

The Cup: Two mikes, a piano and a new act every 15 minutes

By CHUCK GRAHAM
Citizen Entertainment Writer

The newly revived open mike programs at The Cup aren't just for old folkies who wish it were still the 1960s.

For one thing, this new Friday night series at the Campus Christian Center's well-known social corner is sponsored by the freshly chartered Tucson Kitchen Musicians Association.

"We want it to be open to all kinds of acoustic music, from bluegrass to jazz to whatever," said Ken Tucker, TKMA's first president.

Acoustic punk rock would be just fine, too, Tucker said; though he added he hasn't heard of any bands playing such music in these parts.

Restrictions on who can get on stage and who can't are based more on logistics than aesthetics. The Cup's entire stage wouldn't be big enough to hold the drum set of a well-known heavy metal band such as Iron Maiden, much less the rest of the Maiden's members. Neither is there enough time allowed between acts to permit setting up and tearing down elaborate equipment.

"Keep things moving," that's the philosophy of this program. Every act gets 15 minutes to perform. The musicians carry their instruments on stage when they walk up to play, and carry their instruments off when they are finished. One act ends and another begins.

It is nearly continuous entertainment from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. So a drummer has to stay mobile. Synthesizer players are out.

There's an upright piano sitting next to the stage. And TKMA does provide a PA with two microphones.

"I don't think anybody's used the piano yet, though," said Rita Hamilton, TKMA secretary and lead singer with the Rose Canyon Band. "We should check to see if it's in tune."

The mood of these open mike evenings are ultra-casual, with leftover ingredients from the old Cup mixed in with elements of new times. Through the late 1960s and right up to the local arrival of discotheques in 1976, The Cup's open mike Friday nights were a hubbub of string bands and singers.

Directly sponsored by the Campus Christian Center at that time, The Cup was a well-known haven on the folk music circuit. Linda Ronstadt sang there when her dream of fame was still off in the future someplace.

Gerry Glombeck, Jim Griffith and Tucker were there, too. Those three are also at this new series. Passing years have turned them into the Old Guard. They maintain the tradition proudly.

New players of this generation are inspired by the recordings of a new group of bluegrass fuzion players such as David Grisman and acoustic guitarists like Michael Hedges.

"The stage is open to virtually everyone," said Tucker. "We don't ask anyone to audition or anything. Each act has those 15 minutes and if they're terrible, well, we figure everyone can stand it for 15 minutes."



Citizen photo by Xavier Gullgren

Ken Tucker, president of Tucson Kitchen Musicians Association, performing at The Cup.

"Once school starts," Rita continued, "we hope a lot of students will come over. They're going to be up in their rooms playing anyway. We hope that on Friday nights they'll come down to The Cup and get the experience of playing for an audience."

"Audiences at The Cup are the most sympathetic imaginable. It's a great place for new players to start out," said Tucker. "On the other hand, there are some excellent musicians who come by, as well. People who love to play but don't like to be in bar bands or anything."

One of the dearest traditions at the old Cup, for the musicians, was holding informal jam sessions in the practice room across the walk from The Cup itself. This is one tradition still flourishing at the new TKMA open mike Friday nights. The sessions also flow out onto the patio, just like they used to in the old days.

Another worthwhile carryover is the good coffee, teas, sandwiches and baked desserts served out of The Cup's kitchen. A person can't live on music alone.

"Really, we wanted to start these Fridays at The Cup as a way of letting people get to know the Kitchen Musicians, and hopefully join our organization. Dues are \$10 a year," said Tucker.

"We organized," Rita explained, "in order to produce the first annual Tucson Folk Festival. It will be at the Reid Park band shell next April 5 and 6."

Plans are still being formulated for the festival and for additional TKMA fund raiser events. To find out more, telephone Glombeck at 628-8719.

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