

## **From House to Home: Inclusivity in DIY Music**

By Abby Tiska

You have to go in through the side.

If it weren't for band members loading in bulky amplifiers and guitar cases camouflaged in stickers through the front door, you might miss the quaint, white home neatly placed right in between the others on Burd Street. It's cold and it's snowy and it's a Thursday night, and Ian Davies is hosting his fourth house show in the basement of the humble abode on Burd Street.

The basement is Ian's latest creation and Shippensburg's newest DIY venue. Ian, a junior at Shippensburg University, is no stranger to the DIY scene. He's from Doylestown, approximately 45 minutes from Philadelphia's booming music scene, where he's constantly attending shows. Ian also interned at Home Outgrown Presents, a Philadelphia-based DIY collective, where he helped run shows.

Ian's inspiration for the space comes primarily from his experiences seeing live bands in other people's basements. His space, however, was created specifically with inclusivity in mind. As an openly queer man, Ian understands the importance of representation and strives to host a space where all can feel welcome and safe.

"I was like, 'Wow, why doesn't Shippensburg have anything like this?' Like, there's no underground places here. And I was just like, 'I wanna do this,'" Ian says.

And that's exactly what he did.

Ian started booking and holding shows in Shippensburg in spring 2017 in the living room of his Earl Street apartment-- a space once known as The Empire. After the cops shut it down one night due to noise, Ian decided that The Empire wasn't fit to host shows anymore. Luckily, he had been brewing up a new replacement: the basement of his best friend's picturesque white home on Burd Street.

Thus, Birdhouse was born.

Just inside the side door, you are immediately greeted to your left with a wooden staircase where Ian waits at the bottom, seated on a wooden stool waiting to greet everyone walking down the steps. He is eagerly tapping his sockless, Vans Old Skool-wearing feet in part anticipation and part nervousness, so rapidly that his cuffed jeans exposing his hairy legs and boney ankles may start to unravel back down. Every person that walks downstairs is subject to a

hug, and definitely the receiver of a warm, unreserved, tooth-filled smile, even if you have never met Ian.

He's half-holding, half-hiding the black box of cash--the showgoers' \$5 door fee-- which he gives in full to the touring bands. Ian could get into trouble for charging people admission to a private event, but he's not too concerned with the legality of it all.

Ian created a Facebook page for Birdhouse to post events for upcoming shows. The page, boasting 318 likes and 322 follows, gives all the details about upcoming shows except the actual Birdhouse address-- you have to message him for that.

Blankets and sheets line the basement walls like wallpaper while a cozy collage of rugs on the floor host some shoeless feet, the undesirable odor growing noticeable. String lights dangling from the low ceiling illuminate worry-free faces. The basement feels dream-like yet nostalgic, like a childhood fort built to escape reality.

The decor reminds you that this isn't just a basement.  
And that this isn't your house, but it feels like home.

"I want to... maintain that status as being a place where you can feel comfortable and go to a show, and just, like, care about the music and not have to fucking worry about being harassed," he says.

Ian came out as queer his freshman year of high school at 14, and despite what his mom may have initially said, it had nothing to do with listening to Lady Gaga.

"My biggest thing was that I would lose everybody in my life," he says, looking back.

Ian's fear was not his reality. Ian says his dad was "cool with it from the beginning," but his mom took time to be as supportive as she is today. On his 21st birthday last month, his dad even took Ian and his then-boyfriend to a gay bar in his hometown for a birthday beer-- a seemingly small gesture that meant the world.

"If my past self could see this in the future it would mean so fucking much," he says.  
"Just my dad taking me and my boyfriend out for a beer at a gay bar, locally, for just a drink, was just something that would've been my wildest fucking dream, like, in middle school."

Giovani Onativia, a queer, non-binary Shippensburg resident and recent Shippensburg University graduate, could relate as they described facing discrimination for as long as they could remember. Thursday night was Giovani's second show at Birdhouse.

"Everyone's just having a good time and no one just gives a shit about who you are and they just accept you for that..." Giovani says as their eyes start welling up before breaking into a smile. "It makes me giddy."

Giddiness was radiating through the basement as the night progressed, heads nodding more violently, now, to the quickening drum beat and the crescendoing riffs of the chugging guitars. The smell of feet was replaced with the smell of beer breath, thanks to the tallest man in the room who brought down a 12-pack of Landshark. Ian and Giovani were at the front and center, each gulping down a Pabst Blue Ribbon, getting lost in the melodic voice of the lead female vocalist.

Ian's consciousness in booking diverse bills has resulted in pushback from people asking why it matters-- saying that it should just be based on talent. But Ian doesn't buy that.

"I'm not hating cis, straight white dudes... Some of my favorite bands are cis, straight white dudes," Ian says. But at this point, he says, "if it is just all, like, straight, white people... it kind of seems really irresponsible at this point."

"There's so much talent that deserves to be highlighted that I think is overlooked sometimes just because, like, in the sake of just quote unquote talent. But I just think it's a bullshit argument," Ian says.

Nearing 11 p.m., Birdhouse's fourth show is now over, the bands hauling their equipment back into their vans leaving no trace except for an almost-full can of Landshark sitting on one of the now-empty tables that once housed CD's and tee shirts.

"Whatever, I'll just drink it," Ian says as he picks up a can that was once somebody else's and puts it to his lips, unfazed. He points to another corner of the basement where heaping piles of clothes lay and urges everyone to take some clothes home that didn't get traded at the last clothing swap he attended.

He grabs the beer and his copy of "Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement" by Angela Davis that he accidentally left downstairs, brought to his attention by a band member who picked it up and told him, "Keep fighting the good fight."

He rolls up the forest-green sleeves of his crewneck repping Vegan Treats, a vegan bakery based in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. His forearm tattoos are now exposed as he routinely runs his hand through his thick, dark chocolate hair as he speaks.

In a moment of combined introspection and retrospection, Ian stresses the importance of “finding your niche, and if not... making it,” he says.

Ian has created a niche not only for himself, but for many others who may have never thought it possible for Shippensburg: a space to enjoy alternative music, inclusiveness and friendship-- even with complete strangers.

“As dumb as it sounds,” Ian says, “It just feels like home.”