

Eat, drink and be entertained: Chapel Hill restaurants are serving up more than just food

By BRYAN BURNS, ANNE-RENEE RICE and BILLY STOCKARD
Staff Writers

It's not exactly dinner theater but the concept is similar. Food and live entertainment. Chapel Hill has a long tradition of catering to the varied tastes of the hungry. Not quite as old, but becoming almost as established, is the tradition of combining good meals with good music and providing alternatives to typical Chapel Hill entertainment. The following is the result of what three reporters were able to find out about these places (all within walking distance) where you can go to get your fill of more than just food.

Skylight Exchange

Located off of West Rosemary Street, down a narrow alley decorated with a colorful mural, sits a bookstore/cafe offering literature, music and live entertainment every weekend. Open for one year now, Skylight Exchange features various types of bands and plays.

John Howe is one of the people who manages Skylight Exchange. "It's a space where folks can get together and a good place to go to in the evening to hear music without alcohol being served," he

says. This makes it ideal for underage students who can't get into local bars and for people who enjoy music, but not the bar scene.

Three nights a week, entertainment at the Skylight Exchange covers bluegrass, country, jazz and rock. Performers this month include the folk rock performers Nat Wilde and John Gillespie, who are appearing tomorrow night, and a psychedelic rock group, the Third Eye, which is scheduled to play on Feb. 23. Howe says he expects large turn-outs when three members of Liquid Sound play on Feb. 25, and also for Hugh Moffet's appearance in early March.

This Saturday should draw a crowd of dancing fools to the Skylight Exchange because it's the monthly Dance Night. "We just clear the tables and let people dance," Howe says. A deejay provides music for the dance.

Although there is seldom a cover charge at the Skylight Exchange, a \$2 donation is suggested to help support local musicians.

The Columbia Street Coffeehouse

Just a few blocks away, you'll

find the Columbia Street Coffeehouse — a non-profit organization associated with the Columbia Street Bakery. The coffeehouse has been open for 16 months but it was five years in the making. Joe Sparling and B.B. Danzager, whose father-in-law owned a one-time Chapel Hill coffeehouse, Poppa Danzager's, deserve most of the credit for its inception.

Why a coffeehouse? "One of the objectives is to provide a friendly space for communication," Sparling says. "One way to achieve this is to allow people to perform." Al Sawyer, booking agent for Columbia Street Coffeehouse, says that they encourage every type of talent but that they've had to restrict electric guitars due to noise level ordinances. They also encourage original work, although they don't insist on it. Some of the performers scheduled to appear include the Hilltop Harmonizers with Barbershop, who are singing tonight, and a contemporary folk group, Holdfast, which performs Saturday.

The coffeehouse also has several ongoing events. For example, Friends of the Guitar, with an open mike, is held every second Sunday

of the month from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Nothing is scheduled for these events except the time and anyone is welcome to participate. They also have Columbia Street LIVE, which features music and drama and involves people from the community, who are raising funds for a local day care center.

"These events go further than just singing," Sparling says. Plays at the coffeehouse frequently have discussion and audience interaction following the performance. The coffeehouse also serves as a meeting place for various community discussion groups. For example, on Feb. 22, a gay and lesbian discussion group will meet.

So, when you need an alternative to the local bars and want to find some nearby entertainment, give one of these places a try. But remember, there's no alcohol at the Skylight Exchange and neither alcohol nor smoking at Columbia Street Coffeehouse, but maybe there's more to a good time than polluting your body.

The Franklin Street Pub

The Franklin Street Pub, which opened last August, offers a variety of things to do in the afternoon, evening and late at night. The pub is located next door to Magdalena's at 506 W. Franklin St.

