

Caffeine and chords

The Buzz coffeehouse has become a place where lesser-known artists can showcase their skills

By Sara Jarrett
Oregon Daily Emerald

After its makeover in the fall of 1998, The Buzz coffeehouse, on the EMU's first floor, has settled into its new face and has also found time to cultivate a fresh function.

"This year we're getting known as a music club where local artists can perform," says Melanie Jones, a senior sociology major and the campus coffeehouse's programming coordinator.

Before she took over the duties last term, the Cultural Forum managed The Buzz entertainment schedule. Though that organization is no longer coordinating shows at the venue on a regular basis, it has not stopped partnership with the coffeehouse completely, says Linda Dievendorf, the Cultural Forum's program coordinator.

"It's just that it's not very well-attended," she explains, "and [we] are interested in other things. There will, however, be a new song contest affiliated with the [Willamette Valley] Folk Fest and sponsored by the Cultural Forum, held at The Buzz in the near future."

The current situation is fine with Jones, who now has almost full control of the establishment's entertainment. She says her mission is to make The Buzz known as a venue that supports lesser-known but very talented artists.

Her idea is to give opportunities to bands and artists who are denied shows elsewhere because they have yet to distinguish a name for themselves.

"I book new artists so they can use The Buzz as publicity," she says.

Admission is always free at the venue, but all of the artists get paid from a small budget. Musicians are encouraged to use tip jars, however, and the performers can sell CDs, T-shirts and other band-related paraphernalia to make more money, Jones says.

Audience turnout is almost always directly related to how well-known the artists are, similar to any other place. For example, 16 Second Hum last fall drew one of the biggest crowds in the history of The Buzz, Jones says.

The band was developed in the dorms and gained a well-established following while playing for friends and neighbors.

In the same vein, Poetry Night was scheduled for Monday nights after Jones observed that so many people wanted to read poetry at Open Mic Night on Fridays. Because open mic means anything goes, poets were often sandwiched between hard rock bands. Monday nights offer a more comfortable atmosphere for everybody, Jones says.

Other nights hardly draw an audience at all, though.

Thursdays and Saturdays feature specific artists and usually draw a smaller, more intimate crowd. This is advantageous for some, but others feel somewhat out of place.

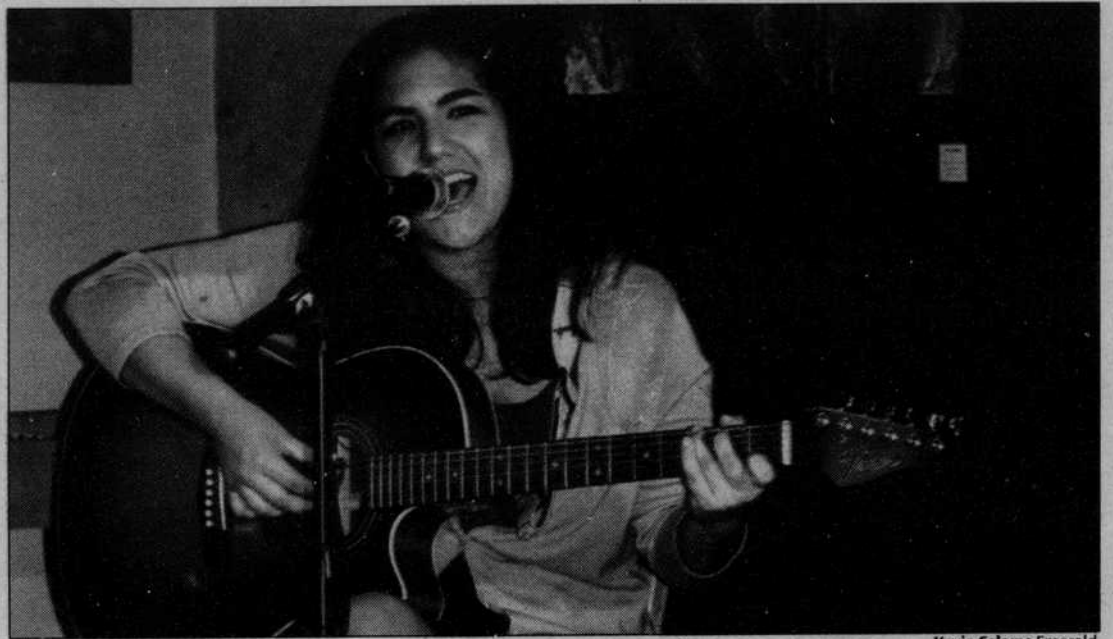
Peter Wilde, for instance, a local folk singer/songwriter, prefers playing at "smoky, drunken bars," he says.

