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Lavish choices to salute Vienna, D6

Michael Lutz photo

Countdown to 2005



Toast the new year with The Midnights at Pearkes Arena, Loverboy in Nanaimo



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Dance until next year

The list of New Year's festivities includes the sublime and the ridiculous

By Mike Devlin
Times Colonist staff

The offerings range from an '80s band celebrating its 25th year in the music business to a motorcycle-riding burlesque dancer coming out of retirement.

No, it's not the new line-up of reality shows. Welcome to New Year's Eve 2004.

With a list of events that includes both the sublime and the ridiculous, Vancouver Island's Friday night festivities are nothing short of amazing. And while the number of activities looked, at one time, somewhat underwhelming, organizers have been in overdrive planning what has become a fantastic night of entertainment.

Leading the way are these events, which we feel are the hot-spots in terms of value for your dollar. (For more events, check Nightspots listings below and calendar, D11.)

One of the biggest parties on the Island this year is an all-ages concert hosted by local R&B band The Midnights, which is joining forces with Victoria native Gene Hardy (a sax veteran who's played with everyone from the Bare-naked Ladies to Ronnie Hawkins) and The Vic High R&B Band.

The event, Countdown to Midnight, is being held at George Peakes Arena, located at 3100 Tillicum Rd. This non-alcohol New Year's Eve celebration is a benefit for the Vic High music program, graduates of which currently play with The Midnights.

"The idea is hopefully that we can run it in the following years and use it as a fundraising effort," says Midnights saxophonist Paul Wainwright, the event's coordinator.

In addition to Hardy, the 12-piece band has recruited other guests as well, including local quasi-celebrity Alfred the Flower Man, who will sing *Auld Lang Syne* shortly after midnight. "Alfred has practically got New Year's written all over him," Wainwright jokes.

Wainwright hopes Countdown to Midnight will draw about 1,000 people.

Doors for the event open at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$35 for families, \$15 for adults, and \$10 for youths. They are available at the McPherson box office. For more information, phone 383-0369.

