

CELEBS IN FIGHT TO SAVE CBGB

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April 3, 2005 -- DIRECTOR Jonathan Demme, Talking Heads Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth and Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban are among the thousands of CBGB sympathizers who have joined the fight to keep the cash-strapped rock club from losing its lease.

While those boldfaced names have contacted 73-year-old owner Hilly Kristal and asked how they can help, more than 4,000 other fans have signed an online petition that will be sent to CBGB's landlord seeking debt relief for the Bowery punk pit where the Ramones, Blondie and the Talking Heads played their early gigs.

Kristal hopes a court-ordered "mediation session" scheduled for Tuesday between CBGB and its landlord, the Bowery Residents Committee, will benefit his cause, but he's not optimistic. Besides owing \$91,000 in back rent, Kristal is gloomy over the likelihood that his \$19,000-a-month rent will double when his lease expires in August.

"If it's gonna be 40 grand a month, I can't pay it," Kristal tells PAGE SIX. "Mark Cuban isn't gonna fund CBGB. Jonathan Demme is very into helping us, but he's not gonna pay our rent. People are into helping us, but that's not gonna solve the problem."

The Bowery Residents Committee holds a 45-year lease on the building and houses 175 homeless people above the club, the only commercial tenant. Muzzy Rosenblatt, the group's executive director, says he sympathizes with Kristal, but he still wants the money he is owed.

"When my wife and I had our first date, we had our first kiss at CBGB," Rosenblatt said. "I'm as sentimental as anybody. We've had fundraisers there. I love good rock 'n' roll like anyone else.

"I'm very sympathetic to people's concerns and their love for CBGB, but they still have to pay the rent. By them not paying their rent, it limits our ability to help homeless people. That's the tragedy of it."

Kristal, meanwhile, has other concerns besides the club he has run for 32 years.

"I was in the hospital today," he said last week. "I got a spinal tap - just like the band. It was no big deal. My mother was just in the hospital for a week. She's 96. But I'm still energized. Especially when people call me and come around ... If people want to contribute, we'll put it to good use."



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