"The Buzz is just another gig" to him, that doesn't especially appeal to his musical style.

Other artists make sure an audience shows up to support their livelihood. Acoustic guitarist Steven Pile invited many of his friends to hear his act at the coffeehouse last Saturday. The establishment was packed in response to the request.

The Buzz is also especially appealing to underage students, Jones says, since there are very few venues in Eugene that cater to that crowd.

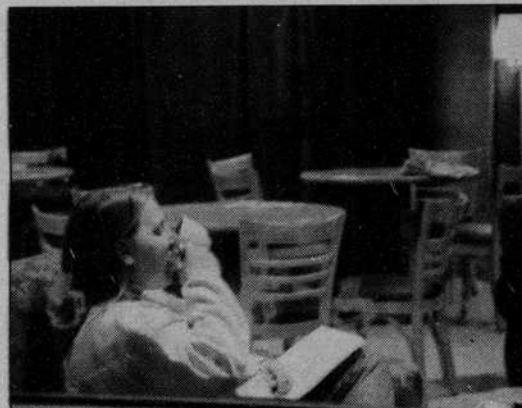
Those in need of a study break can take a quick jaunt to get a caffeine boost and enjoy some entertainment, as well. The Buzz is open until 2 a.m. Thursday through Saturday, and until midnight every other day of the week.



Kevin Calame Emerald

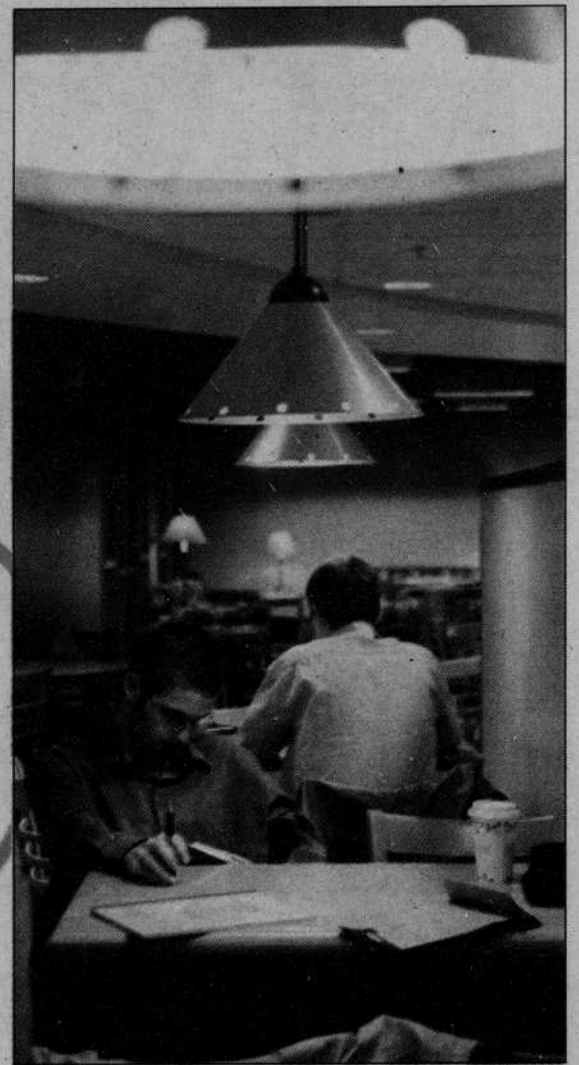
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Melanie Jones
The Buzz
program coordinator



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The Buzz can be a place for music and entertainment as shown in the top photo; acoustic guitarist Nicole Barrett plays for the coffeehouse crowd this past Monday night. Other musicians who frequent the venue, which offers live music most nights of the week, are Peter Wilde and Steven Pile, among others. If music isn't your gig, then grab a cup of java and settle in for some reading or writing. Studying is optional.



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