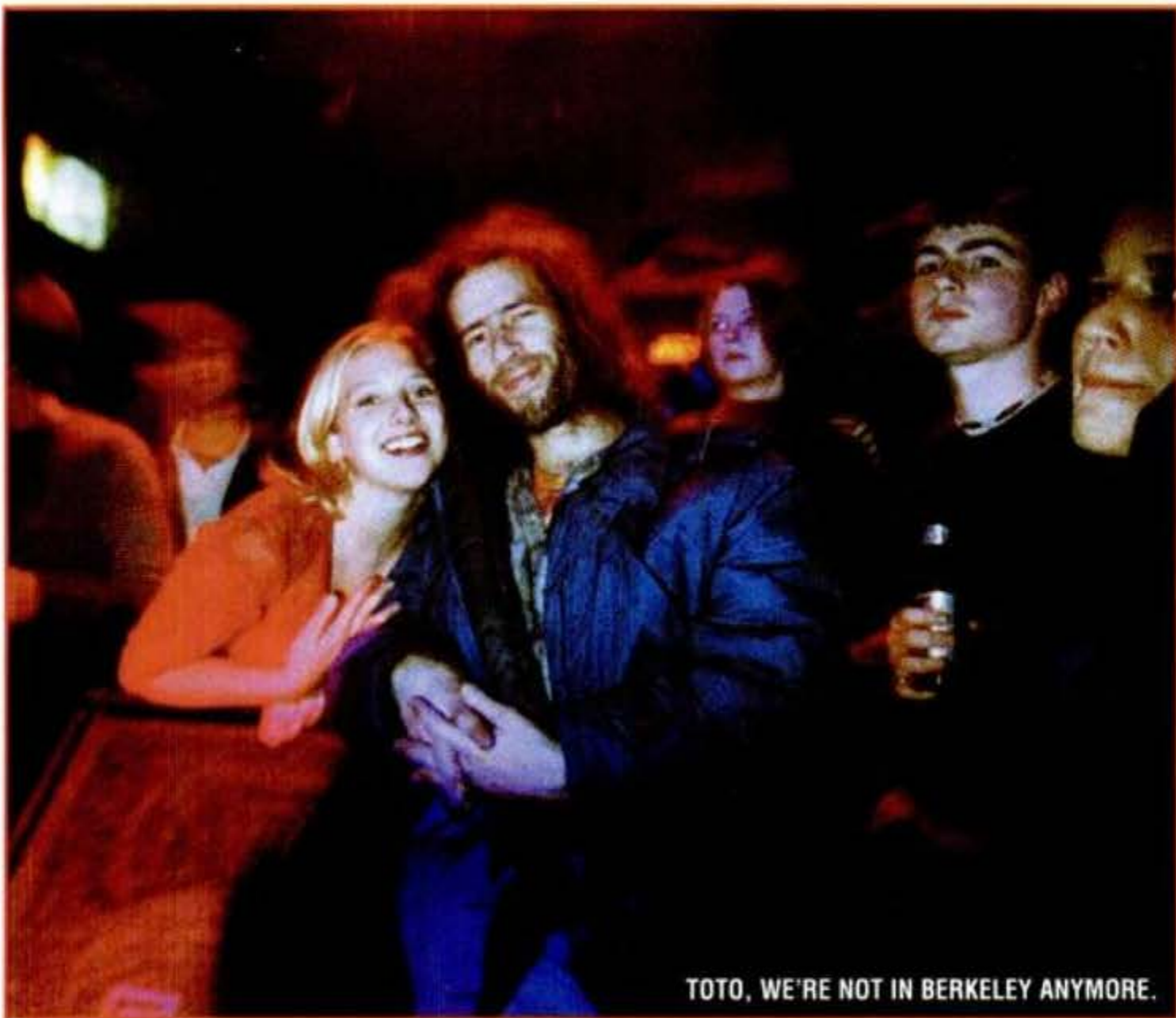
