

# The Cabaret at the Union:

## Converting students fees into a wide variety of low-cost entertainment



California rockers, FIREHOSE, brought their underground sound to the Cabaret's underground locale in the basement of the Union.



The Cabaret gives college bands like The Screaming Trees a chance to play for large audiences.

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Staff Writer

Hey, old chum, you may not much about know it but you're paying for it.

You're paying for live entertainment — jazz groups, reggae, comedy acts and nationally known bands.

The Cabaret is a campus nightclub in the basement of the Student Union. But many students don't know about the club or what it is.

"It's an alternative nightclub for students that is funded by student fees," says Billy Pizer, chairman of the Cabaret committee.

Because of the restrictions on the drinking age, underage students can't benefit from the live entertainment offered at local clubs.

The Cabaret permits brown bagging with proof of ID, but underage students are also admitted.

Conceived by Howard Henry, former director of the Student Union, the Cabaret is one of 12 student-wide programs offered by the Carolina Activities Board. The Cabaret kicked off its series of shows last spring with an audiovisual play called "A Poetics — For Bullies."

"The Cabaret is actually better than a nightclub because the shows are based around students' schedules," said Pizer.

Shows are held at the Cabaret four nights a week, Wednesday through Saturday. On Wednesday and Thursday the entertainment is light and usually has a cultural theme. Student groups such as the Jazz Ensemble or The Lab Theatre perform on these nights. The weeknight shows start at about 8:30 p.m., and the Cabaret closes at midnight.

Local bands and more upbeat entertainment acts are presented on Friday and Saturday nights. The weekend shows start later, at about 9 or 9:30 p.m.

"We try to allow people enough time if they're going out to eat before the show," Pizer said.

Plans for next semester are in the works for the Cabaret. Friday nights will be dance nights with a DJ providing the music. Saturday nights will be devoted to live entertainment.

"Our focus will be jazz and reggae groups," Pizer said.

Variety has been the key to the Cabaret's program this semester.

"We're more flexible than a nightclub," Pizer said.



As The Cabaret's premiere show, "A Poetics for Bullies" delighted audiences with a unique audiovisual format.

The Cabaret has sponsored a "Dirty Dancing" night where people learn the popular Dirty Dancing technique, just like in the movie. It has also had a sold-out talent show as an exhibition for student talent.

Often, these talent nights are an introduction for novice bands on campus. It's not really a competition because no one wins or loses. Talent nights are really just a chance for them to perform and get some experience.

Pizer is also getting experience. He's a junior physics major — a long shot from the entertainment field.

"Working with the Cabaret is a hobby," he said.

Pizer worked on the technical crew last year at Memorial Hall and gained knowledge from that experience about the level of effort involved in each production.

"I thought I could offer a different perspective to the Cabaret — a realistic attitude towards what entertainment we could accommodate, because of my technical aptitude."

Pizer's insight gives him and the Cabaret a gauge on the difficulty of events that can be performed

RTVMP. She said her job is basically a "sifting out process."

Moore is either contacted by a performer or she contacts them herself. After the contact is made, they discuss cost.

"It's really a give and take financially," she said.

She must decide if the Cabaret can afford the act or group. Because the Cabaret is a student organization, Moore encourages bands to lower their fees.

"In a sense, we've made the risk for students — financially, that is," Moore said.

After discussing the fee, a lot of double checking takes place. Moore and her committee must depend on their own perception about how popular the performer would be on campus.

"We have to feel each other out over the phone," she said, "then I can tell if they fit the bill for the Cabaret."

If she likes them she'll book their act.

Rolly Gray and Sun Fire, a reggae group, was one of the acts she booked this year. Gray lives in Chapel Hill and has just completed a tour with Sun Fire. They played in clubs throughout New England, finishing up in Boston, Mass.

The group played in September at the Cabaret and hopes to be back in January.

"We draw a lot of people," Gray said.

The authentic island rhythms attract swarms of fans. Gray and his group perform mixture of reggae, calypso and soca styles. Calypso is a sort of folk music originating in Trinidad in the West Indies when the slaves would walk through the fields singing. Soca is a mixture of calypso and funk music. And reggae, Gray said, is just slower than calypso.

Gray, born in the West Indies, started his first group as a teenager. He definitely has the island beat down by now.

"We'll be rockin' with calypso and soca tunes in January," he said. Other local performers at the Cabaret have been Prince Taylor and Tristan Bishop. Taylor is a long-time Chapel Hill native who freelances as a hobby. He usually plays jazz or beach music at the Cabaret with different musician friends of his. Taylor has enjoyed playing at the Cabaret and hopes to return.

"It's a very nice place for students," he said. "I haven't seen another establishment like it at other schools."

