

THE POUCH

Interviewed by The Silver Age, August 12th, 2024

The Pouch is a West Philadelphia underground music venue founded in 2021 and run by Nicholas, Edweirdo, Parker, Joey, Connor, Eric, and Mayunk. The venue hosts a variety of genres but is known for its punk, noise, and experimental shows. Information about upcoming shows can be found on Instagram (@thepouchphl) and on Facebook.

COLE GABORIAULT: We can start with the basics – names, ages, where you're from, any bands you're affiliated with, stuff like that.

PARKER: Yeah, sure. So I'm Parker, pronouns he/him. I'm from Massachusetts, and I moved to Philadelphia a few years ago. I moved here specifically actually like a couple weeks ago. I play in a band with him – Edweirdo and the Elephants, it's called – and we practice here. So it feels like I've been here for longer, cause we practice here a lot, and I'm here a lot anyway, but yeah, I officially moved in a few weeks ago.

EDWEIRDO: I'm Edweirdo. I'm also with Edweirdo and the Elephants. I'm 27, my pronouns are he/they. Originally I'm from Northern Virginia, but I've also lived in Philadelphia for quite some time now. I went to UArts back in like 2019, so I've lived here pretty much since then. I got pretty heavily involved with the West Philly music scene about some two years ago, and then I moved into Pouch, like, around the beginning of this year, so... It's a really fun venue. It's a really happening spot.

ALICIA LOPEZ: Where in NoVA are you from?

EDWEIRDO: Sterling, Virginia. So kind of like the DC suburbs.

A.L.: Yeah, I'm from Alexandria, so, like, right there.

EDWEIRDO: Sure, sure. Cool.

NICHOLAS: I'm Nicholas. I'm 50. I've been here since 2021. I'm in the band G.T. Arpe. And then I play with other bands – or, I have played with other bands here and there.

C.G.: How did you guys meet, and then, separately, how did the venue start?

NICHOLAS: I know these guys from coming – they came to The Pouch.

EDWEIRDO: Yeah, I've been a regular at The Pouch for like two years and officially became a resident this year. And this guy [Parker], I kind of introduced him to the Philly music scene a while back. So I brought him to a lot of shows here, and then a room became available, so he joined The Pouch team officially.

PARKER: Yeah. Am I allowed to tell the story of how – when we met, how we met? The night?

EDWEIRDO: Oh yeah, of course. Tell them.

PARKER: So actually, the night we met is kind of funny, because we met at Dawson Street Pub¹, which is in Manayunk – yeah, you guys know where – everyone knows Dawson Street Pub. My girlfriend had broken up with me unexpectedly the night before, and I was like, “well, what do I do now? I don't know a lot of people. I want to get involved in the Philly music scene.” So I go to Dawson Street Pub, and I meet this guy [Edweirdo]. I'm wearing a t-shirt of the band Can, and he's like, “whoa, you have a Can t-shirt on!” We're, like, nerding out over Krautrock, and then, come to find out, he had a bandmate that ditched him and kind of went off the deep end. So it was kind of just a weird coincidence of, like, “whoa, your bandmate just broke up with you. My girlfriend just broke up with me. Why don't we just...” So music was my rebound. So we started making music, and I – yeah, and then I met Nick and... yeah.

NICHOLAS: And you knew the people in Manayunk.

PARKER: What?

NICHOLAS: You knew the people in Manayunk, right? Before you met me and Edweirdo? Or you met them through us?

PARKER: I met everybody through Dawson Street and The Grape Room² really. That was where I met, like, all the music people that I know. In fact, I don't really think I know anyone else in Manayunk even after living there. Friends in the area, but nobody in Manayunk.

NICHOLAS: I came here from New York in 2020. The rent was too much in New York, and I had moved like five or six times in four years. I'd always taken the cheapest place, and I just – it was just hard to keep moving. And so I took a place – no – some friends had already moved to Philly before me, and they said that there was a house that needed someone to move in. So that's Haus of Yarga, which is down the street. So I lived there for a year, and I was perfectly happy. But some of the people who lived there and like one or two other people decided

¹ 100 Dawson St, Philadelphia, PA 19127

² 105 Grape St, Philadelphia, PA 19127. Now Permanently Closed

they wanted to form another house separate from Yarga. And because they were leaving, I just followed them here. And yeah, then we formed The Pouch that year.

