flame burning even as performance spaces sit dark.

Vincent Fierro, lead vocalist of the punk band Leech, said the boost big-time bands saw on digital platforms has not trickled down to the local scene. Undeterred, the SWC recording arts major started scheduling new content and merch for Leech's online audience.

"For bigger bands and record labels, everything kind of balances out," he said. "For small and local bands, the virus hits harder."

Stay-at-home orders prevent bands from practicing together, but have not hindered creativity. The Oathbreakers are still producing songs and have a few ready to record, according to guitarist Saul Ramos. The thrash-metal band uses Discord to work together online from their separate homes. Ramos, a business and music production major, said the band has recorded enough music for an album.

"Luckily, with today's technology it's been easier for us to contact each other and send music so we're working hard within all our houses," he said.

Ten Til' Dawn guitarist Brandon Lara, a business major, said being separated from his punk band has been "weird."

"Just like everyone else out there, we are absolutely bored out of our minds and we only want to play music together," he said.

## CANCELLED SHOWS

Ten Til' Dawn was about to take a big career step when it was tripped up by coronavirus. Formed in 2018 to help some friends who needed an open act for a show at SOMA, the band's long-sought headlining gig at the venue's 500-capacity side stage was postponed, Lara said.

"We were all looking forward to the show, but the day we picked up our presale tickets the president declared a national emergency for COVID-19," he said.

Members of Ten Til' Dawn originally thought quarantine would only last two weeks, Lara said. It soon became clear the headliner show was not going to happen any time soon. A scheduled performance at the Del Mar Fair was also lost when the entire fair was cancelled.

Lara said bands that rely on performances have struggled without concerts.

"It's sad when a lot of bands that rely on shows, merch sales and streams can't use (those avenues) at the moment," he said.

The Oathbreakers were scheduled to open for Ten Til' Dawn at SOMA. Bassist and journalism major Jahaziel Valencia said some of the bands on the lineup discussed a virtual show.

"There has been talk about doing a livestream event with a few other bands and it sounds pretty cool," he said.

Appearances by The Oathbreakers have been indefinitely postponed, Valencia said, and remain in flux due to stay-at-home orders extending without a clear reopen date. Gov. Newsom's four-part reopening strategy has concerts and large public events in Phase Four. No timelines for the rollout of the reopening phases has yet been announced.

Fierro said Leech's March and April shows were



UP ON THE ROOFTOP ROCK BANDS PAUSE — Thrash-metal band The Oathbreakers had their next gig, opening at SOMA for Ten Til' Dawn, cancelled due to the novel coronavirus. Band members (left to right) Brandon Gonzalez, Jahaziel Valencia, Saul Ramos and Jakob McCulloch are still working together online to create new music. COURTESY OATHBREAKERS

also postponed or cancelled.

"The venues and hosts don't know when this (shelter in place) will be lifted, so they made the decision to cancel the shows," he said.

Fierro said Leech relies on live audiences to generate new fans.

"This has put a pause on that because we haven't been able to advertise ourselves to others," he said.

Valencia said big name bands with paid staff can adjust to cancellations, but smaller bands sacrifice and scramble to sell tickets and play tours.

## SHELTERED JAM SESSIONS

Ramos said he is adapting to Southwestern College classes pushed online by the pandemic and he is continuing his music career by live streaming on social media. He said he plans to release an uptempo electric guitar original for people who want inspiration to exercise.

"Why not make something that will get people to work out or encourage them to try new things in quarantine?" he said.

Valencia said he stays busy working his flooring job, which is considered essential.

"It's either we work or there's no money, and it's been weighing over my head," he said.

Valencia said he has been practicing fast metal music to improve his technique. His goal, he said, is to be ready to return to the stage as soon as possible.

"Learning fast-pace technique with bass will add more strength to the rest of the music with the band," he said.

Lara said members of Ten Til' Dawn are writing music and recording with the goal of completing its debut in 2020 despite the pandemic. The group has four songs up on Spotify from its first demo, "Collective Mistakes."

Lara said he is excited for the release of the newest Ten Til' Dawn songs, "Hashbrown" and "Chapter II (Where Did You Go?)." COVID-19 will not get in the way of his music or the fans of Ten Til' Dawn, he said.

"Due to the substantial boredom developed during quarantine, we decided to give our fans seven minutes, 53 seconds worth of awesomeness," he said.

Time away from the stage has afforded Lara the opportunity to privately explore other styles of music, he said. He primarily plays pop-punk and is a diehard thrash metal fan, he said, though he

listens to an array of genres — even if he kides his bandmates for listening to music "older than their grandfathers."

"One day I will be listening to Slayer and Exodus, and the next day Kiss and Zeppelin," he said. "Quarantine has definitely opened up our minds to writing new music about the times we are experiencing. Some are silly and some are actually pretty solid."

Valencia said local bands are laboratories of new sounds and innovation. They may be rough around the edges, he said, but there is an appeal to the imperfections. Local bands have a lot to prove and work hard to be heard.

"You never know who will be the next Kendrick Lamar or the next Gorillaz, and that's such a cool thing to experience — a band in its early days experimenting with its sounds and throwing everything at the wall to see what sticks," he said.

Leech has also been hard at work, said Fierro, and is set to release an album with accompanying music videos this summer.

## WHAT COMES AFTER CORONA?

When the shelter-in-place order is lifted and crowds can gather for concerts, Ten Til' Dawn would like to play as many shows as possible, said Lara. Valencia said The Oathbreakers look forward to once again rehearsing in drummer Jakob McCulloch's garage and getting their merch out. Fierro said he is excited to host a show with Leech.

"We miss our friends and fans," he said. "We are just itching to play with all our friends and bandmates again."

Isolation is messing with his sleeping schedule, Fierro said, but at least shelter in place inspires new songs.

"I have one song I've been working on for a week or two now," he said. "When we write, we speak what's on our minds and sing about our frustrations and what makes us angry."

Lara said he is hopeful Ten Til' Dawn will play on stage this year. He said his bandmates are not worried, and expect shows and merch sales to bounce back when venues reopen.

"If you look at major events from the past, society stops for a bit, but eventually people get back on track," he said.

And bands get back on stage.