

Good, clean fun at 'Players'



Saturday night on the downtown mall, queuing up to penetrate the walls of Player's Cabaret, two sporty boys, 17 and cleanly dapper, eye a tough knot gathered around a boom box.

"Are they break-dancing over there, or are they fighting?" the first asks.

"It's all a bunch of crap," the second says.

These words of suburban wisdom clatter over the cement. A cop car slides down the throat of the broad sidewalk — routine surveillance. Crop-haired bouncers shoot glances at the crowd and perch a leg across the doorway. Two by three by four the young adults enter the club, some having just finished a clandestine wine cooler or beer.

Good, clean fun is what the owners have in mind at Player's Cabaret nightclub. Forget cruising the gut, or bottle-busting parties atop Skinner's Butte. Parents can breathe easy again if their offspring choose after-hours dancing for a night out. Tucked away from tawdry street life this black-walled ballroom, the strobe-lit beat bawls on until four in the morning. And the kids are out of trouble.

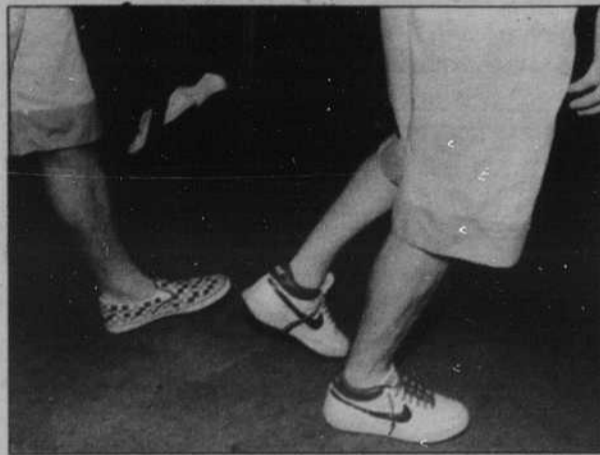
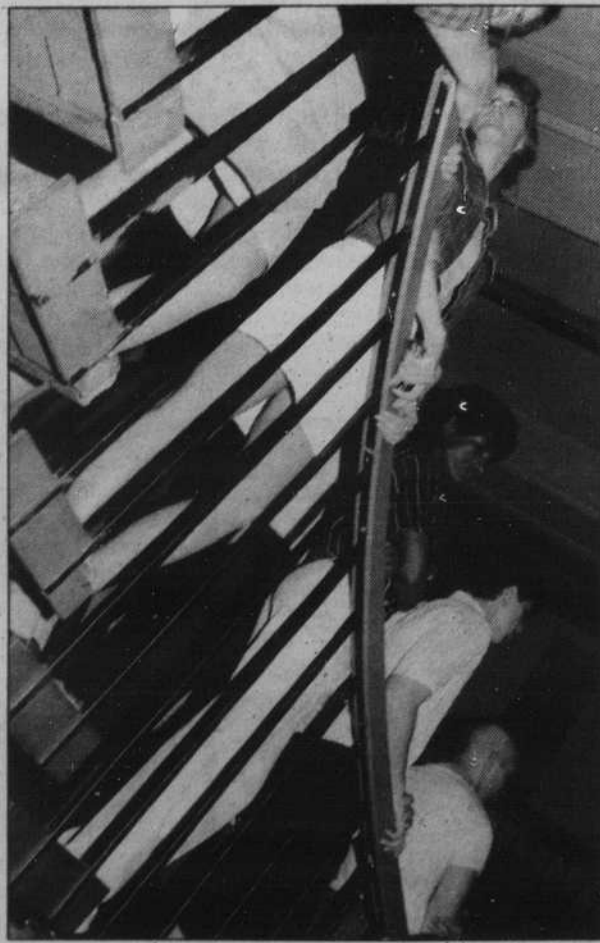
"No work clothes allowed" blazes across the marquee, just to emphasize the club ethics of non-gritty fashion. Inside Player's Cabaret, social pursuits are much more apparent than drug-swapping or seedy activities. A nudging, noisy tour through the two-tiered club reveals smiling dancers, gum-gnawing pool sharps, browsing boys and girls slick with make-up.

Tonight, the video screen rolls silent black and white movie clips and an enthusiastic documentary about Oregon industry. On the perimeter, cushioned insets offer stills of prom couples smoking and necking.

They belly up to this bar for soda pop, not gin. The snack counter cashes in on candy, jerky, almonds, ginger beer, fake wine; even hats and satin baseball jackets bearing the Player's logo — a ribboned ballet slipper toeing a piano keyboard.

Though it doesn't offer a bar's array of drinks, Player's serves up a similar pick-up scene. Two young jocks saunter toward the door, slapping hands and appraising the "chickens." The mixing of ages, schools and colors creates a true social farm, especially after midnight when the admission price is dropped from \$3.50 to \$2.50 and those under 18 are asked to leave. The 300-odd patrons include many University students and even a few full-fledged adults.

Club owners Neal Lynn Jacobson and Jeff Cole, who both hold master's degrees in public administration from the University, don't plan any changes in the discotheque format. They have patterned the business after clubs Jacobson has been to in Salem and Cole in Roseburg. They are working on promotion and video projects, including a May lip-sync competition, "Puttin' on the Hits."



Line 'em up and move 'em out... a roundup of the crowd at Player's Cabaret on Saturday night.

The other comparable nightclub in Eugene, the Met, captures a younger crowd, and Jacobson doesn't consider them competition. Two Willamette High School girls commented that they used to go to the Met and KZEL-sponsored dances before Player's Cabaret opened in December. They expressed displeasure with the "sucky new wave music at the Met."

Mainstream but loud, the music at Player's is composed of danceable top 40 tunes with some funk and slow tempos thrown in. One of the disc jockeys lamented the musical slowness of the Eugene area in general. "If I played those last 10 songs in other places, I'd be out of a job. They're obsolete."

Requests from the audience regulate much of the playlist, and Prince is top dog, growling frequently out of the speaker banks.

Tonight, a girl approaches the cubicle of turntables and sound equipment. She shouts into the disc jockey's ear, cutting through the thick fog of music. "Could you play something by Duran Duran? My friend's little sister refuses to leave until she hears something by Duran Duran." The disc jockey glares back with resolve. "She's going to be here all night then," he replies. The girl shrugs at the spot of rebellion and sifts back into the crowd.

Story by Ami Pate
Photos by Hank Trotter

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