

Open Stage gives amateurs chance at one-night fame

By Mary Kay Wayman

The crowd in the dimly-lit bar is attentive—until the performer strikes a bad chord.

"After all, this is cheap entertainment," he says with a grimace.

It may be cheap, but Monday night's Open Stage entertainment at O.G. Kelly's, 220 N. 20th St., certainly is unique.

Performers simply walk in the door and register an act with the master of ceremonies for a chance at stardom.

The show begins at 9 p.m.

Jek Kelly, manager, part owner, and an accomplished juggler, said acts include all kinds of music, jugglers, comedy and even a fast-draw demonstration.

Other acts have been: rock 'n' roll groups who have since been hired elsewhere, a violin quartet from the Lincoln Symphony and a guy who played his hand.

During the school year, students perform most of the acts, Kelly said.

THE OPEN STAGE has existed for years in Lincoln, he said. O.G. Kelly's has sponsored it for six months.

Kelly said what is usually a slow night for bars finds them with standing-room-only crowds.

Monday's gathering was smaller than the usual crowd, but just as noisy. Toward the end of the night, favorite performers gave encore performances to the sound of cheers and beer glasses being pounded on table tops.

Kelly blamed a Monday night football broadcast and the beginning of classes for the small crowd, but predicted the bar soon would be packed wall-to-wall again.

Amateurs, professionals and unsuspecting spectators all perform on the stage.

Rick Kincade, announcer and organizer, called Open Stage a good place to meet people for "recreational music."

Performers are given one free drink, he said, adding that a collection is taken midway through the night to cover costs.

Gary Hatten is a regular on the Open Stage.

"I haven't worked for six months," he said. "Ever since I came down here."

He said playing informally in the bar is almost like being in a musicians' workshop.

"We have a real good time together," he said. "What could be better than playing two or three songs and feeling out the music?"

"ANYBODY CAN get up—you don't have to be good. It's a chance to get up and see if people like it."

Even if they don't, Hatten said he couldn't remember the audience ever booing anyone.

Kincade announces each act and, like Kelly, also performs himself. Kincade's country-western brand of rock 'n' roll and original songs sets the audience laughing. Sometimes he lends his guitar to an unprepared performer who found his courage in a beer glass.

T.J. Kregness said he came to O.G. Kelly's to have a beer, and after having it, decided to take the stage. But stage fright eventually took over.

"Something just happened to my heart about 10 minutes before I went on," he said, grasping his chest in mock pain.

Performer Kris Collins, an apprentice cabinetmaker, said he has "no big dreams" about a show-business career.

This is a place to go to meet people with similar interests. It's not a pretentious place," he said. "It's like having friends over, really down home."

Bill Wohrmar is a professional guitarist who performs around Lincoln. He comes to Open Stage to enjoy making music with friends, he said.

Wohrmar recently moved to Lincoln from southern California. His tan and luau shirt distinguished him from the others, but his enthusiasm for the music fit right in.



Photo by Jerry McBride

Gary Hatten, Bill Wohrmar and Rick Kincade ... jam to close the bar Monday night.

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A New York janitor found a painting in a trash can and hung it in his home for 10 years until he had it appraised. It was sold for \$6,500.

And a punch bowl set is putting children through college for one family who attended Heirloom Discovery Day.

Sheldon Art Gallery is sponsoring an Heirloom Discovery Day Saturday, Sept. 22 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Five experts from Sotheby Parke Bernet, a New York-based fine arts auction house and a leading authority on antiques and art objects, will, for a \$5 fee, identify and

appraise such things as pottery, glass, pewter, antique jewelry, watches, furniture, rugs, textiles, paintings and prints.

Items that will not be appraised include books, photographs, coins, and stamps. Locally-produced paintings and drawings also will be excluded.

All appraisals are verbal. Although there is no limit on the number of articles, each must be hand carried. For furniture valuation, the experts ask to see a photograph and, if possible, an empty drawer or other movable part.

Heirloom Discovery Day is a fund-raising event sponsored by the Nebraska Art Association. Proceeds will go to Sheldon Art Gallery.

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