A.L.: So The Pouch started in 2021?

NICHOLAS: Yeah.

A.L.: And why'd y'all – I guess you were almost continuing a venue? Or, why'd y'all make a venue?

NICHOLAS: Well, we were at the Haus of Yarga, and then some of the people – there was some drama or something. And then some of the people decided they didn't want to stay there cause of the drama. I was happy staying – didn't want to leave – but then I followed them here, and that was it, really. And then we were looking around for a good place to have another venue, and this was an ideal spot just cause the basement is so big. I call it, like, a deep water port, because the ceiling is so high. And then people were really impressed with it in terms of the basement size. So it kind of took off from that. They were really impressed with the size of the basement or whatever, so...

C.G.: Where'd the name "The Pouch" come from?

NICHOLAS: We had this huge meeting, or a couple of meetings, and we couldn't decide on an idea. And then we narrowed it down to like 10 names. And then I think Devon, one of the people who lived here, suggested The Pouch, and we just kind of decided on it by default or whatever. It was just the least lame name that everyone agreed on or whatever. And that was it.

C.G.: It works.

A.L.: Do you have any decor inspirations for your place?

NICHOLAS: Most of the decor that is up now is from the people who moved in initially. There were a couple of other things that were put up, but I'm really not a decor person. Like, my room doesn't have any posters or anything, and it hasn't the whole three years I've been here. So I'm not the person to ask about that. But um, I don't know if you guys put anything out.

EDWEIRDO: Not really around the house. I have some of my own artwork in my bedroom.

PARKER: Yeah, I've got vinyls hung up on the wall.

EDWEIRDO: I have kind of, like, a little art – because I'm a visual artist also – so I have a little bit of an art space in the one corner of the basement that I make some cool sculptures, drawings, all kinds of stuff.

C.G.: As a broad subject, obviously running a venue requires some sound equipment, some set up, some consideration to, like, running stuff. What's your guys' general approach? You have any interesting things that you do? Standard procedures that are novel or anything?

NICHOLAS: Um, I think all the people who moved in initially, they were all people who played music. And then some of them had audio equipment because they went to University of the Arts. So we initially had a semi-decent mixer. And then there were like two or three PAs. And then – I forget what happened to one of them – one of them broke or something, so we had to get another one. And then one of the old ones is still down there. And then we have another one, which is a spare. Oh, I bought one from Joey too, which is the one that's down there now. And that one's down there because it's hard to move, and it's so big. So that's the only reason.

C.G.: Do you run sound? Or who's doing it for the venue? Just, like, tag team? Everybody?

PARKER: I mean, I don't know that much about running sound. I'm trying to learn more about, like – especially since we just started kind of recording for the first time and stuff. So I'm trying to learn more about mixing and recording. But yeah, usually Nick or Joey, I feel like, are the ones that generally run sound.

NICHOLAS: I worked at a venue in New York, and then I worked at like two other venues in New York. And then I worked in Korea. I did shows in Korea for like eight years or something. So I had a lot of experience before I came here. So, yeah, I know some stuff through those experiences.

A.L.: Okay. Obviously, y'all do a ton of shows. Are they on any sort of a schedule at all, or just kind of whenever bands reach out, or whenever you want?

EDWEIRDO: I feel like we've been doing a lot of them, like, Fridays and Saturdays. I don't know, we do it kind of moderately I guess now. We do like three to four shows a month. Yeah, it's pretty chill.

NICHOLAS: It's me, Edweirdo, and Joey that set up the shows right now. I know Parker wants to set up a show.

PARKER: Yeah, I'm happy to help out too. I mean, I did just move in. So there have only been I think a couple of shows since I moved in, so yeah, down the line I'm sure I'll...

NICHOLAS: When we first came, it was like a free-for-all, and we were doing shows whenever, practicing in the basement whenever, because that's what we did at Haus – or Haus of Yarga. It's, like, really free over there. But then we had some complaints from the people over here. So then we curbed it, and we agreed that we would only have it on Friday and Saturday. And then we had some other rules about when we would stop. So it's

basically like a more conservative version of Yarga, which is good for me because I'm older anyways. But, you know, then there were times we had COVID problems and other stuff happen where we didn't have shows. But now there's new people who moved in, so we're doing a bit more shows. So it changes.

