



Moving clockwise, starting above left, emcee Paul Moss fills in between acts. Above right, folk blues players Bruce Nelson and Bill Sundeen (far right) harmonize on electric and acoustic guitars. Right, Morning Glory group members (left to right) Mary McPherson, Betsy Bremser, and Miller McPherson are regulars at Earl's. Below, Elston Murphy adds a different note with his harmonica.



EARL'S TAVERN TALENT

They call themselves The Unvarnished Music Company as they take the stage Monday nights at Earl's Tavern, 56th and Havelock Ave.

Dock workers, Goodyear employees, railroad switchmen, University of Nebraska at Lincoln instructors, they become, for one night, musicians performing for free—for practice.

Both amateurs and professionals sit in the audience, listening to each other, waiting their turns. Up front, they pick, strum and jam through an evening of songs that range from Utah Phillips' folk music to James Taylor's "Sweet Baby James" to the classical guitar compositions of Villa Lopus.

Actually, "it's not a company, it isn't varnished and I don't know how much music they (members) turnout," said Paul Moss, the show's mustachioed emcee.

They're local musicians, working on performance skills, he said, and "you can't do that any other way," but play to the audiences of 30-50 people that gather Monday night at Earl's.

The lack of a place for local musicians to gather and perform last summer prompted one musician, Dale Jeffries, to buy a sound system, which he convinced Earl Allon to put in his bar and host the free performances.

The first performance had ten musicians, and five more came in that night, according to Moss. "Then people just started walking in."

"We've got a really good bunch of kids here," said Earl the owner. "Some play good, some not so good." But both kinds can come in and "hash

things over," he added.

Some of the performers who stop in are on the road, passing through Lincoln, Moss said. They've included a Virginian who makes and plays dulcimers, and a Louisianian who played a Cajun harp. Bluegrass musicians Peter Blakeslee and Johnny Walker may filter in as the evening grows late.

Regulars include UN-L sociology instructor Miller McPherson who plays guitar and his wife Mary, a sociology graduate student on banjo.

McPherson, who was a traveling folksinger for 10 years, plays at Earl's to keep in practice and "to have a good time. That's what's important to me."

Elston Murphy, a bib-overalled harmonica player for 39 years who works at Goodyear, is back after a three-week absence. Banjo player Paul Ritscher and his wife Char, both 20, don't remember missing a Monday night since the performances began a year ago.

And there's Earl, who occasionally leaves the bar for the stage to deliver his one-song repertoire of "Cigarettes, Whiskey and Wild, Wild Women."

Moss works with the Mountain Plains Regional Training and Economic Development Program when not emceeing at Earl's. He also was Nebraska's campaign manager for Hubert Humphrey's 1968 presidential campaign.

But "it isn't who you are" that matters when you walk into Earl's, he said. "When you come here, that's who you are here."



At Earl's (above) it's come-as-you-are. Below, Brad Anderson solos on the banjo. Below left, Earl collects the empties at closing time.



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