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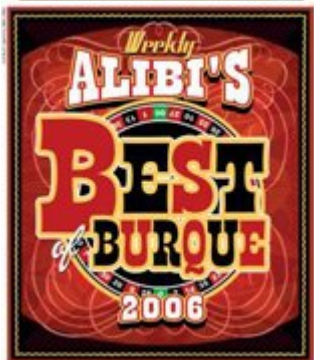
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This Week's Music

Spotlight

It's Smooth, It's Sweet, It's Vanilla Pop

Vanilla Pop croons over three years at Martini Grille

By Amy Dalness

Here's a common scene: A young man leans against the bar, making a phone call to, let's say, his roommate. He chats for a minute, tells his buddy to come over for a drink and puts the phone away. A simple scene, causing no general hubbub or hilarity—unless it's at the Martini Grille on Wednesday night.

"Maybe your hearing wouldn't be so bad if you weren't on the cell phone while I'm singing," a man



Amy Dalness

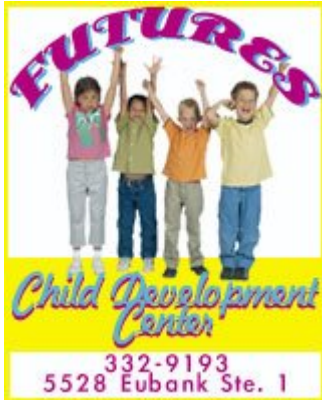
Al Dente and Lester Moore want to know: Are you a Vanilla



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with a pinstripe mustache tells the guy on the phone.

Pop tart?

"Yeah, honey, I'm still at the office," the mustachioed heckler continues between verses of "L-O-V-E" by Nat King Cole, the caller still chatting. "It's just the radio. I know, it's terribly loud."

Rather than ending the conversation and aiming an angry fist at the singer's nose, the man puts his cell phone away and gives a nod of approval. Being heckled is just part of the experience that is Vanilla Pop.

Take every stereotype of a lounge singer you've ever heard—now multiple it by two, add leopard-print pants, pink flamingos, a dash of satire and some major talent and you've got Vanilla Pop. Singer/keyboardist/heckler Al Dente and guitar player/singer Lester Moore tag their act as "Sinatra makes out with the '80s." And, boy, if Madonna, Michael Jackson, Frank Sinatra and ABBA all made out, Vanilla Pop would be more than sloppy seconds.

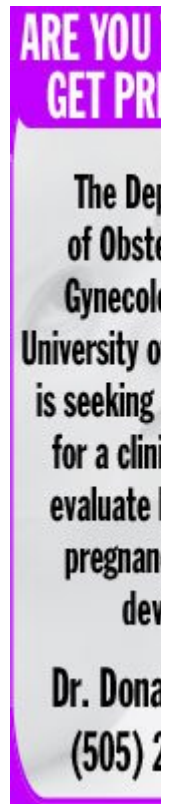
The arsenal of cover songs these bejeweled hipsters can pull off is fantastic and nostalgia-inducing. Some of the best include "Mack the Knife," "Tainted Love," "Fame" and Prince's "Kiss." Vanilla Pop may lay on the *queso* pretty thick, but they back it up with real musical ability and performance gumption.

The dynamic duo from Taos has been playing the Martini Grille every Wednesday night to avid fans for nearly three years, and on April 19, they'll celebrate their third anniversary--in style.

"It'll probably be the exact same show," plus a few Vanilla Pop-inspired drink specials, Al says. "Maybe we'll have two bubble machines. That'd be crazy."

Their Wednesday night performance does draw a large and diverse crowd, from barely-21 college students to party lovers who could have barely-21 children. Vanilla Pop does croon (when they want to) and tell bad jokes (they're bad—but that's what makes them funny), but there's one lounge stereotype they can't replicate: an empty dance floor.

Catch Vanilla Pop on Wednesday, April 19, for their third anniversary show at Martini Grille (4200 Central SE, 255-4111) starting at 9:30 p.m. \$2 cover. For more information, visit <http://www.vanillapop.com/>.





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