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Loop returns to brighten downtown's music scene

Nightlife by Don Challenger

THE LATE AND sometimes lamented Loop lives again, and although there's a new boss and no bus, tonight's crosstown jamboree will pack enough local talent into six clubs and restaurants to give the affair a new lease on life — even if it's only a monthly lease.

Three and four years ago the Loop, a once-a-month circuit of clubs sponsored by Fine Times magazine, was the upstate answer to Rehoboth Avenue on the Fourth of July. On the last Friday night of every month, in-town clubs would book their biggest acts, Fine Times would contract buses to run a circuit from venue to venue, and club owners would oil their cash registers and pray.

At the bell, thousands of music fans and scene-makers — down from Philly, over from Jersey, up from the University of Delaware — would squirm into downtown clubs, until on good nights it was a 20-minute walk from your hand to your glass.

But the same financial snowball that caught up with some of the city's best rooms — recession, band saturation, tougher enforcement of drinking laws — eventually forced the Loop into hibernation as well last October.

Enter John Hedley, a local music entrepreneur who books bands at Gallucio's Downtown and Three Cheers in Newark. Hedley got interested in the nuts and bolts of rock promotion while selling sodas at a J. Geils-King Crimson concert at the Wilmington Armory in 1978; he's been producing his own shows or booking bands for clubs ever since. When he sensed that the Loop still had a pulse, he arranged a revival with Fine Times — a stripped down, six-club, no-bus version for which he would take over the bookings and put strong bands in clubs best suited to them.

"It's still a Fine Times operation," Hedley says, "but I'm doing the footwork and the promotion. I'd booked a lot of Loops for clubs I was handling in the past, and I'd always done well. It's my job to know what band will do well at what club."

Hedley cites a partial-sponsorship arrangement with a brewery — arranged by his partner, D.J. Gluck — as "a key to putting the new Loop together, because it allowed us to trim the smaller clubs' expenses."

Tonight's Loop features Tommy Conwell's Young Ramblers — making their only Delaware appearance this month — at Gallucio's Downtown, 208 W. 10th St.; the R.B. Hiskins Band and the Jones Purcell Band at the Greenery, 410 Market St. Mall; the Girlfriends at Oscar's, 703 Market St. Mall; Honour Society and Coup d'Etat at the Haberdashery, 700 King St.; White Lightning at the Barn Door, Ninth and Tatnall streets; and Chanson Noir at Bruno Gelato, 804 Market St. Mall. A $3 cover gets you into all the clubs.

● Townes Van Zandt, the country, pop and folk songwriter-singer from Texas, has a sheaf of hits in his portfolio, including "Pancho and Lefty" and "If I Needed You." Trouble is, they were hits not for Van Zandt but for people like Willie Nelson, Emmylou Harris, Hoyt Axton and Don Williams.

Things might have been different if Van Zandt hadn't spent most of his recording career sequestered on the tiny Poppy and Tomato labels. Van Zandt has been called "a cross between Woody Guthrie and Leonard Cohen, combining a ramblin' man mystique with a touch of contemporary angst." He appears Sunday night at 8 at St. Alban's Parish Hall, 913 Wilson Road, with Mickey White and Donny Silverman, in a concert sponsored by the Folk Survivors. Tickets are $5 in advance and $6 at the door. Call 475-2599 for information.

● Wilmington's John Neel, whose roadhouse rhythm-and-blues bands made him a top attraction in Delaware for years, returns to the area Saturday night when he appears at Philadelphia's Chestnut Cabaret as a member of guitarist Dickey Betts' touring band. Neel has been working as a songwriter and musician in Nashville.

● It's zero hour for the Hooters. The Philadelphia pop-and-reggae band's long-awaited album, "Nervous Night," is due next week from Columbia records; meanwhile the band will appear Thursday at Newark's Main Street Cabaret, with the line presumably forming somewhere around Elkton.

● Englishman Joe Stead, singer-comedian who plays guitar and banjo and bills himself as a boring old something or other, appears Tuesday night at 8 at Immanuel Episcopal Church, 2400 W. 17th Street, in a concert sponsored by the Green Willow Folk Club. Tickets are $5 in advance, $6 at the door; children younger than 12, $2; younger than 6, free. Call 994-0495 for information.

● Here's what else is happening:

Cheryl's Sky Lounge, New Castle Square Mall: Johnny Fisher's Willie Nelson Show, Friday and Saturday.

Comedy Cabaret, 410 Market St. Mall, 65-AMUSE: Bill McCarty, John Schuler and Scott Bruce, Friday and Saturday.

Country Squire, 5 Rehoboth Ave., Rehoboth Beach: Dave Lemmon, Friday; the Heartbeatz, Saturday.

Deer Park, 108 W. Main St., Newark: The Snap, Saturday; Markley Band, Sunday; Rockett 88, Tuesday; Me and the Boys, Wednesday.

Main Street Cabaret, 115 E. Main St., Newark: John Eddie, Friday; Rockett 88, Saturday; Tom Larsen Band, Tuesday; the Bullets, Wednesday.

Minggles, Pike Creek Valley Shopping Center: Stranger and Shaker, Friday; Soars, Stranger and Shaker, Saturday.

Prime Times Room, 15 Presbury Square, Newark: Nope, Friday and Saturday.

State Theater, Main Street, Newark: No Excuse, midnight Saturday.

Three Cheers, 58 E. Main St., Newark: Mini-Mall: The Exam and No Excuse, Friday; Rhythm Dupes, Saturday; Rockett 88 and Fred Ford and the Fairlanes, Wednesday; White Lightning, Thursday.

Timothy's, Hercules Plaza, 13-13 Market St.: Conni Lassen and the Don Glanden Trio, Friday and Saturday.