C.G.: Do you usually book through Instagram? Just, like, bands reach out? Or do you work with booking groups or anything?

NICHOLAS: I'm trying to think. It was all on Instagram when it started, and it was just on Instagram, and it still is, kind of, but I don't really like that. Cause I've seen MySpace come and go, and these other websites like Napster, you know what I mean? And I know that sooner or later the same thing is going to happen to Instagram. So I don't just rely on Instagram. So I made an email, and hopefully Edweirdo will use it, or someone. And then I try to use Facebook and not just Instagram. I'm kind of concerned that people are overly obsessed with Instagram.

C.G.: Yeah, I share that concern. Something's going to happen someday, and it's not going to be there anymore. So you guys have, you know, a lot of shows, a lot of diversity. If you had to pick some main genres that you guys host, what's sort of your target?

EDWEIRDO: I like to kind of diversify it as I've been – you know, I've been running a few shows here since I lived here, and I like to diversify it for the most part. I'd love to get some, like, folk or indie bands here sometime, and we've had a couple of those. But also mainly we rotated around punk and noise and experimental. I would say the top three that we – you know, we keep it diverse, but I feel like it all kind of more or less rotates around those three. You know, whoever plays, it's always some deviation of one of those three genres. Like, we've had quite a few hardcore punk shows here. Those are always the trickiest to control volume to avoid noise complaints. Those are, I would say, the absolute trickiest. And also a lot of bands, you know, show up on punk time. Meaning, like, if we try to get a show rolling – you know, try to get doors at 6:30 and get the show rolling at 7:30, if it's a hardcore punk show, you can bet they're not even going to show up till 7. And their music probably won't start till 8:30 or even 9.

C.G.: Maybe related to that, have you guys had any memorably really really great or really really awful shows, or funny stories from having shows?

EDWEIRDO: I can think of a lot. We've done a lot of really cool – we do Pouch-o-ween every year. I'm really excited for that one. We've got to figure out who we're going to be for that. Yeah. Those are always super fun. The fashion show every March, that's, like, super cool.

NICHOLAS: The first one was really good, the first fashion show. It was massive.

EDWEIRDO: Oh, this is a funny one, I just thought of this. You remember this one. Porchfest. We always play Porchfest, West Philly Porchfest. So we played it, and we were probably on our second to last song, and what we did was we closed off the front door to people, because obviously we're playing out here on the porch. We don't want anyone coming up on the porch like they would normally do. So we opened up the back door, so anyone who had to come inside and go to the bathroom or get water or whatever, they had to go around back. So we're on our second to last song, and this guy – I think he was maybe a little blitzed, or – I don't know – he kind of tapped me out of the way, and I think maybe tapped Parker a little bit, and just made a beeline for that front door. Or did he come out too? I forget. Did he go in or out?

PARKER: Well, I think the awkward thing about it was that he went to the door, and then there was just this unified shouting of, like, “no no no, use the back door, use the back door,” and he just kept going at it with the door. Until finally we were just like, “hey, man, gotta go the other way.”

EDWEIRDO: And that was back in June, and then, I would say, like two or three weeks ago we had a show here, and that same guy came to the show, and he's like, “hey, you remember me?” And I'm like, “you look kind of familiar?” I didn't really know. He's like, “oh, I just wanted to apologize for butting in your way. I don't know what was going on in my head.” I'm like, “ohhh, that's who you are.” And I'm like, “alright, it's chill.”

C.G.: I guess about you guys personally, first of all, do you have a favorite feature of the venue? Favorite thing about the venue?

EDWEIRDO: That is a really, really tough question. I'll let Nick answer that one first.

NICHOLAS: I like how it's so big compared to where I lived in New York. I lived in places where there was just like two rooms that I could live in or whatever. Or, like, that were common space. In here there's like 15 or 16, 17 rooms. So it's way better.

EDWEIRDO: I would say the feature I love the most is how you can hear the music in the basement from just about anywhere. So, you know, I love a good hardcore show, but some of them are just too loud for me even with earplugs. I literally remember – this was like two years ago or so, one of the first ever Pouch shows – I pretty much listened to an entire set from the bathroom all the way up on the second floor. It was coming through so clearly through the vents. I think it was the band SHID that was playing. I think SHID was the band. I tried going downstairs during the SHID show, and I almost went deaf. And I'm like – I was up in the bathroom, I'm like, “you know what? If I really wanted, I could just hang out here the entire set.” Piss a lot of people off outside the bathroom, but, you know, gotta do what you gotta do.