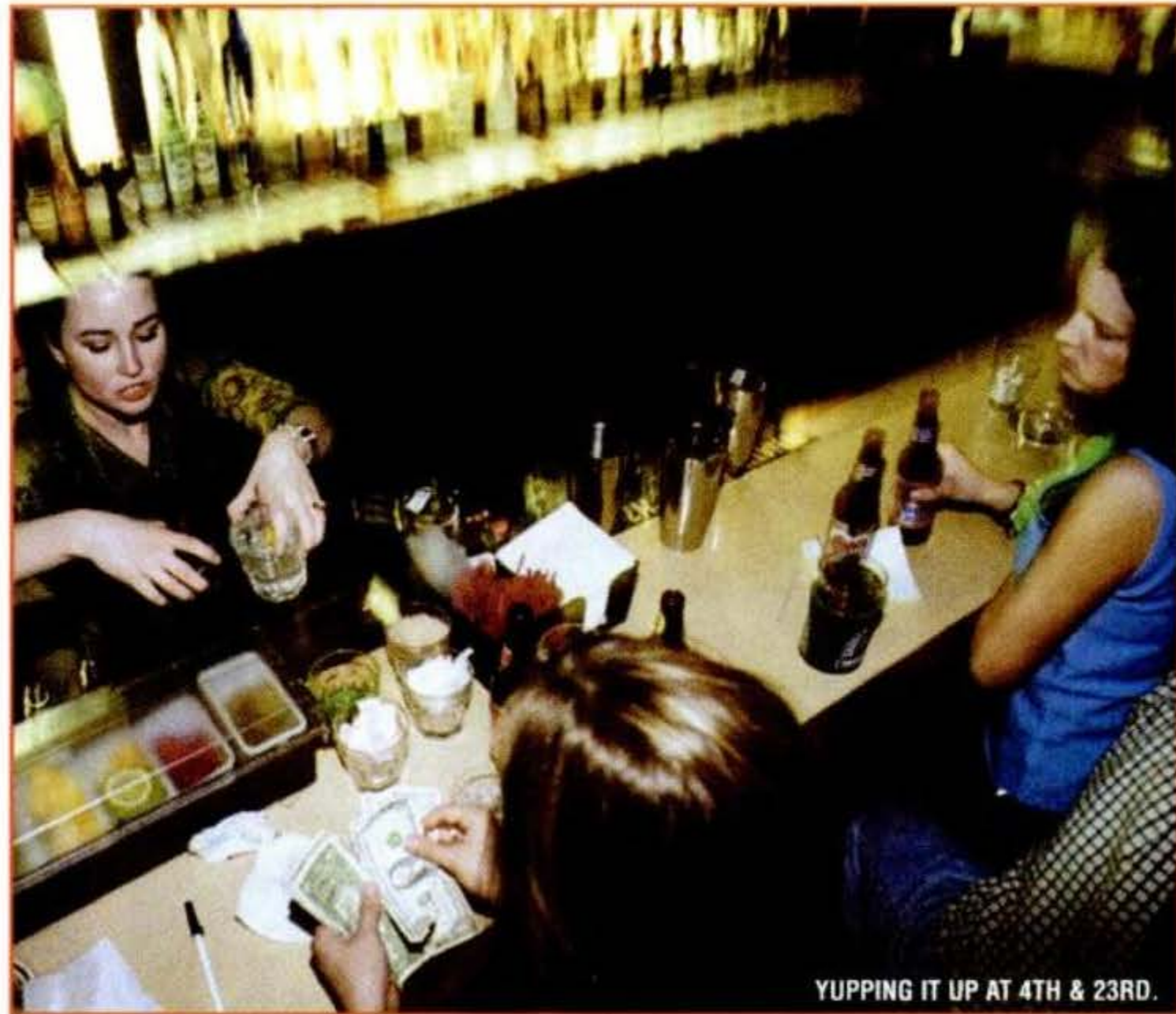