Zink's Place, 1208 Washington St.: Anna King's Dirty Works, Friday; White Lightning, Saturday.

Don Challenger is a free-lance writer.

Bingo

Today: 7:15 p.m., St. Thomas the Apostle School Hall, Second Street and Woodlawn Avenue; 7:30, St. John's-Holy Angels Catholic Church, Possum Park Road near Newark; St. Stanislaus Church, Eighth and Locust streets; Eastern Sussex Family Branch YMCA, 105 Church St., Rehoboth Beach; 8, Frederica Fire Hall; Marydel Fire Hall; Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6483, Milford; Clayton Fire Hall; Modern Maturity Center, 18 Greenhill Ave., Dover.

Saturday: 7:30 p.m., Mill Creek Fire Company, 3600 Kirkwood Highway; St. Anthony of Padua, 10th and Rodney streets; St. Stanislaus Church, Eighth and Locust streets; Milford Elks Lodge 2401, South Marshall Street, Milford; 8, Cheswold Fire Hall, Magnolia Fire Hall.

Sunday: 1:30 p.m., Dover Elks, Forest Avenue; St. Paul's School Hall, Third and Van Buren streets; 2, Little Creek Fire Hall; 1:30, St. Anthony of Padua, 10th and Rodney streets; 7, St. Peter's Catholic Church, 10th and Harmony streets, New Castle; 7:30, Harrington Fire Hall; 8, Bowers Beach Fire Hall; Leipsic Fire Hall.

Monday: 7:15 p.m., Holy Spirit Catholic Church gymnasium, 12 Winder Road, Garfield Park; Temple Beth El, 301 Possum Park Road, Newark; 7:30, Salesianum School cafeteria, 18th and Broom streets; St. John the Beloved Catholic Church, 907 Milltown Road, Sherwood Park; St. Catherine of Siena, 2501 Centerville Road; Aetna Hose Hook and Ladder Company of Newark Fire Hall, Delaware 273; 8, American Legion Post 3, Milford; Newman Lee Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8801, Clayton; Modern Maturity Center, 18 Greenhill Ave., Dover; Bowers Beach Fire Hall.

Tuesday: 7 p.m., Holy Rosary School, 3200 Philadelphia Pike, Claymont; 7:30, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church hall, 801 Du Pont Highway, Wilmington Manor; St. John the Beloved Catholic Church, 907 Milltown Road, Sherwood Park; 8, Citizens Hose Company of Smyrna Fire Hall; Carlisle Fire Company of Milford Fire Hall; Fraternal Order of Police Lodge, Little Creek-Wyatt L. Fox Post 2, Dover.

Wednesday: 7:15 p.m., St. Matthew's Catholic Church auditorium, 807 Maryland Ave.; 7:30, Salesianum School cafeteria, 18th and Broom streets; Singerly Fire Hall, Maryland 279, Elkton, Md.; Selbyville Fire House, West Main Street; 8, Camden-Wyoming Fire Hall; Dover Elks, Forest Avenue.

Thursday: 7:15 p.m., Holy Spirit Catholic Church gymnasium, 12 Winder Road, Garfield Park; Temple Beth El, 301 Possum Park Road, Newark; 7:30, St. Hedwig's Parish Hall, 1009 Sycamore St.; Corpus Christi Social Hall, 900 New Road, Elsmere; Newark Elks Lodge 2281, 267 Christiana Road (Delaware 273), New Castle; 8, Hartly Fire Hall; Felton Community Fire Hall; Delaware Veterans Inc., Walker Road and Peer Street, Dover.

Clubs host heart benefit

Dance for Heart Week begins Saturday, at the Kirkwood Fitness and Racquet Ball Clubs, the Brandywine Center YMCA and the Wilmington and Arden YWCAs to benefit the American Heart Association of Delaware. For information, contact the participating clubs or the American Heart Association at 654-5269.

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People
How's the man doing who occupies the governor's office these past 100 days? News-Journal reporter Celia Cohen looks at those days and compares them to past administrations. Plus...how's a bachelor faring as host of Woodburn? Discover this fascinating look at Mike Castle in this weekend's Sunday News Journal.

Food
The cuisine may not be first class but the cruise is triple-decker fun. Read in Dining Out Al Mascitti's review of the floating restaurant, Lady Christina. Learn what to expect from the buffet and the three-hour trip down the Christina and Delaware rivers.

Fashion
Want the everlasting, waterproof eyeliner that is often advertised and seldom a reality? In Threads, reporter Stephanie Whyche describes a surgical process that, in effect, tattoos the eyelid. Read how it's done and what it costs in the Sunday News Journal.

The repercussions of Vietnam are many and varied. Starting in the Sunday News Journal and continuing Monday and Tuesday is a comprehensive look back at the war in Vietnam, which ended 10 years ago. What did the war mean to Delawareans who fought, to those who refused to go and to the families of those who died? What emotional pains or physical scars remain? Read this insightful series starting on Sunday.

Sports
Racing expert Izzy Katzman and sports editor Jack Chevalier team up to cover opening day at Delaware Park. Kevin Tresolini provides full results from the historic Penn Relays at Franklin Field. Ray Finocchiaro checks out the Phillies and Cubs at Veterans Stadium. Gene Bryson covers Delaware State's Red vs. Blue spring football finale.

Lifestyle
Look for a Sunday bonus section that's jammed full of household hints. What's important to consider when carpet shopping? How can your antiques be used to decorate? What insulated window treatment qualifies for a tax credit? Find in Home and Apartment stories on installing exercise equipment in your home, replacing faucet washers, how humidity affects the home and other practical ideas for putting your home on the best-dressed list.

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