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# Latin rockfest gets groove back

## Carlotan festival hopes to build on '08 revival.

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Five years ago, the Latin rock scene in Charlotte was starting to bubble. Bands were forming and beginning to play Spanish- and English-speaking clubs.

At the heart of the scene was a Latin alternative rock band called La Rua. Encouraged by public interest and the new music that was brewing in the Carolinas, drummer/vocalist Juan Miguel Marin, guitarist Tony Arreaza and keyboardist Herman Marin decided to create a showcase for area bands.

The Carlotan Rock Festival – and, subsequently, Carlotan Rock Productions (the trio's concert promotions venture that brings international acts to the Carolinas) – were born. The first festival, held in 2004 at Skandalo's, featured three bands and attracted 500 people. By the second year, there were seven bands. The festival eventually outgrew its home at the Latin nightclub and moved to NoDa's Neighborhood Theatre. Now in its sixth year, Carlotan Rock is back at Skandalo's tonight. La Rua, the band that started it all, is back, too, after a three-year hiatus.

Putting on an annual festival hasn't been smooth for Juan Miguel Marin and his co-organizers. In 2007, Carlotan Rock moved to an outdoor stage behind the Neighborhood Theatre and despite an impressive headliner, Mexico's Inspector, the event was poorly attended. Marin blames scheduling – early on Saturday when lots of Latinos are working – and that summer's immigration crackdown. “People were scared to go out,” he says.

Carlotan Rock rebounded by scaling back in 2008. The festival returned to Skandalo's with a lineup of N.C. bands that illustrated the evolution of the movement and the festival's history. It not only had a resurgence in attendance, but National Public Radio covered the festival and the surrounding Latin rock movement in a segment heard by Marin's friends and family as far away as Ecuador and Spain.

“It's super ironic that when we got back to the place where we started and worked on the tightest budget, that we had a great turnout,” says Marin, who estimates attendance of 600 to 800. The lack of a big-name international headliner also placed the bands on equal ground. “I could sense the camaraderie between the bands backstage. No one felt like ‘We're the local act.’ Last year was about the movement.”

The lineup of Carlotan Rock 2009 is heavy on newer regional artists but also features national touring indie acts. From numerous submissions, the organizers chose Monroe's Johnny Mortera (who enjoyed a following in Mexico), ska-tinged Charlotteans Rey de Bastos, Winston-Salem's Flor de Zempa, Atlanta's bilingual and heavily American-influenced Satellite District, Los Angeles' Monte Negro and La Rua.

The reunion is being advertised as a one-off show, given the obligations and proximity of La Rua's members. Guitarists Arreaza and Jorge Loor, whose return to Charlotte made the reunion possible, have children now. Herman Marin lives in Washington, D.C., and Juan Miguel Marin, who recently completed his degree, plans to move to New York City this fall. But Marin isn't ruling out the future for La Rua. His move certainly won't halt Carlotan Rock, which is the subject of a documentary that's being filmed now.

“We took that time off (from La Rua) to push Carlotan Rock and push the scene,” he says. “We have a passion for helping other bands and setting up shows, but we do miss playing and being on stage.”



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