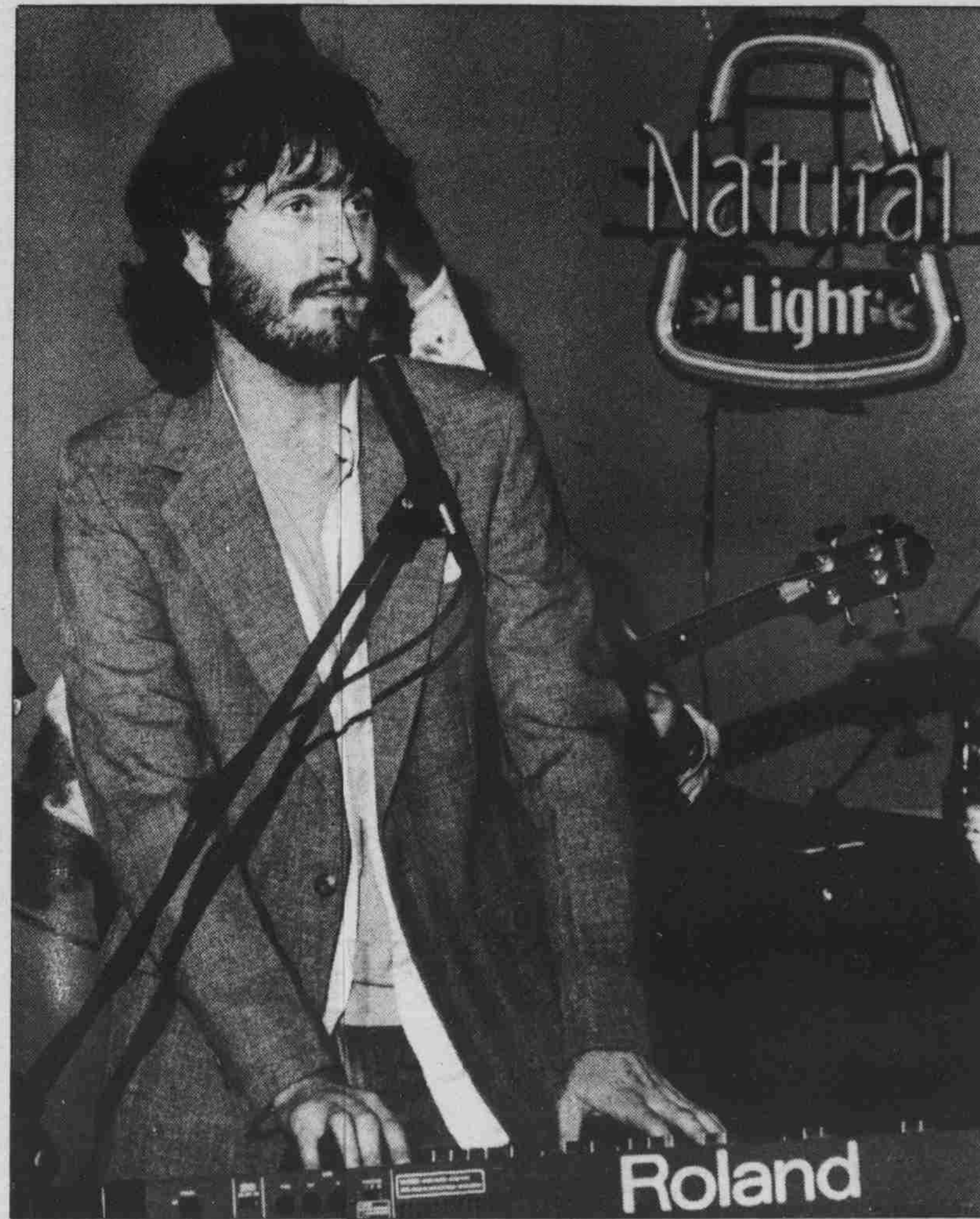
Part-owner Larry Ryan says that students often come in the afternoons after class. They play pool, video games or foos ball and drink a few beers. Darts is also a popular sport at the pub.

The Triangle Dart League sponsors dart games Tuesday and Thursday nights. Ryan says that these nights draw a fairly large crowd. And the clientele is always varied.

"We don't particularly cater to any one age group," Ryan says. "As a matter of fact, there have been some older couples visiting the pub on a regular basis. It's great! And you've still got the younger college-age crowd."

Diversity seems to be the key to the club's atmosphere.

