



Dance-pop artist ellee ven with members of her band Jody Giachello, left, and Antony Lee at Buster's Billiards and Backroom, where ven's 10th annual Give Into the Groove charity fundraiser will be held Friday night.

Rich Copley — Lexington Herald-Leader [Buy Photo](#)

Musician ellee ven has a groovy kind of love for annual fundraiser

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Dance-pop artist ellee ven was born and raised in Los Angeles, where Robert Goulet was her theater director in school and where she launched her music career in the city's iconic clubs.

But over the past decade, she has found herself increasingly drawn to Lexington.

"Here, I walk over and get a little butter at Christine's house ... do-do ... sugar at Jackson's ... doo-t-doo-t-doo ... Bread at Lissa's, and it's great," says ven, the stage name for Jessica Lazaro Kunin. "It's like I have a little family here. If I lose my sunglasses, someone recognizes my sunglasses and brings them back to me. It's nice to feel supported."

That support has extended to her annual charity event, Give Into the Groove, which has its sixth Lexington edition and 10th outing overall Friday night at Buster's Billiards and Backroom.

It was an event she started in Los Angeles, with the intention of having artists play to benefit a variety of charities.

In L.A., she says, "it's always, What's coming up

the next day? What's the next, better thing? This sort of event in a community this size, things can build from it.

"Here, people really do see the power of community and the joy of joined forces. It's been wonderful to see, and I think I've found my

creative home here."

In Los Angeles, ven says, she always feels a pressure to categorize and commodify her music, whereas in Lexington, she feels more room to create without commercial pressure.

"When I first started in music and had a little positive reinforcement, people started trying to tell me what I should do: You should be playing a bass, you've got to sex it up like Britney Spears, you've got to have dancers, you've got to do this sort of thing, if the music was a little more upbeat I could play this," she says. "Here,

I know people are ready to receive what I put out in a positive way, within reason. I feel like I can stretch here. I'm a wildcat."

She says she enjoys a similar freedom with her charity in Lexington and she thinks that in the closer-knit community, she can raise greater awareness. Give Into the Groove benefits more than a dozen organizations, including the Lexington Humane Society, Living Arts and Science Center and Moveable Feast.

Unlike other charitable events, ven says, the point of Give Into the Groove isn't as much about making money as it is for raising awareness. Through the evening, there are various ways that people can make contributions, including direct donations to groups, and games and contests in which the prize is a donation to a favorite organizations.

"The event is about the energy that is generated; it's about the idea that a 5-year-old can play musical chairs and win \$500 for charity," she says. "It's 'I can do something fun, and it can benefit somebody else.' The charities don't think they'll be leaving with thousands of dollars. What they think they'll be leaving with is new relationships."

In its first few years in Lexington, Give Into the Groove changed venues from the Round Barn at The Red Mile to the Atomic Café before it settled at Buster's.

She confesses that the event started out of a desire to promote her own music and work with artists she wanted to partner with, as opposed to relying on L.A. talent bookers. But moving it to Lexington has helped her to focus on the charitable concerns.

Still, this Give Into the Groove also gives ven a chance to unveil new material.

"My start was in musical theater, vocal jazz, so I started looking at standards like *All of Me* — I just did a really funky remix of *All of Me*," she says. "It's like rap, hip-hop with a thread of classic jazz through it."

The new material will add to a big weekend for ven, celebrating the 10th anniversary of an event that grows every year.

She says, "This really is my favorite time of year."