

PARKWAY OF BROKEN DREAMS

A documentary by Pj Perez

In the early 1990s, UNLV-adjacent thoroughfare Maryland Parkway was *the* thriving center of cultural activity in Las Vegas, where college students and the creative class of the city came to study, socialize, dine and shop. Independently owned coffee shops filled with academics and intellectuals. Multiple record stores, including a massive Tower Records, served as premier destinations for local musicologists. Bars and clubs buzzed with live music, flowing taps and warm bodies. At night, people casually walked from retail stores to cafes to bars. And UNLV's own student-run radio station, KUNV, provided the soundtrack and connective tissue for the whole scene, through its innovative and award-winning "Rock Avenue" programming.



By the dawn of the 2000s, however, that scene almost entirely disappeared. Rock Avenue was cancelled. Record stores went under. Coffeehouses shuttered. The art and music scene, for the most part, moved downtown, and Maryland Parkway today looks very different: rising new UNLV construction projects mixed with a collection of decades-old shopping centers and proliferation of chain restaurants. Those walking the sidewalks at night are less likely to be students than residents of the surrounding neighborhoods, bus riders biding time between routes, or individuals living on the streets.



For many people, that scene that rose up out of the 1980s and blew up in the 1990s—paralleling the national mainstreaming of alternative music and coffeehouse culture—serves not just as a high-point in Las Vegas' cultural history, but as the "big bang" for almost everything to come after that. Nightlife pioneers got their start putting on after-hours events in tiny cafes and bars. Rock Avenue DJs became music industry powerhouses. An Emmy-award winning TV writer honed his skills over cheap cups of coffee. Everyone from future *Saturday Night Live* stars to members of The Killers owe at least part of their creative lives to the opportunities afforded them from the inclusive, come-as-you-are nature of the Maryland Parkway cultural scene.



In 2006, just as UNLV was unveiling its Midtown UNLV plan, I wrote an oral history of this period as a [cover story for the *Las Vegas Weekly*](#). Interviewing about a dozen influential participants in the scene—from business owners and artists to DJs and journalists—the article explored the origins, blossoming, and eventual decline of counterculture along Maryland Parkway, and asked whether UNLV's plan to force change could ever reproduce or surpass what came before it, organically. More than a dozen years later, the jury is still out.



Now, in 2019, there's an entire generation of Las Vegas residents mostly unaware that this amazing concentration of creative energy ever existed. They know nothing of the video jams, the poetry readings, the punk shows, the arts collectives, the "world of choice" that KUNV used to be (before it went all-jazz, to appeal to older, upper-middle class listeners who would actually support the station financially).



And when I tell this story to folks who know nothing about Las Vegas, period, outside of the gambling and nightlife for which the world knows the city best, they're fascinated. Unlike the grunge scene in Seattle, the punk scene in New York City, the hard rock scene in L.A., the Manchester rave scene, or the flower-power scene in San Francisco, no one has told the story of the Maryland Parkway scene in Las Vegas, which was somehow like all of the above, combined into one brief, beautiful—and sometimes tragic—flash of culture, community and diversity that could only exist at that time, in that place.

So, now, 25 years after its heyday, [Parkway of Broken Dreams](#) intends to tell that story as a feature-length documentary film, using 2006's oral history as a template for an even more expansive survey of the period, relayed through a combination of new interviews with dozens of the people who made it all possible and archival footage that captures the visual expression of the scene—as well as where Maryland Parkway currently stands, and where it may be going.