"We're running the gamut here," Ryan says. Friday and Saturday nights, the Franklin Street Pub presents bands, which begin playing around 9:30 p.m. There is usually a \$2 cover charge, unless the band requests otherwise.



Geo Jeffries, lead singer for the band Other Side, performs at Franklin Street Pub.

When Ryan wants to contact a band, most often it's through the recommendations of other bands that play for him. His brother helps publicize the pub and assists Ryan in selecting the bands that they'll book after listening to demo tapes that are sent to them.

So, who gets booked? Straight Up is a heavy metal band that

covers the music of Motley Crue and Van Halen. Lighter rock groups that have played at the Franklin Street Pub are Sane Guy and Brave Souls. But Ryan also includes other genres when he's planning the pub's musical schedule.

Gypsy and Duo, an acoustic group, will perform on March 3rd. A week later on March 11th, The

Hove will play.

The first reggae group the pub has booked, Bongo Roots and Culture, is scheduled to perform on April 21st. As an additional pleasure while listening to the music, you can also enjoy 12-ounce, 50-cent draft beers on Friday and Saturday nights.

"One time I had 11 kegs in here

and we sold out — that's pretty remarkable," says Ryan. But that's only happened once during the six months Ryan's been open.

"I got into the bar business for a change of pace," Ryan says. He was once a design engineer for electronic components. Now he says he must deal with long hours until the pub gets more established.

"I just want a day off to go fishing," he says.

But it doesn't seem as if he'll be able to realize that dream any time soon. The Franklin Street Pub is open Monday through Saturday from 1 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Pyewacket Restaurant

If you can't get enough live entertainment at the Franklin Street Pub on Friday and Saturday nights, you can cross the street and go to Pyewacket Restaurant, which has live entertainment on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday nights. Pyewacket is located in the Courtyard at 431 W. Franklin St.

Monday night features blues music, Wednesday night is jazz night and Thursday is centered around a contemporary theme.

Owner David Bacon leaves most of the booking up to Scott Sawyer and Charles Pettie. Both are musicians that know what to look for in selecting a good band. Sawyer often plays with several friends on the jazz or blues nights. Pettie is a member of The Shady Grove Band, which also plays at Pyewacket.

