

Kaleidoscope

Chapel Hill's music scene flourishes with variety

Staff Writer

When an MTV crew from the music show "The Cutting Edge" filmed here in Chapel Hill they discovered a local music scene that "is preparing to rise to national renown." That scene is preparing its rise in some of the hottest clubs in the Southeast. And it doesn't stop there. Not only does new music of the sort featured on MTV flourish on this sound scene, but jazz, bluegrass, blues, reggae, traditional rock-n-roll, swing, country — well, you want it, we got it. And we got it good.

We've got it in the clubs, the bars, the restaurants, the fraternities, the basements, the garages, on the front porches of this musically crowded stage. We've got it in the record stores. We've got it on WXYC, one of the top ten college radio stations in the nation. We've got it so good, maybe better, as any of the country's other "happening" spots: Athens, Ga., Atlanta, Minneapolis, L.A. In fact, we've got it so good, there's a general consensus in town that the present musical outlet is insufficient for the swell of talent in

the area. But the talent keeps on swelling. And the live music arenas cater as best they can to some of the highest quality music around.

Of course it hasn't always been this way. Chapel Hill is coming out of a musical vacuum brought about two or three years ago by the closing of some of the mainstays of the live music scene. Oldtimers will tell you about the legendary days of The Station in Carrbor like us (Spagg's spaghetti emporium is there now) and a club last known as Pegasus, which used to be where Franklin Center is. People just didn't seem to believe all those "Live Music is Better" bumper stickers and students must have had lots of power boosters and the like to keep their eardrums amused.

But then, as now, Carolina had the everpresent fraternity party. It was here, amidst piles o' beer cans, the fatal and deadly shards of smashed bottles, the scattered comatose baggers (as members of fraternities are affectionately called by those other, normal students), that live music struggled to stay alive. There were even those diehards who graced

parking lots in lieu of a stage.

And people listened; drunk and dancing, they listened. When the clubs reopened and Chapel Hill started using its mellifluous mind, and when the people came to the clubs and paid money to get drunk and dance, they got their money's worth. Big name, national acts discovered that this quiet college community is, at heart, a music front in the making and consequently added a stop here en route from New York to Atlanta. Even not-so-national acts were catapulted into the limelight. As Jonathan Mudd, music editor of the Triangle's *Spectator* magazine puts it, "An area (previously) with no sound of its own is now fertile ground."

So we're back to business and the business of music is variety — loud, electrifying, soft, blue, black — as varied as the places it fills. Restaurants featuring live performances in Chapel Hill don't generally get too loud (no one should have to yell with food in his mouth; it's rude), but they can get pretty hopping.

Papagayo's in NCNB Plaza is a perfect example. Because their

music is featured on an inviting outdoor patio (one of the few in town), musicians are limited by local noise ordinances. But this is one of the restaurant's only restrictions. Papagayo's performers crank out anything from blues to folk music to acoustic rock. One of the bar's favorite duets, "Blues in Your Shoes," rouses crowds to dancing frenzies, sing-a-longs, and self-propelled percussion performances. Jazz is not featured at Papagayo's, but reggae groups will rock in from time to time to fill out a varied menu of live entertainment. All age groups are welcome to eat, drink, and be merry, but bring your ID (your constant nightlife companion) so they'll know what you can drink to get merry — and what you can't.

Another restaurant hosting a wide variety of live music is Pyewacket, located on West Franklin Street at the Courtyard. The mellow, candlelit ambiance of the place can be deceiving. Jazz night features some of the hottest, happening, now, wow musicians in town. Variety night runs the entire music spectrum: blues, jazz, swing, rock, folk — and is usually anything but mellow. Quiet, maybe, but the live music at Pyewacket is alive with diversity, talent, and special touches. It is a great place to see some regulars on the music scene play alone or in a totally new and different context. Only the decor is a yuppie's idea of style; the music is anybody's and everybody's idea of fun.

And now the first on the three club list of off-the-beaten-path, ½ addresses. The Cavern sits deep and dark at 452 ½ West Franklin Street. If you've ever seen a movie with a dimly lit, smoke-filled pool hall complete with hustlers, dart throwers, and the guy in the corner that everyone knows; well, that's not exactly the "Cave," but it comes close. They've been serving beer, handing out darts, and giving change

for the pool tables for 22 years now. They serve mostly older townspeople who live and work here — townies, if you will. While the Cave isn't exactly student oriented, the adventurous undergrad can find some great tunes here: acoustic, rock, some jazz, country, blues; "a mixed bag," as the bar's booking agent, Meg Rose, puts it. But don't go looking for a dorm party good time. "They (the students) have to appreciate us, not us appreciate them," says Rose. So leave that orientation group behind, shoot some pool, and enjoy the music. It's a different beat.

