

MY TRIP DOWNSTATE
Ann Arbor Benefit for Scott Morgan
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My professional Ann Arbor music career goes back to 1965, and that was the year I met Scott Morgan of "The Rationals." It seems that Scott's band and ours (The Prime Movers Blues Band) were always friends and have remained that way.

So it was with sadness that I discovered that Morgan was suffering from advanced liver disease and needed all the help he could get. His illness has been going on for a while, since earlier this year, and a special benefit concert was announced at the Necto Ballroom (formerly the Nectarine Ballroom) in Ann Arbor. The benefit was set for May 20, 2012 and I noted the date at the time, but promptly forgot about it.

Then on Wednesday (May 20th) a Facebook friend reminded me of the event. It was going to be that evening at 8 PM and it was already 4 PM in the afternoon, not to mention the three-hour drive to Ann Arbor. I shook my head and kicked myself that I had not planned ahead, and that it had once-again slipped my mind. I immediately went online and donated to the event, so at least I was there with intention.

But I found myself wondering just what kind of event would it take to actually get me off my butt and moving? Who would have to fall ill to get me out of the house and downstate? I had earlier missed a similar benefit for my friend Gary Grimshaw and was already sorry about that. And if I didn't care enough to go and support an old friend like Morgan, what would it take? And then I read that Morgan himself would be there, although not able to sing. I thought it might be good for Scott Morgan to have friends around him in person.

That was when I decided I had to go. I invited my wife Margaret to come with, but she had just returned from an 800-mile drive from New York and did not want to go anywhere just then. It was not more than ten minutes or so before I had thrown some clothes in a bag and was on the road driving to Ann Arbor.

The trip downstate was uneventful and before I knew it I was at the Necto Ballroom, where folks were already assembling out front in full sun. The wait was about an hour and it was 93 degrees out. I was not about to join them in the heat, so I found myself a chair in the shade at an outdoor café across the street and hunkered down until the doors opened, at which point everyone filed in.

The Necto is a nightclub for hip dance music and tonight was a special benefit that featured some older-style Ann Arbor bands, including The Vibrations, George Bedard & the Kingpins, The Michigan All-Star Band, and a late-night jam sessions with Brennan Andes of the Macpodz,

and others. DJ Joe Tiboni was the guest MC, and there were other musicians too. It would go late.

The inside of the ballroom was mostly painted black and the place filled up pretty quickly. There are few seats in the place and before I knew it was pretty much standing room only, and shoulder-to-shoulder at that. I like people well enough, but being packed that tight is not my most favorite thing.

Still, it was OK, and I was seeing many folks from the past, plus a number of my Facebook friends too. However when the band started playing, it was instantly so loud that there was no way to have a conversation. I soon found myself shouting into people's ears and vice versa, and even that was tough. Here I was surrounded by old friends with no way to communicate with them.

My imagined party of catching up with old friends while at the benefit was instantly impossible and would remain so. I did get to see Scott Morgan and say hello. He obviously has been through a lot and it looked like he too was finding the noise and crowd a lot to handle. I wished him well and paid my respects to Scott and to his long-time friend Maureen Ferrell, who has been helping to care for Morgan and probably had a lot to do with arranging for the benefit concert.

By this time it was really crowded and very loud, so I just kind of quietly threaded my way through the crowd and slipped out the door. I soon found myself walking down the street, happy just to see light and hear again. Escape from crowds is a habit I have. I tend to like one-to-one contact or just a few people talking together.

For a moment I thought I would even drive on home that night. To that end I went to Zingerman's delicatessen and got a sandwich for the ride, since I had not eaten since that morning. But within a short while I realized that I was already very tired from everything. So I spent the night at my daughter Anne's house at the invitation of her partner Michael Lee. Anne and my granddaughter Emma were already up at my house visiting.

I was soon fast asleep, but awoke at 3:30 AM, a little later than usual. By 3:40 AM I was on the road and driving into the sunrise, which came around 5:30 AM. By 6:30 AM I was home and crashed out on the couch in my office. I was awakened by my cell phone ringing.

It was my wife Margaret calling me, thinking I was still in Ann Arbor. I walked out of my office to find her standing there with cell phone in hand. She took a double-take and then we both laughed.