

FEATURE

Surviving Neptune's torrent

In a year which has crippled Halifax music venues, Condon MacLeod won't let Cafe Ole slip away

BY GREG MCFARLANE

Condon MacLeod is nothing more than a concerned parent.

For the past six years, MacLeod has been the surrogate father to the patrons of the now defunct Cafe Ole, an all-ages club that was located atop Urban Sound Exchange on Barrington street. Perhaps that is why he is searching for a new location for the club — because that's what his patrons and friends want.

When the club was shut down in December amid a storm of controversy that pegged the Neptune theatre as the antagonist, MacLeod did not intend to revive the venue elsewhere. It seemed to be the denouement for the club that he started as a hangout for his teenage daughter.

But the support he has received from kids, parents, and the music scene alike has compelled him to relocate.

"At the end of the last show, we were just going to put our coats on and thank everyone," said the sociable MacLeod. "That was going to be the end of Cafe Ole, but we've had so much support. Now we feel that we have to find another place."

MacLeod's passion for his club went beyond providing a place for youth to go at night. The gregarious owner described Cafe Ole, the longest running all-ages music venue in Canada, as a co-operative where patrons felt they owned a stake in the place. This co-operative nature had its rewards.

"We had no problems," MacLeod said of Ole. "We got to know a lot of the kids by name. That would be a deterrent to doing something like pushing someone down the stairs. It was self-governed."

Despite the occasional problem, local businesses concurred with MacLeod regarding the conduct of Ole's patrons.

"Those kids never bothered my business," said Sheldon Goldman, the owner of Odyssey 2000, a collectibles shop adjacent to Urban Sound Exchange. "Kids were sometimes messing up the front of my store with writing...but kids are kids. We were all like that at sometime."

Deborah Williams, the manager of Natural Elements on Barrington street, agreed with Goldman.

"We had a few problems with keeping people out of the doorway, but we were quite okay with Cafe Ole being up there," said Williams. "We signed a petition to keep them there."

Overall, the surrounding business community is supportive of MacLeod. Goldman failed to support Neptune theatre, however.

"What Neptune did was a prick-

shot," the angered Goldman said in response to allegations that Neptune forced the closure of Cafe Ole. "They have a God almighty attitude."

"Cafe Ole shouldn't suffer for Neptune's mistake," Goldman continued, referring to the fact that, despite \$15 million in renovations, Neptune failed to install adequate sound proofing. "What's gonna happen if [Neptune] has a show in the afternoon and there's heavy traffic? Are they going to close the streets?"

MacLeod, however, does not



"Cafe Ole gave us experience," Walsh said of his band. (Photo by Angela Beltaos)

share Goldman's anger; his initial feeling was disbelief. With a scarce budget, MacLeod had installed sound proof insulation in his walls, and he expected Neptune to do the same.

"[With the old Neptune], they knew the problem existed. In a year-and-a-half [while building the new theatre] they had perfect opportunities to do sound checks," said MacLeod. "It was a bit arrogant on their part."

Bruce Klinger, Neptune's General Manager, refused to comment on the issue.

During the past two months, the ambitious MacLeod has not been lamenting the past. He's been searching for a new spot, but warns that he has not found an ideal

location.

"We're aggressively looking at new spaces," MacLeod said. "There are five or six locations to consider. None are perfect, but we'll come to something."

That's good news for young bands looking for a place to start. Without Ole, bands won't be given the chance to mature in front of a live audience.

"Cafe Ole gave us experience," said Len Walsh, 15, a drummer whose band, Pack Rat, had a regular gig at the club. "It helped us get better. Now, all we can do is just keep practising in the basement."

Steve Bigg, a 19-year-old Dalhousie student, has been playing at the small venue for the last year with his band, Livestock. Bigg noted that Cafe Ole accepted bands with heavier sounds, something most Halifax drinking dens shy away

from.

Bigg also recognized Ole's role as a launching pad for younger bands.

