

Before they were stars

by Conlan Spangler

Several years ago, on a cold Friday night, I went downtown to see a band play at Tokyo Garden. I'd already seen this out-of-town band a few months earlier when they performed for a small audience of 30 or so at the Starline in the Tower District. They played very melodic, very percussive, very good indie rock. They're called Local Natives, and — if you're a particular kind of music snob like me — you've probably heard of them by now. They went on to release a critically acclaimed debut album, which was featured on NPR and all the usual independent music outlets.

But that Friday night at Tokyo Garden they were new and unsigned to a record label. They were clearly talented; they just weren't yet well known. In fact, they were so unknown that when I arrived, I found the meager audience was composed of just me, the guy running the sound, and the other band that was playing. Essentially, I was the only person who came to see the show.

The band played and they were great. If I were in the right frame of mind, it would have been really fun: a private show by amazing musicians. Unfortunately, I wasn't in that frame of mind. I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed for Fresno. Here we had this up-and-coming band that I felt was on the cusp of making it big, and my city dropped the ball. Poor promotion, poor attendance, and an altogether poor attitude about anything we've never heard of. We like stuff that's popular, and we don't want to take a chance on the rest.

It's not just music and entertainment. How about sports? Odds are, quite a few of you are fans of the World Champion San Francisco Giants. Yet the Grizzlies rarely play to a packed stadium, even though nearly every player on the Giants passes through Chukchansi Park at some point. Why wouldn't you want to be there, up close, as the superstars of tomorrow are being created?

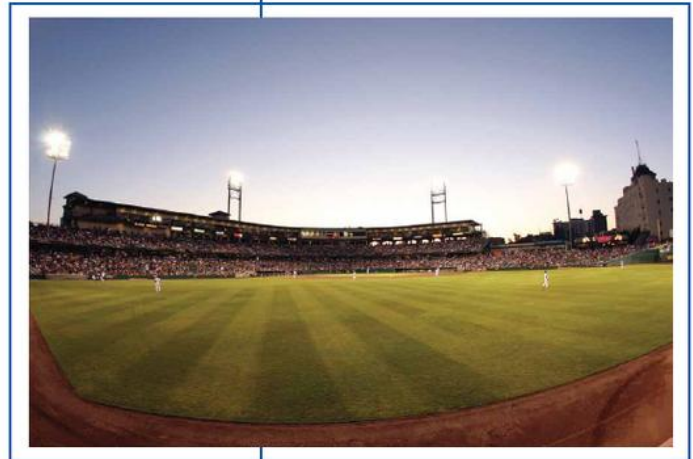
For me, the act of discovering something new and great is so much more satisfying than the act of enjoying something I already know I like. It's not all about warm fuzzy feelings, though. And it's not about "settling" for what we've got. It's about seeking out the world-class talent and entertainment that's right here, right now, so we can create the kind of cultural environment we want to live in.

Fresno won't ever become a first-tier city for sports, music and culture unless we embrace our current second-tierness and start enjoying the great stuff we have — even if it's not super-famous yet. Sure, it takes a little more effort. It requires a little more risk. But if you seek out true quality, without regard for fame or popularity, you'll end up experiencing some pretty cool things.

Plus, the non-"world-famous" ticket prices are way cheaper. 🍷

Conlan Spangler is a second-tier writer who likes music, doesn't really like baseball, and blogs.

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Chukchansi Park, photo by Don Davis