

Features

Local music venues revealed: Part I

by Tim McGill
Staff Reporter

A little ways down South French Broad Avenue is a building that Justin Elrod, guitarist of Asheville's own Secret Lives of the Freemasons, calls the best venue he's played in Asheville. Elrod, an Asheville native, said he prefers the Asheville Y.W.C.A. as the best place his band has ever played in Asheville. It doesn't have a bar that serves his favorite beer, and it doesn't have an excellent sound system.

The look on his face said more though, as he tried to name the best venue in Asheville.

"There isn't one," said Elrod. Elrod isn't alone in his view, and he's not the only one to answer the question of Asheville's music scene with disbelief or laughter. For Sanctity's drummer Jeremy London, though, Elrod's statement is wrong.

London believes that a scene in Asheville does exist, although it varies with the band in question.

"It's all about promoting," said London. "Up-and-coming bands haven't been together long enough to realize what they need to be doing. That's the biggest thing, just really working your band."

Networking with other bands helps to create a better atmosphere for the local scene, according to London.

One thing networking and collaborating isn't helping in the Asheville area is The Orange Peel, which many Asheville musicians don't favor, according to several local artists.

"I don't like The Orange Peel," said Paul Golden, guitarist of Code Adam. "It's cool because they let national acts come in, but they really don't support the local music scene at all."



TIM MCGILL/STAFF REPORTER

Local metal band Sanctity plays shows wherever they can including small bars, restaurants and even basements.

The Orange Peel only supports traveling bluegrass, old time, jazz and other out-of-town acts, and gives no support or even shows to local bands such as Sanctity or Secret Lives, according to London.

London suggests that if The Orange Peel opened its doors to local bands, it would be a more worthwhile venue.

Such a dramatic sentiment towards The Orange Peel, as well as other unavailability issues, has caused some musicians to do things their own way.

Andy Maurer, a student at UNC-Charlotte, along with Elrod, created a Web-based forum called "This City Can Burn," which is dedicated to enhancing the music scene throughout the Western North Carolina area.

Created in June 2004, the site now caters to users spanning from Johnson City, Tenn., to Charlotte, N.C. Updates to the site in the next



TIM MCGILL/STAFF REPORTER

Brandon Lowery, lead singer for Code Adam plays at Fred's Speakeasy.

six months will include additions to the four forums, such as an interview section.

One goal of the site is to attract bigger name bands to the area and to further the careers of local inde-

pendent artists by creating and distributing compilation albums featuring their music.

They started the board after he and many others became tired of the state of other local chat

forums, according to Maurer. Users can access the Web site by visiting www.thiscitycanburn.com.

Other local fans have been making similar steps to create productivity in the struggling scene in Asheville.

Patrick Tobin, undeclared freshman, and friend Joey Leccese sought out an open space to hold a show scheduled for March 25. They were able to book the Highsmith University Union, but the show fell through, so Tobin and Leccese

were left with willing bands but no venue. They gained access to a half-empty warehouse on Riverside Drive for the late-March show and called the event "The Warehouse Show."

"We've only done one show there so far, and it's just sort of a guerrilla show, I guess," said Tobin. "It's very do-it-yourself style."

Leccese and Tobin coined themselves Airborne Productions and came up with a plan to connect bands with venues in the area. They charge at the door in order to fairly pay both bands and venues. Airborne Productions also keeps a very small portion of the earnings.

Even with these steps forward, problems in the local music community still emerge, according to Tobin.

"I personally think there is a lot of division in the music scene up here," said Tobin.

The division is caused by local bands vying for fan attendance at shows, a sort of competition, according to Tobin.

A lot of tension appears in the scene when two popular local bands have shows in different areas booked on the same date.

"You've got two good bands each with their own style of music and normally most music scenes would try to support each other," said Tobin.

The purpose of Airborne Productions is to not only help create new venues in Asheville, but also to support bands they believe are driven to add positive growth to the music community, according to Tobin.

For Leccese, the mission is to unite the community and eliminate "cliques" as well as any errant egos. "You can't have an ego, especially in a local scene," said Leccese.

Leccese, originally from Gilroy, Calif., brought his vision for a unified community from his long-time love of music and networking around music.

"People are trying to segregate each other into smaller groups, and that results in bigger egos, and the whole 'rock star' mentality," said Leccese.

Although seeing a lot of heart to overcome, Leccese believes the fate of the scene is in the hands of those who interact within it, and they are responsible for where it goes.

Among the problems currently plaguing the music scene, Leccese thinks drama and selfishness are the big issues.

"If we could all get along and stay positive, that's going to make for a constructive and fulfilling scene," said Leccese. "It doesn't matter where you come from, but scene is a scene."

"I don't like The Orange Peel... they really don't support the local music scene at all."

Paul Golden
guitarist, Code Adam

Lucky Otter offers good food in a fun atmosphere

by Nicky Marshall
Staff Reporter

If you're feeling lucky and want a good burrito, give the Lucky Otter a try. The Lucky Otter, in West Asheville, serves up an eclectic and healthy mix, which the average college student can not only enjoy, but afford.

