

Area nightclubs making comeback

By DAVID SOTOLONGO
Staff Writer

Nightclubs in the Chapel Hill-Durham area are making a modest comeback, but it will take a consumer-minded student population desire to spend money on new and often unfamiliar bands for the success of local clubs to continue.

The recession hit the nightclub industry as hard as it hit Detroit's car factories. The most notable victim was The Pier in Raleigh, a club that was spacious enough to afford popular bands such as NRBQ and the Nighthawks but cozy enough to maintain an intimate audience-performer atmosphere.

Cat's Cradle and Rhythm Alley, local successors to The Pier's throne, also were forced to close temporarily during their hard times. Unlike The Pier, these clubs are not big enough to seat 600 people. The problem area nightclubs face is balancing an intimate setting with a reasonable cover charge. Under N.C. law liquor can only be sold if the business claims more than half its profits from food sales, thus nightclub owners must rely on the door, not alcohol sales, to pay for the band.

A \$10 cover charge in New York or Chicago does not raise many eyebrows, but even for a good band in Chapel Hill, such a policy would be disastrous, as Cat's Cradle found out this summer when NRBQ played to a poor turnout at \$10 a head.

Some clubs have tried having bands play two shows for \$5 rather than one for \$10. The performance is obviously shorter, but the wallet is spared being naked for the rest of the weekend.

Another less desirable solution is forsaking the bigger bands and banking on the local talent to play for an affordable price at the door. Bands such as the X-Teens and the Pressure Boys will play for a cheap cover charge to get

exposure and promote their albums.

But these bands, no matter how good, are redundant after five or six shows during a semester, and experimental bands like Rain Parade and Violent Femmes may no longer be invited to play.

Variety is the nightclub's formula for survival, especially in this age of increasing specialization of audience taste. Clubs in Chapel Hill and Durham offer a wide enough assortment of live music to lower "Fantasy Island" 's ratings in dormitories and off-campus student housing and get crowds into the bars.

Whether you want to slam dance to new wave, contemplate your eighth viewing of *The Big Chill* to '60s folk, or discuss Reagan and Aristotle to soft jazz, area clubs provide more than enough talent to warrant your wallet's attention.

Cat's Cradle, located on West Franklin Street, installed a new sound system to offset the acoustic deficiency caused by its narrow confines. Despite the architectural deformity, Cat's Cradle has corralled some quality bands.

Last year, the Cradle hosted NRBQ, Violent Femmes, and Roomful of Blues, and that quality will continue this year. Area talent such as Durham's X-Teens and Flying Pits are aiding the nightclub renaissance with sizzling sets of straight-up rock 'n' roll at the Cradle and elsewhere.

Although narrow, the Cradle has plenty of dance floor and booths for the arthritic. There is also an adjacent room for relaxation between sets.

Rhythm Alley, located on West Rosemary Street (in the home of the old Cat's Cradle), is another rock 'n' roll club that boasts big talent at a reasonable price. The dance floor and partitioned bar allow you to sweat with the band and cool off in a separate viewing room.

Rhythm Alley is primarily a rock 'n' roll club, but it occasionally presents bluegrass and offbeat folk bands. It is a favorite stop for Root Boy Slim and his obese obscenities, and has featured Mitch Easter's Let's Active and Tommy Keene from Washington D.C. Various local talent fills in vacant schedule spots and provides warm-up sets for other bands.

Both Cat's Cradle and Rhythm Alley serve imported and domestic beer at reasonable prices and have live music Wednesday night through the weekend. Both clubs also have color television for those of you who still watch MTV.

If rock 'n' roll is not your mug of beer, bluegrass can be heard at several area locations. Rhythm Alley and the ArtSchool in Carrboro occasionally offer bluegrass music, and Luther's at South Square Mall presents bluegrass every Wednesday night along with their northern style barbecue. The Bluegrass Experience, an excellent alternative to electric white noise, frequents Luther's and Rhythm Alley.

The ArtSchool will continue its alternative nightclub image this year with an array of talent ranging from reggae to Irish folk. The ArtSchool has better acoustics than the other clubs and tends to attract bands that accent acoustics rather than the newest rock technology.

The ArtSchool's Sunday Jazz Series has always been popular and is a great way to wind down a torrid weekend on the dance floor. The ArtSchool also presents fast music, notably Rolly Gray and Sunfire and the Pressure Boys. Imported and domestic beer are available and memberships are welcomed.

In Durham, the pickings are slimmer and the emphasis is more on jazz and traditional blues than on hard rock.

The Salaam Cultural Center, located on the corner of Buchanan and Chapel Hill streets, features an annual appearance from bluesman John Hammond. Local jazz talent such as Brother Yusuf Salim, Eve Cornelious, and Bus Brown jam together at the Salaam or at the Chameleon Club on Parrish Street.

The shadows cast by tobacco warehouses and oversized banks over downtown Durham create an excellent blue- and white-collar blues atmosphere, and The Grinderswitch on Main Street rocks on weekends with local bands such as the Mobile City Blues Band and The Pattersons.

The Haufbrau, located on Broad Street across from Duke University's East Campus, also hosts local talent. Both bars have a mixture of students and residents, and beer prices are very reasonable.

If you are a granola-and-politics person, the Ninth Street Bakery and Somethyme Restaurant in Durham offer thought-provoking music from concerned artists, as does Pyewacket Restaurant in Chapel Hill.

A steak lover's delight

By KATHY NORCROSS
Staff Writer

I guess you could say it all started when this cowpoke that wandered from Cheyenne over to the Chapel Hill Triple-K started to a-tellin' the city-slickers there that they wasn't true steak lovers.

He said there was a steak man, and then there was the rest of 'em. And the rest of 'em didn't come to nuthin'. Only a free-spirited steak lover could make a real man.

Waaaall, we at the ranch upped and said, we could turn you out a steak that'd make your bottom sore. And, heck, a few years passed, 'n' the cowpoke came back. He tried one of our steaks, and said, boys, you doune good. So now it's a tradition.

People who enjoy good steaks, but have a limited budget, can satisfy their hunger at Western Sizzlin'. The menu offers everything from a chicken sandwich, country steak or four-ounce steak, to 12 1/2-ounce steaks and fillet mignon. Prices range from 99 cents to \$6.39.

Jordan Le Charolais Steak House's clientele ranges from students to professionals — a little bit of everybody, according to manager Craig Reed.

Jordan's menu includes steaks, for which the restaurant is known, and seafood, with prices ranging from \$7.50 to \$30. Some people come dressed in shorts and order the salad bar, while others order \$16 steaks.

Slug's at the Pines has a warm, cozy atmosphere, according to assistant manager Tim Newton.

"It's kind of like a living room atmosphere since we remodeled," he said.

Slug's also recently got a new menu, which includes its specialty, prime rib, as well as dishes like stuffed flounder, veal marsala, chicken florentine and chicken tarragon. Prices range from \$8.95 to \$18.50.

Dinners come with a fresh tossed salad and homemade bread, and the restaurant has nightly specials that could be almost anything.

Reservations are strongly recommended.



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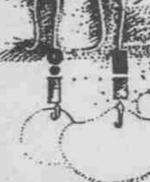
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