Booking acts for Pizer is Karen Moore, a junior transfer majoring in speech communication and

sings and writes songs. He recently played at the Cabaret and featured his original piano ballads, some blues covers and several modern show tunes. He said he has received much of his inspiration from Billy Joel and Elton John.

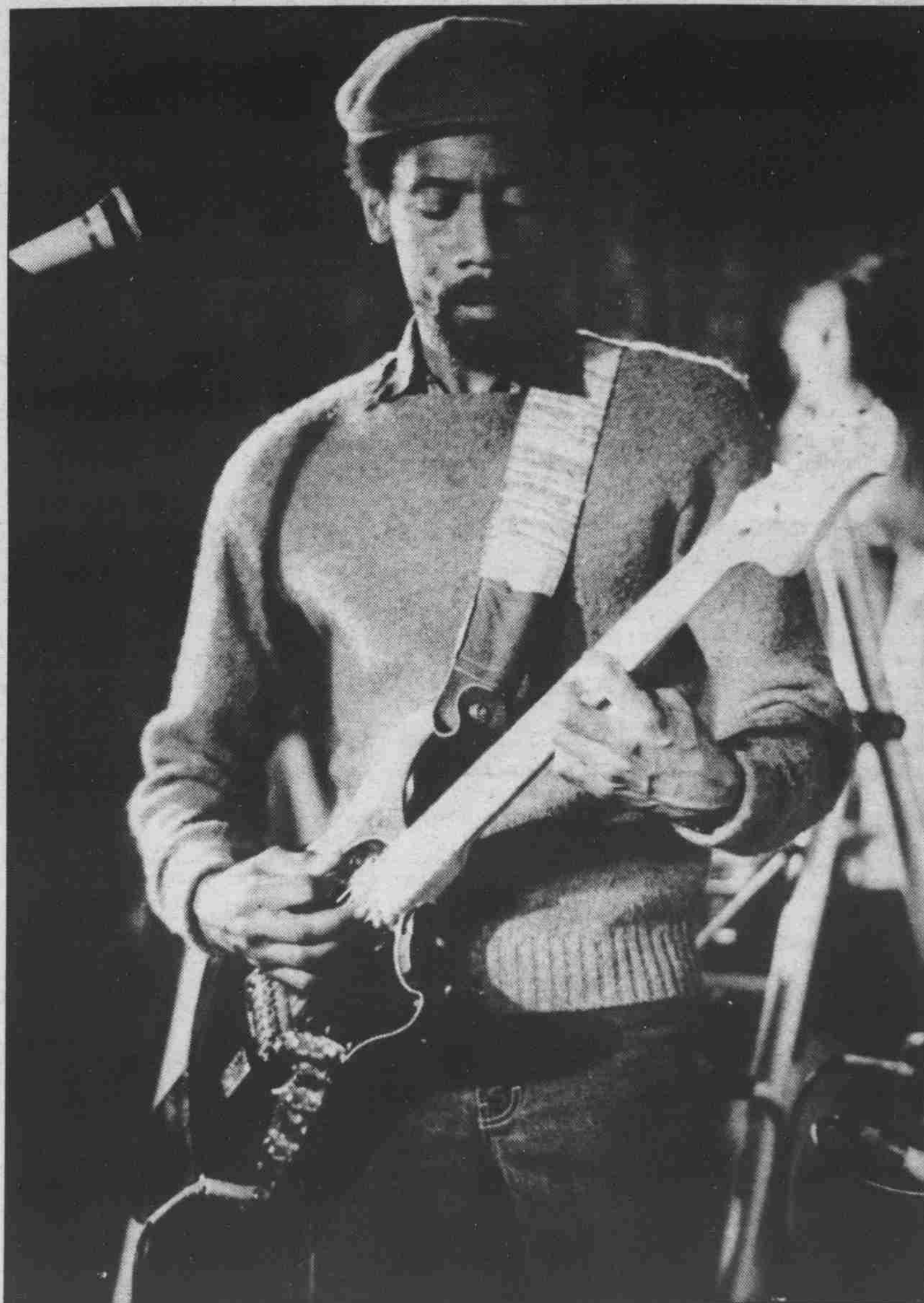
With its variety of shows at a

variety of times, the Cabaret tries to offer something for all students. This is the last week of the semester you can catch an act there, but a brand new lineup of even more entertainment will take over in January.

"We're open to suggestions and

new program ideas from students. We just want them to come out and take advantage of what we've created," Pizer said.

You might as well — as the song goes, "Life is a cabaret, old chum." It's your life and, since you're paying for it, it's your Cabaret.



Rolly Gray and Sunfire will be among the acts to open next semester's season