

The evolution of Paul B

By Bess Winakor

Paul B. Magit had problems. But he was withstanding them in style

His Jaguar XJ-6 sedan was in the shop and he was reduced to hailing taxis.

His apartment was in a bit of a shambles, thanks to a party he gave for his 14-year-old daughter, Lori, to celebrate her graduation from junior high school.

He was sitting in his picture-and-poster-linked office taking phone calls — one from someone unable to get his truck door open, another about the delivery of custom-made T-shirt waitress dresses, and a third about a lighting lease — among others.

He was about to dash home to his apartment on the 43d floor of a Near North Side high-rise. He had an hour to pack and catch a plane to New York for a two-day buying trip for clothes to stock his Paul B stores.

But the main thing on his mind — and the source of most of the phone calls — was PBM (for his initials), his organization which is opening the Concert Club, his "contemporary entertainment showcase," at the Happy Medium Monday night.

"I've felt all along that fashion and music and art are related," says store owner Paul B. Magit, who is going into the rock promotion business at the Happy Medium. (Sun-Times Photo by Bob Fila)



Maggie Bell, who has been compared to the late Janis Joplin, headlines.

Paul Magit, the curly-haired man who noisily opened Paul B, his first store, on Rush St. nine years ago and expanded to other areas of the city and even outside, has become a promoter of musicians more or less in the rock genre.

He says it was an evolutionary thing growing out of his

changing interests over the years. He frankly admits the income from the stores made it possible. But so did the friends he made along the way.

"I was not Paul B before the stores. The stores were Paul B and I became them, simply because I was the head," he explains. What does that mean? Magit talks about the changing orientation of the stores, from California to Scandinavia to New York, to very young, and now to European fashion designers. "These changes reflect changes in my life-style, changes I've gone through," he adds, completing a circular definition he seems unable to pierce.

He says his life-style is fast-moving, international, honest and free, and he can't define it in concrete terms.

"What I do reflects what I feel. I have no specific desires or goals other than to continue," he says. He is considering expanding the club to other entertainment areas or even record companies, artist management and broader promotion.

"I've felt all along that fashion and music and art are related," he states.

The influences on Magit include Peter Max, the artist whose success is so commercial it has gotten his work on the back of buses and even onto a recent postage stamp, and one Swami Satchidananda, whom Magit met through Max.

Magit calls Max a close friend and plans to take his two children — Lori and his tennis-playing son, Rob, who is 15 — to spend a week with Max in Woodstock, N.Y., later this summer. Magit is also Max's business consultant. He credits Max with bringing him into yoga, which, he says, has taught him to "flow, to be able to move freely without encumbrances."

Magit learned yoga from the swami. But the swami is in New York, and Magit spends much of his time in Chicago and Europe. So he doesn't see the swami a whole lot these days.

In fact, Magit is off to Corsica in a couple of weeks to see Brigitte Ariel, a French actress he represents. She played the role of Edith Piaf in the movie, "Piaf." He's also considering buying a house in the south of France.

Yet the twice-married and divorced Magit says, "A major portion of my life now is devoted to my children. They're not only my children but close friends." Their photographs on his office wall are among the largest.

"I'm probably the most honest person I know. I haven't got time for any falsities. I haven't got the energy to remember. I'm completely free with my emotions.

"At age 15 I lost 55 pounds, which changed a not-too-happy childhood into a normal one. At age 18 I was married. Nine years ago I started Paul B and began traveling as a result of it. There is nothing I'm trying to project. I'm just me."