

LOVE in the fast lane

By Jennifer Hoyt
Journal Inquirer

HARTFORD — The 22 people gathered for a speed-dating event at Black-eyed Sally's on Dec. 14 had many different motivations for trying the innovative route to romance.

Ryan McNair, 26, of Manchester, said he went so he'd have a story to tell his friends who were waiting for him at the nearby Arch Street Tavern.

Many in the group, like Allison Phaneuf, 32, of West Hartford, wanted an alternative to online dating.

Mark Meister, of Southington, had somewhat scientific reasoning — he said that having a series of brief conversations increased the probability that he would meet someone he liked.

And Scott Hallden, 25, a Kensington resident who helped organize the event, said with a smirk, "I'm looking for love."

While speed dating's main promise — efficiency — may not be romantic, the dating method is gaining popularity, particularly after being featured in many movies and television shows in recent years.

At last month's speed-dating event — sponsored by the speed-dating company Got 5 Minutes? — the 11 male participants sat at tables while their female counterparts rotated between them every five minutes until everyone shared a "mini-date."

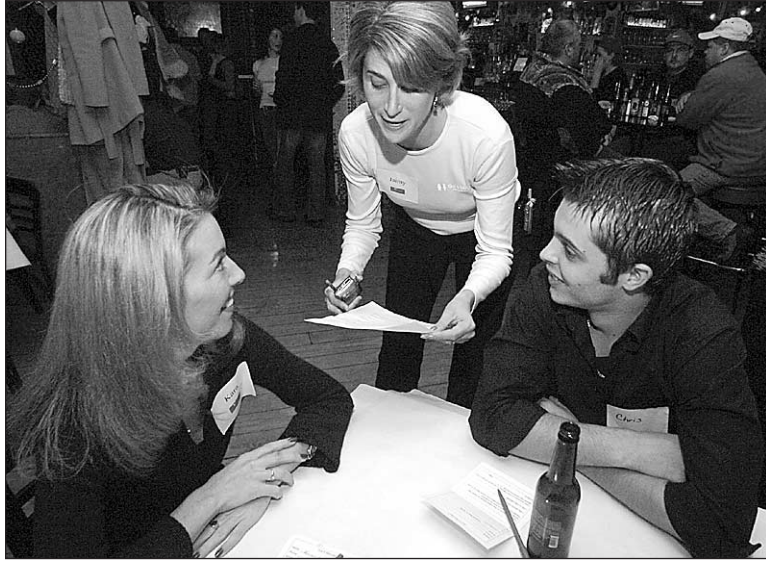
At the end of the night, the speed daters, who had each paid \$30 to \$40 to attend the event, wrote down the names of the people they wanted to see again, and organizers Jaimy Blazynski and Maria Keiser later connected them for dates.

Modern-day matchmakers Blazynski and Keiser, who co-founded Got 5 Minutes?, say speed dating offers the human contact missing from online dating sites, like www.match.com.

"The biggest thing about connecting with someone is being able to laugh," Blazynski said, "Really what you can't find with Match.com is that instant chemistry."

Many of the speed daters at the event had tried Match.com, where they found many dates and little romance, particularly since people didn't offer realistic depictions of themselves in their profiles.

"How many people have an accurate self-perception?" said one of the speed daters, Richard Meister, 34, of Southington.



Jim Michaud / Journal Inquirer

Jaimy Blazynski explains the event to Kara Lawson of Glastonbury and Chris Llorey of New Britain.

Last month's event was the first venture of Got 5 Minutes? The company was formed after Blazynski saw Keiser's success running a speed-networking company for businesses, and proposed they start a similar program for singles looking for romance.

They said they didn't want to be like other speed-dating companies that didn't screen participants, so the two married women began networking throughout the local bar scene, chatting up large groups of singles to get them interested in speed dating.

Many of the pair's recruits were at the event at Black-eyed Sally's, answering rhetorical questions with their various mini-dates and munching on appetizers.

While none of the event's pairings appear to be leading to matrimonial bliss, the night did result in six matches and a few dates.

Phaneuf went on dates with two of the men she met at speed dating and although neither date has led to a new romance, she said she would definitely recommend speed dating to singles.

"Even though there wasn't a love connection, I enjoyed the opportunity to make new friends and connect with people on a business level," said Phaneuf, who said she'll probably try speed dating again.

Speed dater Kara Lawson, 32, of Glastonbury, whose night resulted in one date, also said that although she didn't find romance with speed dating, she was glad she went.

"I can't think of any other dating venue where you have the opportunity to meet so many people at once," she said, "so the odds are good you'll meet someone you like."