PARKER: I think for me, it's really tough to pick just one, because I like a lot of things about the place. I really like the porch. It's just a nice, big communal space where lots of people can hang out, like, in the middle of shows, before shows, whatnot. Sometimes we have trouble telling people to go home. Because we're like, “hey, I

think we're trying to wrap up," because people are just having such a good time out here. But I also really like how big and spacious the basement is. Where at a lot of house shows, there's a pillar, or a column, or, like, at Haus of Yarga it's nice, but the ceiling is really low, so when people mosh, they often hit their heads and whatnot. So yeah, it's just a nice, big, open space. And it's nice that you can hear the music from virtually anywhere, but I do live on the third floor, so I can't – and I live way in the back, so I really can't hear it from my room actually.

NICHOLAS: You can't? Really?

PARKER: No, I can't. Like maybe a tiny bit of vibration. Which is fine, because I have a rabbit anyway, so I wouldn't want her – I mean, she loves music, but I wouldn't want it too loud.

C.G.: Also for each of you, what kind of stuff do you guys do outside of The Pouch? Like work, hobbies, interests, you know, outside of the music scene?

EDWEIRDO: My day job is a barista, but I also do visual art too. I do a lot of painting, illustration. A lot of people in the scene actually know me as the artist that doodles all the bands. So there's this one series I've been doing for about two years now, where – I started it kind of when I started going to shows – where I just take random snapshots of bands that I really like, and I depict them in my own pen-and-ink style, and I give them a little logo and stuff. It actually ironically is how I made a lot of the friends out here that I did. Made a lot of connections.

PARKER: For me, so, my job is – I write web pages for therapists for my job, which is fun. I've done that for a long, long time. And then in terms of other passions and stuff, I'm passionate about animals, I have a pet rabbit, and then I also write and publish fiction. I've been doing that for a long time, since I was like 18, 19, 20 basically.

C.G.: Is there somewhere we can find that?

PARKER: Oh, the fiction? Oh yeah, literally, I think if you just type in my name, Parker Desautell, it's like the first thing that comes up. Yeah, some of them are on the web, some of them are in print. I also was a music critic for the magazine PopMatters years ago, so, did that for a couple years as well.

C.G.: [to Nicholas] And then we were talking earlier about this, but...

NICHOLAS: Yeah, I'm an EMT right now. I help book a venue in New York called Caffeine Underground³ in Bushwick. It's an all-ages space. I help people play in Korea and other places sometimes. And I like to help out charities and things like that, or political things. Yeah, I don't know what else to say.

³ 447 Central Ave Suite A, Brooklyn, NY 11221

A.L.: So then our last question is just, is there anything we totally missed in this interview that we should have asked about that we didn't? Anything about the venue, about yourselves?

C.G.: Any things you definitely want in our write-up or anything.

EDWEIRDO: Well, you forgot to ask when our next gig at Madison Square Garden is.

A.L.: Of course.

EDWEIRDO: You also forgot to ask when we plan to play the Las Vegas Sphere.

A.L.: Of course. Dates, please.

[Joey enters]

NICHOLAS: This is Joey. [to Joey] This is Alicia and Cole.

C.G.: So you're also involved with The Pouch booking and stuff?

JOEY: Yeah.

NICHOLAS: Yeah, we book – the three of us book shows. We're the three bookers right now, I guess.

C.G.: Cool. If you want to be in the write up or anything, I guess.

JOEY: Oh, this is for the interview thing?

C.G.: Yeah.

JOEY (via email): Hey, this is Joey. I am 32 years old, from New Jersey. My activities are booking shows, jaw harp, skateboarding, and cats. Job is stagehand. Affiliated with Sweet Pith, Rratclub, Flemingtondiy.

CONNOR (via email): Hi, my name's Connor. I also live at The Pouch. I play guitar in the band 90eeze – we'll be playing at Abyssinia on 8/30. I've been at The Pouch for about a year. Also, I'm 32, originally from Wisconsin.