"We aren't a strictly Mexican restaurant," said Carey West, front end manager of the Lucky Otter. "We have healthy wraps, which incorporate different styles like barbecue, satay and Thai. Also, everything is made here fresh. The recipes were also all created by the owner, Roland Knoll."

While the mascot of the restaurant invokes memories of the old Nick-toon "Cat-Dog" instead of an otter, the feeling of the eatery is anything but confused.

The Lucky Otter presents an image of itself as hip, but comfortable, with their brightly colored lights and the up-beat, base-heavy music pumping out of the speakers.

The art decorating the walls is simplistic but well done, varying from colorful paintings to black and white sketches.

"The owners have two dogs," said West. "One's name is Lucky and the other is Otto."

That explains the strange two-headed dog that serves as the restaurant's mascot. Pictures of the real Lucky and Otto can be found on the wall next to the cash register.

"It was a nice atmosphere," said Monica Combs, senior art student. "The giant blackboard added some creativity there. I liked the big drawings and I thought it was cute that they displayed some student art. I give them points for creativity in the decoration as well as the burritos."

The Lucky Otter also has a large dining area, so there is less of a chance of having to wait to be seated.

"We never really have problems seating everyone," said West. "We always manage to seat everybody, but it can get pretty crowded."

During the warmer weather, the patio in front of the restaurant is also used for seating.



CHARLOTTE CLAYPOOLE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Nicole Foster digs into a burrito at Lucky Otter in West Asheville.

"They use a lot of tasty ingredients," said Bec Eakett, junior environmental science student. "So many, in fact, that I gave up on reading all the long burrito descriptions and just got the nachos. They were good, but the 'Better Than Sex Bar' makes me want to go back again."

For those looking to get really lucky, the Otter has the thing for you. They feature "Better Than Sex" bars, which are rich, brownie-like concoctions of chocolate, graham cracker, peanuts and butter-scotch. They have more calories than sex, but who's counting?

"The 'Better Than Sex' bar was better than some other dessert bars, but not the best," said Nicole Foster, senior literature student.

Maybe the bars are false advertising, but they're better than not getting any at all.

REVIEW

"The 'Better Than Sex' bar looked really yummy, but to me it was too sweet," said Combs. "Maybe if it was served warm or something. I thought it was just like any bar you could get in a coffee shop."

Looking for a place where everybody knows your name? Cheers to the Lucky

Otter. "We get a lot of people from West Asheville in here," said West. "Some people come in two times a day, others will come in every day. We try to learn the regulars' names."

The owners also have a restaurant in Boone.

"The Black Cat in Boone was created first," said West. "The Lucky Otter only celebrated its two-year anniversary this December. The differences between the two is that the Lucky Otter serves liquor and has specials."

Although the Lucky Otter has liquor, the Black Cat offers about the same atmosphere.

"I've been to their sister restaurant, the Black Cat, in Boone, and it had the same feel, a hole-in-the-wall type place with cheesy art, and strange music, but very welcoming," said Katie Brown, senior classics student.

Speaking of alcohol, the Otter has seven different types of beer on tap. Beer is currently part of a special for \$2.75

while wine and margaritas are \$3 a glass.

In an industry where bigger is always better, the Otter aims to please.

The burritos are immense, and if you're tough enough to finish the whole thing, be assured that there will be no late night cravings.

But, while the Otter brings new meaning to the word "full," be prepared to wait. The service at the Lucky Otter is a little slow.

"I thought their menu was very creative and I would like to try some of their other burritos because each one looks unique," said Combs. "But, I didn't like how it was served because it was very difficult to eat with a knife and fork. It was also awkward to have the sauce on top. I would have liked to eat it Urban Burrito style."

Other noteworthy wraps include the "Satay It To Me Softly" and the "White Trash Barbecue."

"My favorite wrap is 'The Sage,'" said West.

Still, not all critics were impressed with the Lucky Otter.

"I wasn't that impressed because the atmosphere was not really that enticing," said Foster. "My food was sort of lackluster and it took a while to get to the table. There are better burrito places in Asheville. The prices were OK. I sort of feel they were a bit expensive, but the burrito was huge."

The Lucky Otter does have a dessert option for the few persistent connoisseurs not satisfied with burritos alone and who aren't afraid to loosen their belts.

Getting something slightly less sensational than sex, a large soda and an even heavier burrito for \$10 doesn't seem too bad. So, you've got to ask yourself a question: Do I feel lucky? Well, do ya, punk? The Lucky Otter restaurant is located at 630 Haywood Rd. in West Asheville.

"I give them points for creativity in the decoration as well as the burritos."

Monica Combs
senior art student

ENTERTAINMENT REPORT

Tops at the box office

weekend of 4/22

1. "The Interpreter"
2. "The Amityville Horror"
3. "Sahara"
4. "A Lot Like Love"
5. "Gong Fu"
6. "Fever Pitch"
7. "Sin City"
8. "Guess Who"
9. "Robots"
10. "King's Ransom"

Billboard Top 5 Albums

1. Mariah Carey, "The Emancipation Of Mimi"
2. Mudvayne, "Lost And Found"
3. 50 Cent, "The Massacre"
4. Garbage, "Bleed Like Me"
5. Faith Evans, "The First Lady"