localzine TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA





TOTO, WE'RE NOT IN BERKELEY ANYMORE.



YUPPING IT UP AT 4TH & 23RD.

STORY: MARIE YARBROUGH PHOTOS: TAMIKA MOORE

In Tuscaloosa, three things are for sure: Jesus, drinking and football. Home to the University Of Alabama and its 12-time champions the Crimson Tide, the city is a drinking town with a football problem.

Not far beneath these mainstays, however, lies an emergent music scene. During the past half-decade it waned to a dismal collection of pop-rock, reggae-funk and Grateful Dead cover bands whose gigs attracted the uncritical drinking crowd, but as the 20th century dwindled, the local original music scene began to pick up steam. With the city's current musical momentum, it's no longer a struggle to hear good music on the weekend. According to Stuart McNair, a local musician whose recently self-released solo album, *I Can't See Over The Accordion*, features collaborations with many Tuscaloosa musicians, this long-overdue upswing stems from a growing sense of community. "If the Tuscaloosa music scene is going in any direction, that's it," McNair says.

Right now, Tuscaloosa bands—who thrive on the love of college students—lament that the city has ruled all bars 21-and-up. This amounts to an almost 50% decrease in gig attendance, which has sent many bands underground to play at house parties. Some venues

have helped combat the exodus—Hale's Tavern (1225 University Blvd.), for instance, hosts a Monday-night songwriters' circle.

To some, this move away from the traditional bar scene and into more creative venues is an ideal direction. Music scene stalwart Lauren Krothe, who sings with psych-rock band Blip and the punk-metal band Green Beret and has recently self-released a solo album, says the best thing about the Tuscaloosa music scene is that "a lot of the music hasn't been uncovered yet."

There's a lot out there, though, like hippie rockers Full Circle, Planet Jive and Freak Magnet. Odile plays a hybrid of funk, rock and jazz. Punk rockers The Dexateens and funky rock purveyors Mindseye have long been a part of the mix, while The Wayne Mills Band and The Jason Herndon Band keep the country tunes a-comin' at Harry's Bar (1330 Hargrove Road). Once hailed as Tuscaloosa's great skankin' hope, punk-ska rockers Pain took their trombones, trumpets and saxophones on an extended US tour last year, then disappointed hometown crowds by going on hiatus. Other local bands to catch when you roll on through: bluegrass mavens Rollin' In The Hay; Birmingham, Alabama's Flair; outlaw country freaks The Inlaws and always-infectious rockers The Katies.

While hip-hop and electronic music have taken the nation, only traces can be found in Tuscaloosa. Most successful bands here rely on their bluegrass-influenced roots to produce their organic regional sound. "We're nestled in a place in which Southern music traditions are everywhere," McNair says. "Every band here has got to know what bluegrass is. Aside from the college-dominated music scene, there is a subcultural community of bluegrass musicians."

Local bands find support at the college station, New Rock (90.7 fm), on the local shows on commercial station Tide 101.7 and from independent local music stores. At the 20-plus-year-old Vinyl Solution (1207 University Blvd.) you'll find a large selection of both CDs and vinyl (alterna-kids, check here first), as well as a decent jazz and blues selection and a friendly, laid-back staff. Whirligig Records, though not as large or as inviting as Vinyl Solution, also has a good vinyl selection on top of its new and used CDs.

When the weekend rolls around—at about 9 p.m. on Thursday, since many students blow off Friday classes—bands usually start playing around midnight. When it comes to nightlife, there are essentially two choices: The Strip, just beyond the UA campus, caters to the college crowd, while downtown, for the most part, caters to grad students and the older non-student population. The Strip's bars, like The Booth (1201 University Blvd.), Pounders (1137 University Blvd.) and Gallette's (1021 University Blvd.), offer a smoky, loud, crowded atmosphere in a collection of grungy, rundown buildings. Next to these three you'll find Pepito's Mexican restaurant, a favorite to all because of the friendly service and drink specials, and Phil's, known for buffalo wings and live jazz on Friday nights.



LOCAL LOGIC TUSCALOOSA'S BEST:

- SWEET ICED TEA:** Milo's (1307 McFarland Blvd.)
- PLACE TO MEET AN ESCAPEE FROM BRICE MENTAL HOSPITAL:** Roaming around University Boulevard
- SITES TO SPOT GHOSTS:** Woods Hall or the Little Round House (UA campus)
- MONEY-MAKING SCHEME:** Sell your plasma
- CHEAP PITCHER OF BEER:** Phil's (1137 University Blvd.)

known for buffalo wings and live jazz on Friday nights.

At downtown establishments, you'll meet both yuppie-wannabes who sip wine while gabbing on cell phones and students and locals who just want to drink away from the Strip's beer-soaked madness. A relaxed place to start off the evening is 516 Blue (516 Greensboro Ave.), a wine bar with reasonably priced (and delicious) appetizers and desserts. Right around the corner are performance spaces like Rhythm And Brews (2300 Fourth St.) and The Copper Top (2300 4th St.). Classic venue The Chukker (2121 Sixth St.) resembles bars on the Strip in its dilapidated appearance, and bands like Sublime, The Dave Matthews Band and Fastball all played here before they broke. At jazz and blues treasure 4th & 23rd, you'll run into the quintessential redneck alongside the business professional, enjoying a beer and dancing.

If, of course, that doesn't strike your fancy, head out toward the highway on McFarland Boulevard. Perched just beyond the first traffic light is the Christian bookshop Christian Publishers Outlet, right next door to the ABC Liquor Store: a vision of shopping convenience. Amen!