Hiding away at 405 ½ West Rosemary Street is a somewhat more accessible "neighborhood bar," Rhythm Alley. Its beat is up; its music, according to manager Judy Hammond, is "alive and well." It is a music club scene without the "club"; no dress-up parties, no pretensions. This place is all about music. Bluegrass, blues, jazz, rock, traditional, and "new music" are all featured in a familiar, welcoming context. There is a slight tilt to the traditional side but no one type of tunes dominate the atmosphere of Rhythm Alley. And no one age either. Having already hosted some underage shows, the club plans to try a new schedule that may include a permanent underage show. So find the road that leads to Rhythm Alley and listen, listen, listen. (Dance a lot, too.)

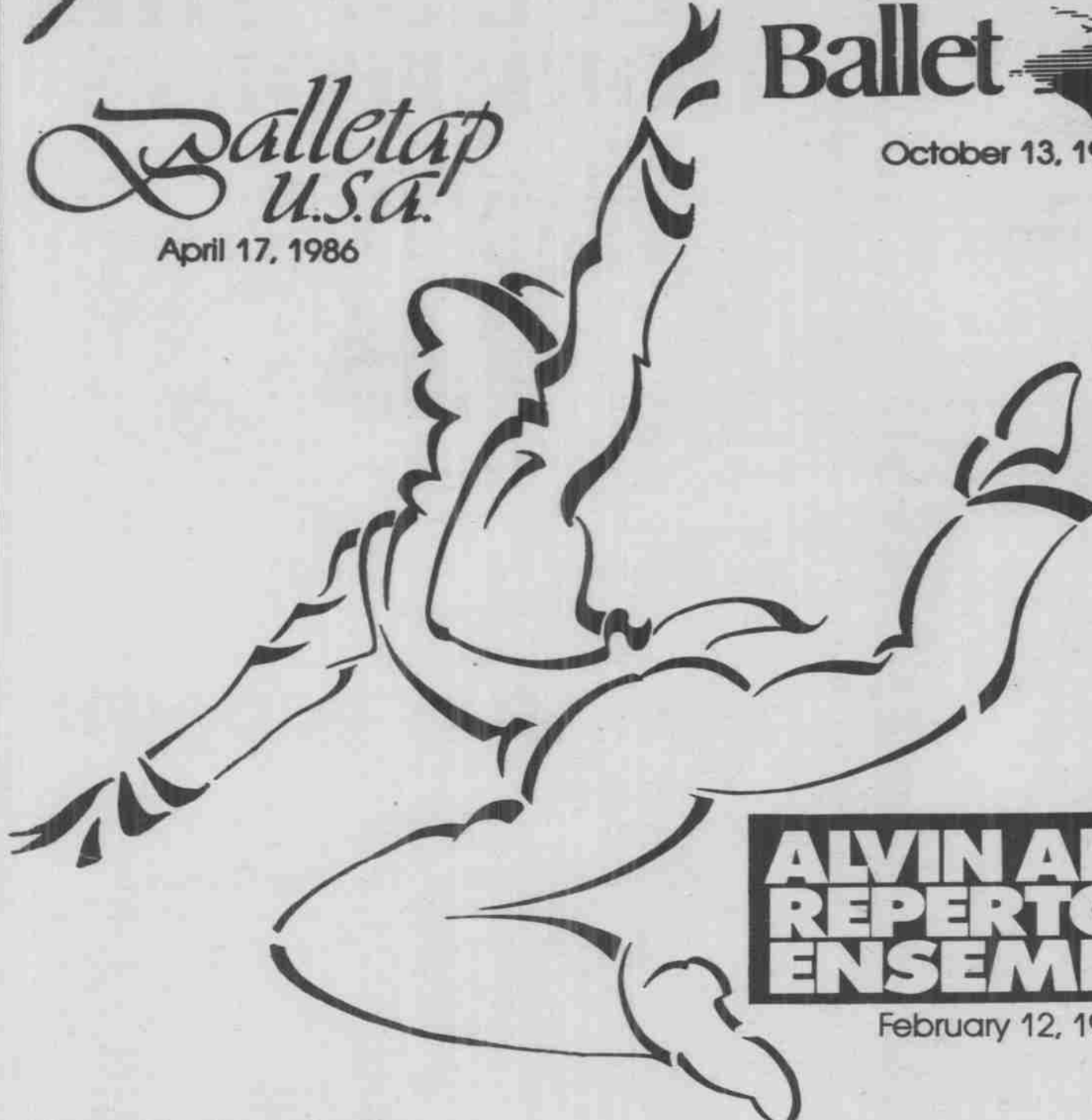
Finally, the last folded-in music spot, lounging on the Green at 112 ½ West Franklin Street at the "pizzayogurt" connection is, of course, He's Not Here. Who is he and why is he gone? Maybe he just didn't want to party. Maybe a slow, sunny afternoon there on what used to be grass is his speed. Maybe he should leave when He's Not Here hosts its weekly band. Because the crowd, the bar, the music is anything but slow. Chapel Hill's favorite, and only, beer garden can sure throw a music party. Pay your cover and you're in for a rock-n-roll evening. Wear sturdy shoes for the typically Standing

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