For now, Blazynski and Keiser are back at the bars, meeting new recruits for their next speed-dating event for the under-40s crowd, which will be held at Murphy & Scarlett's in Farmington on Wednesday, Jan. 18, at 6:30 p.m.

Got 5 Minutes? is also hosting a baby boomer mix-and-mingle at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 11, at the Manchester Super 8 Motel and Conference Center.

More information about these events can be found at:

www.got5minutes.com
or by calling (860) 324-6679.



Couples meet for five minutes before the women rotate to the next table for another mini-date.

COMPACT DISC REVIEWS

Blige: No drama, less passion

By The Associated Press

THE BREAKTHROUGH

Mary J. Blige, Geffen

Mary J. Blige can do punch-in-the-gut emotional pain and passion, but can she do love and happiness? More importantly, do we even want her to?

Blige continues her starry-eyed ascent from 2003's "Love & Life" with 16 songs about love and relationships, with straightforward nods to her music-producer husband of two years. "So glad to have someone to hold me," Blige wails in "About You," featuring the Black Eye Peas' Will.i.am, who co-wrote and co-produced the track.

One could do without cheesy lines such as "He's my personal UPS / I'm sending him an S.O.S." on "No One Will Do." Same thing for an over-the-top reworking of U2's perfectly adequate "One" — complete with Bono competing against Blige's expert trills.

Blige co-wrote 11 tunes on "The Breakthrough," and enlisted a truckload of talent in the form of producers Raphael Saadiq, Rodney Jerkins, Jimmy Jam, and Terry Lewis. Duets with rappers Jay-Z, The Game, and Brook fill the album with Blige's usual smattering of hip-hop heavyweights.

Adept flourishes, from the groovy organ current of "Gonna Breakthrough" to the classic '60s R&B of "I Found My Everything," lend "The Breakthrough" a clean, fresh sound.

That, unfortunately, may not be enough.

Since creating the "hip-hop soul" genre with her 1992 debut album, Blige has endured addiction, suicidal tendencies, heartbreak, and abuse. This has placed her in a catch-22 situation: To find enlightenment means moving past pain, and Blige's pain was raw, inspiringly heartfelt, and all-encompassing.

Having moved from student of life to teacher, Blige wants no more drama. But the soul and panache of her sweeping voice — the modern-day equivalent of Aretha Franklin's — is worthy of more passion than what's contained on "The Breakthrough."

— Solvej Schou

29

Ryan Adams, *Lost Highway*

Ryan Adams' latest release — his third this year — opens with a rollicking title track. It's a rockabilly template complete with lyrics about getting arrested, drinking too much, and watching his dog die.

But it's a false start, really. The rest of "29," is Adams at his pared-down, contemplative best. It's a short CD at only nine songs, but each one is a tiny masterpiece, completely different from the song before — or after.

"Nightbirds" is a true beauty. Spooky and dreamy and sad, the song seems to vibrate. The crescendo comes near the end when Adams' vocals disappear under a cover of artful white noise.

The next track is similarly beautiful. "Blue Sky Blues" features horns, strings, wind, and water sounds. "Blue sky, when you gonna learn to rain," Adams asks.

As quickly as he ventures out, he returns to his classic alt-country storytelling with "Carolina Rain."

The closing track, "Voices," sounds like Adams is sitting on the edge of his bed, leaning in close.

— Kim Curtis

DA HITMAN PRESENTS REGGAETON LATINO

Don Omar

Machete Music/VI Music/Universal Records

With reggaeton becoming an undeniable force in music, Don Omar is one of the stars helping to further push its sound and movement to the forefront.

Omar delivers triumphant club bangers, hard hitting rhymes, and smooth vocals on "Da Hitman Presents Reggaeton Latino." Omar recruits Latin lyricists Fat Joe and N.O.R.E. to express the importance of this musical movement on the title track "Reggaeton Latino (The Chosen Few remix)." While Omar's vocals alone are enough to stress reggaeton's significance, the evident Latin pride expressed by Fat Joe and N.O.R.E. make the song an instant anthem.

On "Dale Don Dale (the remix)" Omar holds his own crooning and rhyming alongside Fabolous, as the two artists reveal their confident swagger when talking to women over a Swizz Beatz' frenzied synthetic offering.

Later it's Omar who lends an assist to Jennifer Lopez on her "Hold You Down (remix)."

While more attention may sway to fellow Reggaeton artists Daddy Yankee, for his party igniting jams, and Tego Calderon, for his notorious street narration, Omar successfully borrows a page from R. Kelly, as he can croon effortlessly and rhyme efficiently when needed.

— Mark Leliniwall



Mary J. Blige