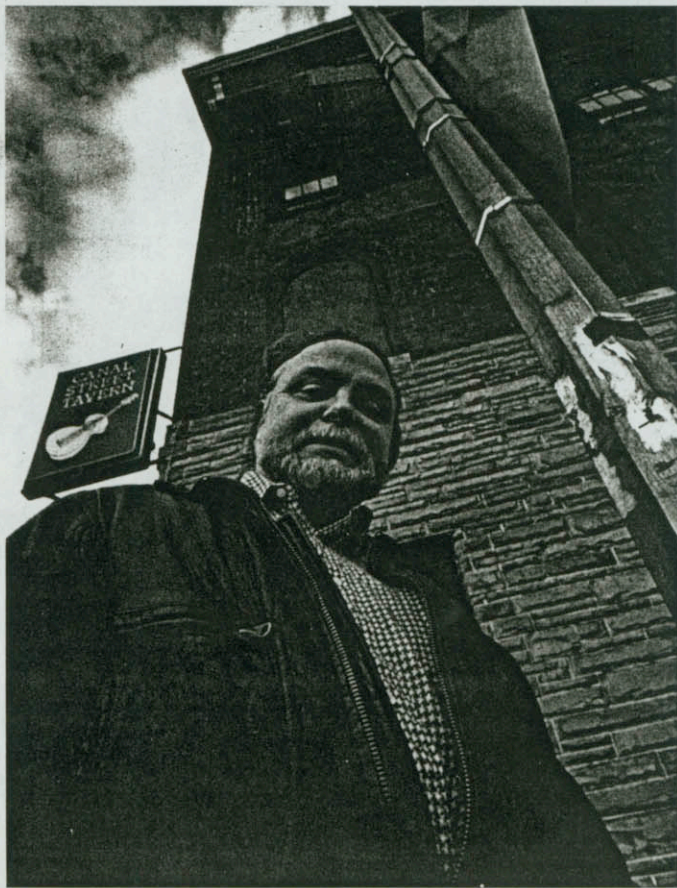


From Folk to Funk

Mick Montgomery's Canal Street Tavern Is Alternative Music at Its Best.

By Kate Lanzotti, Arts Editor



DON HARTMAN

"I've always strived to offer a quality of music to this area that is truly an alternative to the kind we are force fed from every angle," says Mick Montgomery, owner of Canal Street Tavern.

He's been a guitarist, an artist, and a teacher who always wanted to open a coffee house. Finally he bought a building, determined to fulfill a dream that had been on his mind longer than he could remember. This dream is Canal Street Tavern, a thriving night spot on the northern edge of downtown Dayton, and the man who created it is Mick Montgomery.

Most Daytonians have heard of Canal Street, but many still wonder (or have forgotten) what it's all about. Mick's philosophy for starting Canal Street was simple. "People have a tendency not to think of live music as a participation sport," he says. "I wanted to create an environment in which people could let the music touch them...I've always strived to offer a quality of music to this area that is truly an alternative to the

kind we are force fed from every angle." Canal Street's performance schedule and atmosphere certainly demonstrate this philosophy.

In any given month, the listener can expect a multi-cultural menu: folk, country, Cajun rock, rap, blue grass, and Celtic. "We don't claim to be the jazz club, or the folk club," continues Mick, who caters to no one genre of music. The result is music for its purest reason: that is, music for the sake of human expression. And that can take many forms.

Daytonians who understand what's happening at Canal Street Tavern will avidly tell you about the performers it brings in. Mick adds that, "The performers are hungry to connect with the audience, and the audience is free to respond." Indeed the performers are often seen sitting at the bar and blending with the audience between sets. "They (the audience) should feel free to talk to them and ask questions," says Mick. "This is another aspect of Canal Street that makes a show more intimate."

Montgomery's philosophy is manifested in Canal Street's physical environment as well. If you've ever been to Canal Street, you know that the stage sits in the center of a room that holds approximately 150 people. The decor is completely incidental. You can expect to sit on anything from theater chairs to old church pews. The tables are of all shapes and sizes, fans hang from the ceiling, and stained glass has been hung on most walls. Canal Street is a small space where people can be natural, because there are no social norms that tell them how to dress, talk, and move. The atmosphere is that of shared experience, and anthropologists tell us that this is what culture fundamentally is. This environment creates a social consciousness, yet at the same time, defines a distinct comfort zone for each listener.

It becomes apparent that this intimate, comfortable room was designed to flaunt nothing but sound. During our interview with Mick, he said more than once that when he started Canal Street "It was very important that it wasn't pre-

tentious."

Dayton Monthly recommends that interested listeners find out about Canal Street's performers before going down for a taste. All too often, individuals eager to experience new music have "dropped in" only to find a genre that, quite literally, caused them to panic and bolt. They end up thinking that Canal Street caters to whatever it was that caused them to flee. (Although harmless, a form of music referred to as "grunge" has perhaps been the biggest source of panic to some Daytonians.)

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There are those who would like new musical experiences; however, they often think that if a group is not reviewed in the pages of *Rolling Stone* magazine, it must not be significant. But consider, for example, that Mary Chapin-Carpenter, a Grammy Award-winning country-folk singer, wasn't always well-known. She did, however, play at Canal Street last year (keep your eyes open for "Mick's Picks" in future issues of *Dayton Monthly*.)

Find out about performances by calling Canal Street Tavern at 461-9343. The staff can tell you about the performers and direct you to publications that have reviewed them. Several performers that Mick has brought to Canal Street are available on CD at major record stores; you could go have a listen there. If you do your homework, Canal Street gives you the opportunity to find new genres of music that can reach inside, feed your soul, and broaden your field of vision.

Kate Lanzotti is Dayton Monthly's Arts Editor and claims going to Canal Street is not hazardous to your health.