

Best-kept 'secret'



SUSAN THACKER Great Bend

Guitar-playing brothers Freddy, left, and Andrew Reynolds, who call their musical act "Fraud," visit with audience members Friday during a break in their concert. The Back Room, a venue for acoustic music, is located in the gallery of the Barton County Arts Council at Forest and Main in Great Bend.

The Back Room is filled with talent

By SUSAN THACKER

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The members of musical duo Fraud, just in from Drogheda, Ireland, were having trouble adjusting to Kansas heat as they kicked off their U.S. tour Friday in Great Bend. Brothers Andrew and Freddy Reynolds paused between songs to sip water and wipe away sweat.

The room was packed, which isn't unusual for the venue known as the Back Room, which seats a maximum of 40. Audience member Tron Buehler and his friends were just two feet from the stage.

"The cool thing about this place is, around here nobody really knows about it," Buehler said after the two-hour concert. "There's amazing talent from all over the world. Anybody that I've ever brought here likes it."

Bill McKown is another regular Back Room customer.

"It's a small, intimate setting that plays a variety of acoustical music, from literally all over the world," McKown said. "Best kept secret in Great Bend, Kansas."

Located at Forest and Main, the Back Room is located in the Barton County Arts Council's gallery. Once used for storage, the room was cleaned up for the first Oscar Micheaux Film Festival and used as a videotape screening room. Since then, it has been used for art demonstrations and workshops, lectures, practice/performance

Coming soon

Reservations to Back Room programs are recommended, as seating is limited. Tickets are available at the Barton County Arts Center, Forest and Main, Great Bend, which is open from 1 to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Or call 792-3097 or e-mail tickets@bartonarts.org.

Here is a schedule of upcoming Back Room concerts:

- Randy Sparks & Becky Jo Benson, 8 p.m. Saturday. Tickets, \$15. Sparks founded The New Christy Minstrels in 1961. Benson joined the group when six of the original members reunited in 2005.
- Bryan Bowers, 7:30 p.m. Oct. 3. Tickets, \$10. Bowers has redefined the autoharp and is well-known as a singer-songwriter.

Source: Barton County Arts Council, www.bartonarts.org

room for Great Bend High School debate and forensic students, and other public gatherings. About twice a month, it is the setting for live acoustic music.

Tickets are usually \$10, although the musicians — who play for a percentage of the gate — can set their own price, said Don Shorock, who schedules the shows. This coming Saturday will be a \$15 show with Randy Sparks, founding member of The

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Andrew Reynolds, left, and brother Freddy sing one of their original "Irish soul" songs onstage at the Back Room.

Back Room

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New Christy Minstrels, and Becky Jo Benson.

Shorock is responsible for finding quality musical acts from all over the world, but these days, the musicians often come to him. While it doesn't pay much, the Back Room is perfect for musicians with a one-day layover between shows in, for example, Kansas City and Denver. They like the setting and the hospitality they receive. Many enjoy spending a night at Heartland Farm in rural Pawnee Rock, he said.

For Fraud, signing a contract with the Back Room was their proof to Irish authorities that they had a real job waiting overseas. They were then booked at festivals and coffee houses across the country.

The brothers played guitars and Andrew sang for about 45 minutes before the first break.

Buehler and his friends, all in their earlier 20s, listened to the band on the Internet (www.fraudtheband.com) before Friday's concert, and could probably have sung along when Andrew and Freddy launched into their

song "Lemonade." The new fans invited them to a bonfire after the show, but Andrew said they had to get up early Saturday and head to the Tumbleweed Festival in Garden City.

During the break, audience members stretched their legs in the art gallery, where Ellinwood High School art instructor Greg Maxwell is the featured artist of the month. In September, the gallery will feature paintings and prints by another Ellinwood area native, Lawrence Robl. People snacked on coffee cake and tea or chatted with the band members, who were selling copies of their first CD for \$5 each.

McKown asked how they chose the name "Fraud." It may have been a misunderstanding, Andrew said. When their manager asked about a name, he suggested they use Freddy's nickname, "Frod," but the manager thought they were saying "Fraud."

By the beginning of the second set, audience members were speaking to the Irish singers as if they were old

friends. One woman advised them to raise the price of their discs. "Americans like to spend money," she said.

The number of people who have discovered the "secret" of the Back Room continues to grow. Zach Smith, one of the people who came with Buehler, said the venue is "something I'd definitely go back to."

Jason Whisnant, one of the regulars, said he wishes there were concerts every week. "It's a worthwhile thing to have in Great Bend," he said. "It's great having live music."

Although reservations are always recommended because of the limited seating, Arts Council members aren't always sure how many people will show up. CPI Qualified Plan Consultants Inc., one of Great Bend's largest private employers, underwrites the Back Room and many of the tickets are often picked up by CPI employees. The Barton County Arts Council also receives funding from Barton County, the City of Great Bend, the Kansas Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts.