



# T SAN DIEGO TROUBADOUR

Alternative country, Americana, roots, folk, blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass music news

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To promote, encourage, and provide an alternative voice for the great local music that is generally overlooked by the mass media; namely the genres of alternative country, Americana, roots, folk, blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass. To entertain, educate, and bring together players, writers, and lovers of these forms; to explore their foundations; and to expand the audience for these types of music.

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The San Diego Troubadour is dedicated to the memory of Ellen and Lyle Duplessie, whose vision inspired the creation of this newspaper.

# Hoffer's Cigar Bar: Where There's Smoke There's Fiery Jazz and a Whole Lot More

by Raul Sandelin

Ask anyone with a PhD in musicology (or any stoner, for that matter) what music is. And, he or she will tell you that music is a metaphor for something. The vibrations of the universe, the hard-wiring of the human brain, love, hot monkey love, pain turned outward, joy turned inward, the libido turned upward, the unstated turmoils of class or gender, God with a capital "G," god with a lower-case "g," God-damn-the-guy-who-stole-my-woman, God-bless-the-woman-who-stole-my-man. These are only a handful of the signifieds that have danced the semiotic samba alongside music's signifier.

To say that music is simply good or music is simply fun is not enough. We in the Western world have to place a deeper meaning onto the music we listen to. But, if music is always the metaphor, what is the metaphor for music? We talk about music as a symbol for something else. We seldom turn the tables of logic and inference in the other direction.

So, I'll posit an idea here: Smoke. Smoke is the perfect metaphor for music.

Unfortunately, we're trying to purge smoke from our lives. Witness the clean coal industry and catalytic converters. This is a darn shame considering all the good things we owe to smoke's carcinogenic presence. Think of the great episodes of modern history: the Industrial Revolution, the trenches in France during WWI, Keith Richard's morning sit on the loo. All involve billows and billows of smoke. Smokestacks, mustard gas, Chesterfield non-filters. The world was built upon smoke.

If we turn to high-culture, let me just

say six words: Cheech & Chong's *Up in Smoke*. Actually, that's five words and a squiggly line. Shoot me. Just don't leave a smoking gun. There's also that charming indie film *Smoke Signals*, which convinced Sherman Alexie to stick to writing short stories. Look high and low. Smoke is everywhere. Here one minute, gone the next. And, it deserves a "thank you."

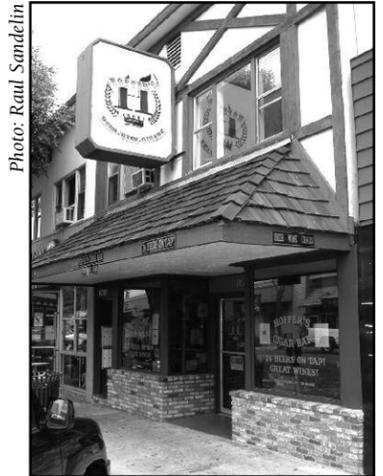
But, a big *tergum quo nos caepi* to all my brethren in the hills east of El Cajon. Let's get back to the beginning and my main point: Smoke is the perfect metaphor for music. Not only does it swirl around a room, so physical yet untouchable, smoke also has a storied role in the making of the music we love. What would the roadhouse, honkytonk, and juke joint of yore look like with smoking ordinances posted on the walls? Where would our croaky, old blues singers be if it weren't for cigarettes and whisky? How would the Beatles have ever held a press conference? What would Tom Waits stuff into the corner of his mouth? Why would Kurt Cobain have sat through yet another MTV interview? Smoking has become an indispensable prop in popular music. And, it seems like the music died when we tried to legislate away the smoke.

Fortunately, the whole world doesn't think like those killjoys over at the American Lung Association. Hoffer's Cigar Bar in downtown La Mesa is doing it old school.

Walking into Hoffer's is like walking into a *film noir*. Wood paneling and brick gladly replace the all-too-current faux finishes and neon one finds elsewhere. The room is enveloped in rich shadow and mood lighting. The sunlight beaming in from the doors reminds the patron that there's a world worth escaping out there. However, thankfully, "I'm in here and not a part of it." Hoffer's is an escape to another place and time.

For this bar, smoke means elegance. This ain't no smoky liar's club for sharecroppin' crackers. It's where one can come and savor the rich tobaccos from far off tropical ports with names as exotic as the names of Angelina Jolie's children. "A cigar is a vacation," the bar's owner Phil Hoffman reminds us. And, all of the seats are first class.

Given that Hoffer's is such a buttoned down operation, it's amazing to learn that Hoffman is only a year into his first business. Groomed in the automobile industry, Hoffman is a trained mechanic who spent the past 25 years in wholesale tire sales. He even helped the Price family spearhead the



Hoffer's, 8282 La Mesa Blvd.



Hoffer's patio performance space



Bruce Cameron at Hoffer's

Price Club tire outlets in the early '80s. Running contrary to common sense, he decided to start his first business when the economy got really bad. "We owned the building," he explains, "and watched a number of tenants come and go." By summer of 2008, he said *basta Rasta* to working for someone else. At that same time, the latest tenant on La Mesa Boulevard wanted out of her lease. The challenges were many, but Hoffman decided it was time. Hoffer's Cigar Bar opened its doors in August of last year.

Combining his passions for a good beer, sports, music, good conversation, and, of course, a good cigar, Hoffman installed everything he would need to entertain patrons as he would want to be entertained himself. "We put in a state-of-the-art sound system," he says. Two wide-screens adorn the bar for Sunday and Monday night football. "We have 24 beers on tap, 20 wines, four ports, and 40 to 50 different cigars." Two humidor rooms allow customers to journey through the vast selection of stogies. Hoffman has even developed his own rating system, ranging from mild to full-bodied to help find the "right cigar for the right person."

Not ready to light yourself afire? Never fear. All of the smoking is done out on the patio. The inside bar is kept smoke-free by a couple of de-smokifier doohickies (I never was good at mechanical nomenclature) that blow the smoke back out the doors before it enters.

But, I know you've been waiting to feel some *déjà vu* all over again. So, another *tergum quo nos caepi* to all who have wondered why there's a diphthong in the word "Budweiser." Let's get back to the main point of this whole thing and see if we can get some smoke and music swirling in unison.

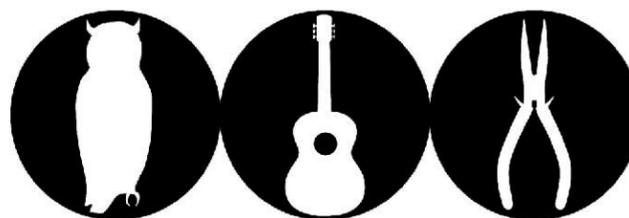
In May, jazz trumpeter Bruce Cameron walked into Hoffer's and proposed to provide a professional jazz combo on Saturday nights. Phil Hoffman replied with an immediate "yes." The rest is history. And, Cameron along with local guitar pro Mark Augustin and bassist/drummer Ted Williams have been packing 'em in on the patio, the same patio where all of the smoking is going on.

Bruce Cameron, many may remember, is the former musical partner of the late Hollis Gentry. Cameron and Gentry started the group that would go on to become

continued on page 14.

## ERRATA

The people in the photo below were incorrectly identified in last month's Troubadour. They are the Pony Tales, a trio that performs at Wood 'n' Lips Open Mic on Thursday evenings.



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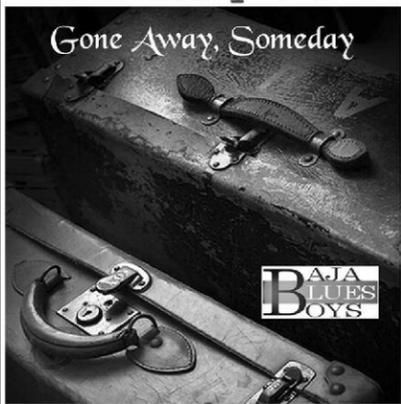
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Hoffer's, continued from page 3.

Fattburger in the 1980s. Cameron himself has been playing the professional jazz circuit between San Diego and L.A. since 1972. He has also acted as promoter, booking shows at Croce's, Elario's, and Humphrey's. In 1984, he and Gentry were invited to play the national anthem before a Padres' World Series game at, then, Jack Murphy Stadium.

In 1978, Cameron had a national hit with the album *With All My Love*. The album featured Nathan East, now of Fourplay and Eric Clapton fame. Today, Cameron's playing reaches back into the American songbook. With the occasional vertical surprise, Cameron's trumpet traces the melody in a way reminiscent of Chet Baker. Understatement allows lush open spaces to emerge. Timber and tonal introspection reign over speed. Cameron pulls out the mute a la Miles, even the flugelhorn a la Chetty for accoutrement. However, the accoutrements only underscore a set already woven of smoky lyrical webs. The listener could sit alone for a week straight with nothing but Bruce Cameron and his horn and still hear new sonic crevices opening up at the end of Day 7.

Mark Augustin has been a mainstay in San Diego for years. Befriended and mentored early on by his hero – the late Joe Pass – Mark can either breathe fiery bebop or lay back behind the beat and beneath the surface of the music. In addition to playing with the likes of Gilbert Castellanos and Bob Magnusson, who appear on his 2006 CD *Soul Purpose*, Augustin is owner of Mark's Guitar Exchange near the Sports Arena.

Ted Williams, in addition to playing for

the Boston Red Sox (or is that a different article?), is a trombonist extraordinaire. However, he has developed a technique by which he can play both electric bass and drums at the same time! This is no novelty act. Williams frets the bass with his left hand, shucks the bass drum with his right foot, sticks the snare, a tom, and hi-hat with his right hand (and, of course, shags fly balls for the Sox with his left big toe...but, again, that's a different article). The result is a tightly harnessed, one-man rhythm section in which bass and drum snap back and forth with intuitive precision.

The trio is called Full House. Besides giving the small crowd a tasty sampling of both smooth jazz and the rough stuff, the band also steps back each week to allow guest artists to play out in front. Jaime Valle made a recent appearance on Hoffer's patio. Torch song dynamos Cynthia Hammond and Janice Edwards have also fronted the stage.

With the Full House trio of Cameron, Augustin, and Williams intact, every Saturday night guarantees the listener several sets of some of the finest jazz this side of a Spazio or Dante's in L.A. The guest performers keep it fresh and different each week.

So, there you have it: smoke and music. Jazz and fine cigars. Hoffer's also has an agreement with several restaurants in the area. If you get hungry, you can order snacks or dinner right to your table. It should be mentioned that there is a \$5 cover on Saturday nights to help pay the band. But, this charge is minimal compared to the range of talent being showcased. Hoffer's is open seven days a week. When the band isn't jamming, there's still great beer, wine, conversation, and, lest we forget, a fine cigar. ☺

Peggy Watson, continued from page 11.

note saying 'Why don't you come by my salon; I'd like to do something about your hair.' and another time 'I'd like to talk with you about what you wear on stage.' I guess you could say I was kind of style 'unconscious.'" Maybe so, but I can't imagine too many 50-something moms who have dedicated 30 years of their lives to creating and performing their own special and unique brand of music, and then going bravely out into the world to perform it; pretty "hip" and "stylish" if you ask me.

Finally, we talk about the changes she's seen in the music industry in the course of the last 30 years. "I almost feel like making CDs at this point is, well, pointless; I don't buy them. I download – legally mind you – anything I want. I just go on iTunes and get it. I don't go to the store and buy a CD, or order a CD from Amazon.com. Once in a while I'll find a CD on iTunes where I listen to three or four of the songs and I love it, so I'll buy it, but most albums for most people have only one or two songs that they want to hear."

What Peggy does believe will never change is the need for and her desire to serve social causes through benefit concerts. "Although I don't write that many political songs, I try to write meaningful songs, and it's really important to me that my songs serve a good cause when possible. For that reason, I always have, and will continue to perform benefit concerts. I don't have tons of money to give, but I can donate my voice and my songs."

She leaves me on this last note, "I love to entertain people. There are few things in life that give me more pleasure."

Peggy and David Beldock, with their backing band Paul Beech and Gerry Reva, will share their joy of entertaining and giving back at a Thanksgiving concert to benefit the local food pantry at Christ Lutheran Church on Cass St. in Pacific Beach on November 21 at 7pm. For reservations call (858) 483-2300.

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