

## Dancin' at the rascal fair

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**T**he thing about ASCAP's "Music Café" at Sundance each year is that the musicians displaying their wares are every bit as independent and eclectic as the filmmakers displaying theirs. The collective palette is awash with overtones of singularity. It's a great mix. And fun, too!

**T**hat isn't to say that the unique vision of these performing artists has kept notoriety at bay...has kept them under the radar. They run the hip gamut of fame. There aren't many of them that are unfamiliar to the musically active in our midst. Fans of filmmakers and performing artists alike consider themselves a confederacy of cool.

**T**hat's the attraction of the Sundance Film Festival in general and the Music Café in particular to local culture junkies. The space-time of Park City in January produces a feeding frenzy for those who partake of the arts lifestyle.

**I**t should be noted, however, that many of my friends, as mentioned many times previous, are not of this persuasion. They would just as soon the people-in-black went back to where they came from. I do see their point. Afternoon drive time is abhorrent and, if that wasn't enough, there is the overwhelming shortage of empty barstools.

**T**he upside, however, if one does go to the trouble of perusing the festival schedule for shows and gigs—even considering the overlapping event times and all the rushing around searching for parking spaces and bus stops—is that there is something here for everybody.

**W**here else could you go from motorcycling and rafting and tramping around South America with a 23-year old Ernesto "Che" Guevara and within a couple of hours catch Edie Brickell's brilliant set with Charlie Sexton at "Plan B." Not to mention Tim O'Brien and Shawn Colvin and John Doe and John Hiatt.

**I**f the word isn't out on the Music Café at Plan B among the locals, those in town for the films are definitely in the loop. The line starts forming on the sidewalk out front around noon or shortly thereafter and by the time the first act of the day appears the joint is shoulder to shoulder.

**R**unning the gauntlet with coffee and Baileys requires the most subtle of maneuvers. And clambering about the prized cushion area directly in front of the stage calls upon route-finding of the highest order. There is no floor space. Between crux moves you must decide whether to step on clothing or backpack or human appendage.

**F**orward momentum becomes your enemy. As Isaac Newton used to spout, bodies in motion tend to remain in motion. This makes it imperative not to tarry and attempt to repair damage caused by your previous lunge. The attention given to an apology for stepping upon someone's digital camera could end up causing you to kick a cell phone completely through the next guy's ear.

**F**or the most part the crowd respects the performers to the extent that chatter is reduced during the sets. There are those times, however, when it takes a stack-of-Marshall-amps worth of peer group pressure to quiet the throng. This is Sundance after all and deals must be cut and calls must be taken and males and females alike must be hit on.

**A** perfect example was the sheer mass of mutter taking place while Tim O'Brien performed a fiddle piece that he contributed to the "Cold Mountain" soundtrack. These are sounds that have the ambient texture of mist upon the Blue Ridge and evoke a sense of time and place. To fully appreciate and experience the nuance of the sound—to become one with the civil war--at least a bit of focus needs to be maintained.

**B**ut that is the case with most all the performers at the Music Café during the festival. The sets are for the most part acoustic with auras stripped bare and non-essential frills checked at the door. Even with the place packed to the rafters there is a radiance of creative energy that brings you back show after show, year after year.

**T**here is nothing quite like the overwhelming intimacy of breath held in the moment as art mouths its promise. It may not often be the case but there are flashes when the collective unconscious becomes conscious...if only for a fleeting instant. It is this transcendence that causes lines to form upon cold sidewalks in old mining towns during the middle of winter.

**T**his could very well go on for a while. With 170,000 composers, songwriters, lyricists, and music publishers from all genres in the fold, ASCAP has a rather large reservoir to draw from. If they were to creatively program these resources they could very well sponsor enough Music Café's for another 8500 Sundance Film Festivals. My anti-festival friends are going to love to hear that.

**W**hat the films and club concerts give the town is a distinct "air" that adds to its already heady temperament for eccentricity. It's part of what's attractive about living here. It says our nature is different from others and this separateness is a condition to which we aspire. We want art...not nuclear waste.

**S**o, as these January afternoons continue to become eclectic, we should celebrate our independence. We who are peculiar and just after the unique with our odd manners and strange ways should take a moment and knock back a couple in honor of those who feed our artistic cravings during the rest of the year.

**H**ere's to the Park City Film Society, the Eccles Center for the Performing Arts, the Egyptian Theater, Mountain Town Stages, the Kimball Arts Center, and all the local artists and musicians and club owners and venue operators who help keep our community right where we want it...just a bit off plumb.