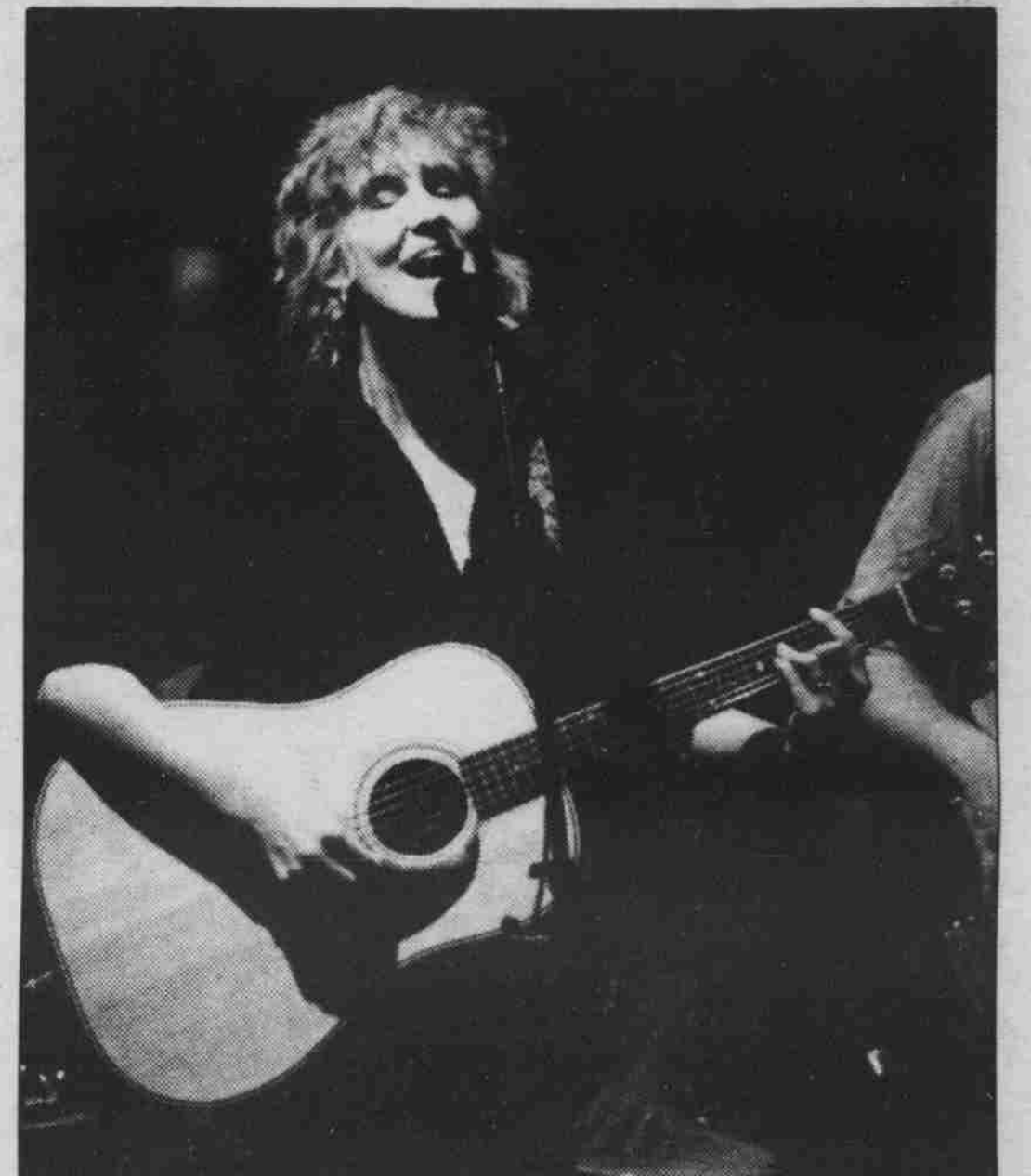
"Our bands attract a particular clientele depending on what type music is offered," says Bacon. "We do see our regulars but there are always newcomers as well."

Because Pyewacket is a restaurant, the bands generally start later than usual. Show time begins around 10 p.m. so that the music and the influx of people coming only to see the band doesn't interfere with the diners.

During the performance guests may enjoy beer, wine, espresso or hot tea from the bar. There is no cover charge.

Spanky's

Another traditional Chapel Hill restaurant that features live entertainment is Spanky's. Whether your tastes include



The Nancy Middleton Band, a country rock group, sings at Hardback Cafe.

pop, rock or country, Wednesday nights or Fridays, all the choices are within your reach.

Spanky's, located on the corner of Franklin and Columbia streets, is well-known for its hearty dishes and weekend crowds. But there's also a livelier spice on the menu Wednesday nights provided by the Motown and blues band, Carter Minor and Andy Church — it's a tradition of live entertainment that's almost two years old. An employee says live bands significantly add to business, although the place is packed most of the time anyway.

The Hardback Cafe

Around the corner on Columbia Street is the Hardback Cafe, which offers live performances three nights a week. This practice started about three years ago, and the restaurant's entertainment coordinator, Paul Price, expresses enthusiasm about the Hardback's function in Chapel Hill. Price says that the restaurant is devoted to

local entertainment and tries to support their creativity as best they can.

And there is definitely a creative force here. Southern Culture on the Skids, the Pressure Boys and many other jazz, country and rock bands have played at the Hardback, including Bongos, Roots and Culture, a band Price calls a "political poetry over percussion" group, the country-rock Nancy Middleton Band and an improv comedy group called the Transactors.

There have also been poetry readings and experiments combining members of different bands into one group to create a more original sound.

"We try to book bands that are creative and diverse," Price says. "We're pretty proud of that."

So, if you're getting tired of the bar scene (or you only wish you had that problem) check out one of these alternative hotspots. Chances are, your sensibilities (and your stomach) will be glad you did.



Contemporary folk and blues band L.A. Fernandez shows how live music and literature mix at the Skylight Exchange.