

New Jersey's rockin' eve

VENUES THROUGHOUT THE STATE PLAN BIG YEAR-END SHOWS

By **Tris McCall**
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Even the most jaded touring rocker would concede that there's something special about playing a New Year's Eve concert. Musicians thrive on drama, and a flip of the calendar imparts a significance to a show that can't be artificially generated. Catching your favorite band in concert is exciting; catching that same band on New Year's Eve can be unforgettable.

Some of New Jersey's best clubs don't schedule New Year's concerts, but those that do tend to treat the night as a party. Maxwell's in Hoboken has booked two different festive shows, the Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank is extending an annual tradition, the Atlantic City casino resorts have landed performers with cross-generational appeal and Asbury Lanes is welcoming back one of its favorite acts. Other New Year's Eve rock events include metal in Vineland, jam bands at the Stone Pony and Mexicali Live and a synthpop favorite at the Wellmont Theatre.

THE GAY BLADES

It's been a heady year for the **Gay Blades**. The power pop duo, which features New Milford guitarist Clark Westfield and New Brunswick drummer Puppy Mills, released "Savages," its freewheeling second album, to critical acclaim. The Blades toured the country to support it, but it's hard to imagine that any of the out-of-state shows were as festive as the late summer gig the band played at Asbury Lanes. Rock fans are still reeling on the boardwalk from that night. The bowling alley/rock club, located at 209 Fourth Ave. in Asbury Park, has invited the raucous act back to headline on New Year's Eve. These guys may be jokers, but when they talk about going over the top, believe them. \$14; call (732) 776-6160 or visit asburylanes.com.

MAXWELL'S

Legendary for New Year's Eve shows (among other things), Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken, will be turning its

back room over to garage rock luminaries. The members of the **Fleshtones** have been playing smart, scruffy R&B and offbeat pop since the mid-'70s. "Roman Gods," the band's 1982 release, remains one of the most respected discs of the

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garage rock revival. Longtime fans of MTV will remember frontman Peter Zarella as the host of "The Cutting Edge," an early alternative video show; Maxwell's regulars will recall that the Fleshtones were one of the first groups to play the Hoboken stage. The Queens rockers are paired with the **Detroit Cobras**, a band that specializes in swaggering, roughneck covers of vintage rock and R&B songs. **Mike Doughty**, the singer-songwriter who once fronted Soul Coughing, will present a separate show earlier in the evening. Doughty starts at 7:30; \$25. The Fleshtones and the Detroit Cobras perform at 10:30; \$20 in advance, \$25 day of show. Call



(201) 653-1703 or visit maxwellsnj.com.

SOUTHSIDE JOHNNY

Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes have made a practice of ringing in the new year with blowout concerts in their home state. These Springsteen contemporaries, whose best-loved albums were produced by E Streeter Steven Van Zandt, never seem to slow down: a new Jukes album, "Pills and Ammo," came out in July, and the band is sharp from a year of touring. This will be their 12th New Year's Eve at the Count Basie Theatre, 99 Monmouth St., Red Bank; it's



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safe to say they know how to throw a shindig. \$29.50-\$99; call (732) 842-9000 or visit coubasietheatre.org.

ATLANTIC CITY

Gamblers and revelers alike make Atlantic City a popular New Year's Eve destination. If you've lost big at the craps tables and you're looking for musicians who can sing away your sorrows, there will be no shortage of options. Bluesman **B.B. King**, widely recognized as one of the world's finest guitarists, takes the stage at Harrah's. Still rocking at 85, King is an inspiration to all musicians who dream of a long career in the spotlight. **Sarah McLachlan** hasn't been at it for anywhere near as long, but she's heading in that direction. The singer-songwriter, whose sets at Lilith Fair this year were accomplished, if a bit automatic, will perform at the Circus

Maximus theater at Caesars. Although it hasn't always gotten the critical respect it deserves, **Maroon 5** is one of contemporary pop's most reliable hit-making bands. The infections "Misery," the group's latest Top 20 single, hit the charts this summer; follow-up "Give a Little More," which echoes the Bee Gees, is even better. As the ball drops in Times Square, Maroon 5 will be moving bodies at the House of Blues at Showboat. \$63-\$103 for King, \$78-\$124 for McLachlan, \$73-\$83 for Maroon 5; call (800) 745-3000 or visit ticketmaster.com.

WHERE THE OCEAN MEETS THE SKY

If you're astounded by the high price of tickets elsewhere, you're up for a drive, or you just want to rock hard in a friendly place, consider taking a trip to the excellent, unpretentious Hangar 84 nightclub at 20 S. Sixth St. in Vineland. Pennsauken metal band **Where the Ocean Meets the Sky** welcomes listeners to a Heavy New Year. "Empires," the group's uncompromising debut album, features a three-guitar attack and has been compared to the music of labelmates Texas in July. \$12; call (609) 319-5423 or visit hangar84.frontgatetickets.com.

JAM BANDS

New Year's Eve usually means dancing, which is why so many clubs that ordinarily host rock bands are turning their sound systems over to DJs. Here's another alternative: Hire a jam band. **Reflections**, a Jerry Garcia tribute act, takes the stage at Mexicali Live, 1409 Queen Anne Road, Teaneck, with singer-guitarist Tom Circosta of the Zen Tricksters sitting in. \$18; call (201) 833-0011 or visit mexicalilive.com. The Stone Pony, 913 Ocean Ave., Asbury Park, hosts old-school psychedelic act **Juggling Suns**, which has been among Asbury Park's favorite jam bands for the past decade. \$18; call (732) 502-0600 or visit stoneponyonline.com.

PASSION PIT

Passion Pit isn't necessarily a better band than any of the others that will be playing for audiences on Dec. 31. But Michael Angelakos' synthpop act was built for celebrations. The band's glittering sound, which owes as much to the Jackson 5 as it does to Talking Heads, is the aural equivalent of a confetti drop. "Manners," Passion Pit's debut album, is wistful enough to conjure memories of summers past, and optimistic enough to promise better ones to come. Most importantly, the big beat never stops. Passion

Pit will be sharing the stage with a legend — rapper Slick Rick, whose storytelling skills and sing-song delivery have influenced a generation of rappers — at the Wellmont Theatre, 5 Seymour St., Montclair. \$43-\$68; call (973) 783-9500 or visit wellmonttheatre.com.

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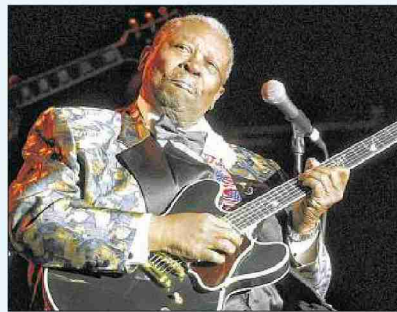


Rock artists presenting New Year's Eve shows in New Jersey include (clockwise from left) Southside Johnny, the Detroit Cobras, Adam Levine of Maroon 5, Passion Pit, B.B. King, the duo the Gay Blades, the Fleshtones and Sarah McLachlan.



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