

# ***Dollhouse Rocks Through the Rain on Opening Night***

**New DIY venue aims to create a safe, music-centered environment for house show-goers on Syracuse University's campus.**



Opening night crowd at the Dollhouse, Syracuse, NY Sept. 9, 2023. Photo Courtesy of Jean Prysock-Gonzalez

by Zoe Hansen, September 2023

Rain pours, and cigarettes burn as the sounds of music begin to drift out the basement windows of the Dollhouse.

With performances by Champagne Blondes, Delinquent Activity, and Gaslite, Syracuse DIY venue, the Dollhouse's first show on Sept. 9 left house show fans electrified for their next event.

The post-pandemic house show resurgence on Syracuse University's campus has come with a rash of shows morphing to become focused on partying over music and predators taking advantage of these large gatherings to harass and assault their fellow partygoers.

Dollhouse founders Amanda Wheeler, Arielle Blatt, Victoria Ciszew, and Zeynep Aker created the venue in response to the need they had observed for a safer, more music-centered DIY venue on campus.

The Dollhouse seeks to maintain a safe environment by restricting entry to only ID-carrying SU and ESF students, barring people with known histories of abusive or predatory behavior from entering the venue.

Guests began arriving at 9 p.m., filling the basement venue's capacity even before the first band went on at 9:30 p.m., leaving a crowd wrapping around the front and side of the house to listen through open windows.

Champagne Blondes, a local hard rock band made up of Sam Conklin, Jon Hubbard, Jacob Adams, and Dom Lisi went on first, making them the first ever performers at the Dollhouse.

"It's a really big honor," Conklin explained, "We knew going into it we were going to be the first ones ever to play, so we really made sure we had a good set and really practiced everything to get it perfect because we didn't want to have a bad first show for them. We felt some weight in that."



Champagne Blondes performs at the Dollhouse's opening night, Syracuse, NY Sept. 9, 2023.

Photo Courtesy of Jean Prysock-Gonzalez

Only formed in Jan. of 2023, Champagne Blondes had previously only performed at bars such as Funk 'n Waffles in downtown Syracuse before coming to the Dollhouse Saturday night.

They hope to make this performance the first of many house shows.

Up next was another local band called Delinquent Activity. Band members Sami Martin, Max Mintz, and Griff McMahon formed Delinquent Activity in the fall of 2021, taking inspiration from punk and '90s grunge music to create what they call "punk-inspired alternative metal."

Delinquent Activity has played at various DIY venues in the university neighborhood, and even hosted their own called the Crypt when they had the opportunity. Band members hoped to get the chance to play at the Dollhouse as soon as they heard about it through social media and secured a slot when they reached out to the venue's team mid-August.

"I would say that it was probably one of the most energetic crowds I've ever played in front of, especially just considering the conditions. It was hot in that basement," says Mintz, "There was no lull in the crowd, at least like during our set. I mean, it seemed like there was a very high amount of energy for every single band which just says a lot about the crowd, like people were genuinely there for the music and enjoying the music a lot."

Delinquent Activity performed all original material besides a brief teaser of a Taylor Swift song as requested over social media by a fan celebrating their birthday.

The last band of the night was a pop punk band based in Holbrook, Long Island called Gaslite. Band members Shawki Mallick, Charles Ihle, Nick Panzarino, Robert Gravino, and Liam McLean came together to form Gaslite in October of 2021.

Since then they have been frequent performers at the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in Massapequa where they usually have an audience of 20 to 30.





Gaslite performs at the Dollhouse's opening night, Syracuse, NY Sept. 9, 2023.  
Photo Courtesy of Jean Prysock-Gonzalez

By the time they went on at the Dollhouse, around 10:40 p.m., fans had gathered in the house's kitchen and along the staircase leading to the basement, which was still at capacity.

Gaslite described performing for this large crowd as a big step up for them.

The music ended only slightly after the predicted end time of 11, sending sweaty but satisfied music fans out into the night.

The Dollhouse hopes to break the cycle of money-motivated, Music Business major-dominated, and party-centered DIY venues in Syracuse.

Dollhouse team members are working to achieve this by casting their net wider to bring in bands from outside the on campus scene, charging less than other venues for entry, and splitting their profits down the middle with their performers.

All three bands had nothing but positive reviews for the Dollhouse and its team, with Gaslite member Nick Panzarino even expressing surprise that the Dollhouse had never run a show before.

“It seemed like something they’d done a million times before,” Panzarino says, “It was just really cool and a really great group of people.”

The Dollhouse’s next show is scheduled for October sixth, performers to be announced through the Dollhouse Instagram.