"Younger bands won't be taken seriously until they're older, so where are they supposed to play in the meantime?" asked the soft-spoken Bigg. "Sloan was one of the first bands to play there, and look where they are now."

CKDU, Dalhousie's campus radio station, has taken an active role by informing listeners of the proceedings surrounding the all-

ages club. CKDU also co-sponsored a benefit to raise money for the new location, wherever it may be.

Kasia Morrison, the station's volunteer co-ordinator, agreed that a revived Cafe Ole is of extreme importance to the Halifax music scene.

"[Cafe Ole] feeds the music scene later...it's circular," stated Morrison. "[Without Cafe Ole], the music will still be there, but not in a community atmosphere or steady venue."

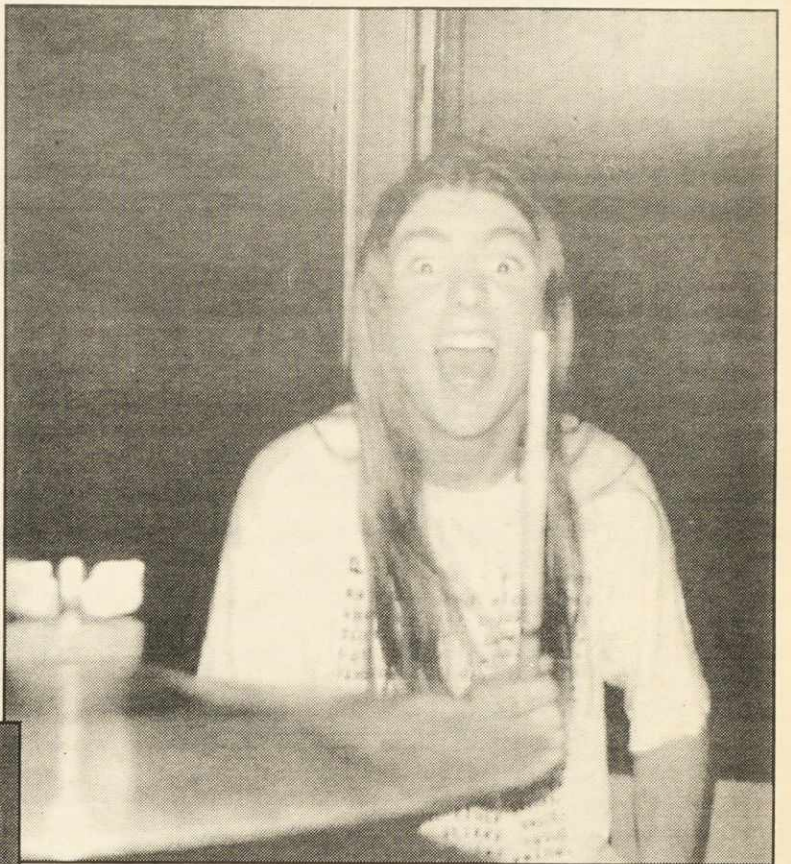
Morrison, however, has never entertained the idea of Cafe Ole not being resurrected. She has faith in those behind the club, especially MacLeod.

"Condon [MacLeod] has gone beyond his parenting

At the Cafe...

While Cafe Ole may have been a small venue, the bands which came in and out of its doors were not only a who's who of the Halifax music scene, but also some up-and-coming bands from across Canada, the US, and Europe. Some of the over 800 bands to play were:

- Sloan
- Ghandarvas
- Hanson Brothers
- Rusty
- Jale
- Thrush Hermit
- Ginger
- Paste
- Gob
- Monoxides
- Diesel Boy
- The Queers
- Vanilla Muffins
- Day Glo Abortions
- Change of Heart
- Slowburn
- Panzy Division
- Cub
- Pure



Len Walsh of Pack Rat. (Photo by Angela Beltaos)

responsibilities, and he's brought his care for music and teenagers to the community. That's pretty admirable,"

Morrison said. "If parents are concerned with what's going on with youth, they could learn a lot from him."

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