

Aggielife

On the path to harmony

Local residents take the stage once a week to make music

BY TRAVIS HOPPER
The Battalion

Music in this day and age has become a by-product of the technology we so long to improve. Rare is the radio star or MTV mainstay who chooses not to have a synthesizer, a drum loop, distortion or the now infamous, Puff-Daddy-inspired, "sample."

Even modern country has jumped on the bandwagon. But take all the technology away and what remains is the song and the performer.

Every Wednesday night, from 8 until midnight, the Crooked Path Ale House on University Drive hosts KORA's Singer-Songwriter Open-Mic Night. It is a chance for aspiring musicians to get their feet wet in the local music scene, for seasoned veterans to test out new material and for many residents of Bryan-College Station to have a relaxing and entertaining night out on the town.

Roy Munse, co-host of the KORA morning show, said he approached Willie Bennett, local talent booker, three years ago with an innovative idea.

"I had lived in Nashville and in Austin, and in both cities, I had attended and played at open-mic nights," Munse said. "For me, they were a great opportunity to rehearse the music that I was writing, because at the time I was writing faster than I could record. It was a cheaper and more efficient way to stay polished and get feedback."

Upon relocating to College Station, Munse said he noticed there were no established open-mic forums for himself and others to hone their craft outside the spotlight. So, he did what any entrepreneurial-minded person would do — he created one.

Munse approached Bennett, then working for 3rd Floor Cantina, and asked him if a night not regularly booked could be converted into an open-mic night.

Bennett agreed to let Munse do his show there Wednesday nights from 8 until closing time, and so Singer-Songwriter Night was born.

Munse said initially it was not the successful and varied scene that it has become today.

"That first night, we had about three performers and three audience members," Munse said. "Each performer got to play for as long as they wanted, and then some."

Bennett and Munse both knew the type of program they were hoping to achieve would take some time to get off the ground and become well known, and so for about six months the Singer/Songwriter Night was a low-key affair.

Munse said things gradually started to pick up, however, as word began to circulate around Bryan-College Station and Texas A&M.

"The first time I really noticed that we had something going, something that really had some staying power, was this one time where A&M had an off week, school was not in session and we still had a full house," Munse said. "That was really the night when I realized that this whole Singer/Songwriter Night might actually work out."

For about two and a half years, Singer/Songwriter Night was a Wednesday night fixture at the 3rd Floor Cantina. When the club closed its doors for good a couple of months ago, Munse said he moved his show over to its current residence at the Crooked Path Ale House.

"Donny Anz, who owns the Crooked Path, had told me if I ever needed to move my show, he would like to have us," Munse said. "So, when the 3rd Floor closed, I took him up on it."

Moving from one location to another has not caused Singer/Songwriter Night to slow down at all.

Chris Taylor, the general manager at Crooked Path, said they have had to hustle just to keep up with the new business it brings.

"Before Roy Munse and the Singer/Songwriter Night moved here, we didn't even open the upstairs Wednesdays," Taylor said. "But now with us being right across from campus and all, we are getting more people here on Wednesdays than we were before. It has really been a nice addition for us."

Currently, each performer signs up for a 15 minute time slot between 8 p.m. and midnight. They are allowed to play for 15-minutes or three songs, whichever comes first.

Munse said at the end of the night, provided

everyone has already played once, those that stick around are allowed to play a few more songs.

"We used to do this all the time in the early days," Munse said. "But lately we've had so many performers that we've been working hard just to get them all in."

While entire bands are discouraged and drum sets and prerecorded material are not allowed, every type of music is welcome.

"We get a lot of folk and country singers obviously, but we also get everything from blues to alternative to rock 'n' roll," Munse said. "We even had a guy a while back who brought in some cooking pots and played a little percussion with pots and spoons. We've seen just about everything."

Munse said there are many talented performers who have played the Singer/Songwriter Night over the years, but do not look for any on MTV or VH-1 just yet.

"We haven't had anyone hit it really big, but we really haven't been doing it for a long enough time yet," Munse said. "The music business takes a while to get started in. I can say, though, that I am sure it will happen to someone. With so many talented people having played here, like members of Reclamation, Spirit Tree and Roger Creagger, I'm sure that at least one of them will hit it big."

Taylor said there has been a warm and enthusiastic response from those who have attended Singer/Songwriter.

"It has really been a bunch of fun," Taylor said. "The performers have been really good, and the audience has been really good to them. Everyone claps and seems to have a really good time while they're there."

Munse said people who are curious about playing in front of some new audiences, discovering new musical talent or just hanging out and catching some original new music should come out to Singer/Songwriter Open Mic Night Wednesdays at the Crooked Path.

"It is a great way to start playing, and you will never have an easier audience," Munse said. "There's no risk, nobody boos you, and it's just an all around good time."



MIKE FUENTES/THE BATTALION

Kusting, a College Station resident, plays stand-up bass during Songwriter night at Crooked Path Ale House Wednesday.

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