

Brew Pub brimming with talent

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Whether dining, or just enjoying a cool one, patrons at the Howe Sound Brew Pub on Monday (Aug. 27) got the chance to sample some of the hidden talent during Open Mike Mondays.

The evening began with Squamish local and Open Mike fixture Owen Veber's psychedelic strumming.

Veber's now familiar sounds filled the pub, mixing with the clink of glasses and the clamour of the crowd.

Using pre-recorded loops of himself playing the bass, Veber's performance seemed to have no beginning or end, just pure gold.

Following Veber was Ken Greenway from Pemberton who played covers of *House of Pain* by Faster Pussycat, *Gravedigger* by the Dave Matthews Band and an acoustic version of Dusty Springfield's *Spooky*.

The folksy undertones of his guitar mixed well with the soulful rock edge of his voice, conjuring up performances by Bruce Springsteen or Bob Dylan.

However his polo shirt and close-cropped hair showed his songs are not part of an image but his imagination.

"It's awesome," said Greenway when asked about Open Mike. "There's a nice sound that travels well.

"The acoustics are great and same with the crowd. You don't get crowds like this in Pemberton or Whistler."

Next up was the grassroots duo Cream Cracker, with Squamish residents Paul Coulter-Brown and Paul Borchart. The duo perform with string instruments including an acoustic guitar, mandolin and violin.

They played stripped-down straight forward country so potent a genuine hootenanny was likely to break, and as more hoots and whoops came from the crowd, one could be forgiven for mistaking the Brew Pub for a barn dance.

Coulter-Brown, who moved to Squamish from England five years ago, said he never imagined he would be sounding off in Howe Sound.

"If someone would have told me years ago that someday I'd be in a pub in Squamish playing the mandolin I would have said they're nuts," said Coulter-Brown. "But all of the sudden I'm here having a few drinks and sharing some songs.

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—Paul Coulter-Brown

"I think the caliber of performer is getting better every time [and] this is the busiest I've ever seen it," he added.

Kelly Thomas, who was in town to go rock climbing and celebrate her birthday, decided to take a shot next and took her guitar on stage.

"It's very cool," said the Sequim, WA native. "But I still get the golly-wobbles when I get up there.

"I guess it was my first time performing internationally."

Other audiences have been more subdued and focused, said Thomas, but she likes the energy of the pub crowd.

"I've played in coffee houses where the crowd is more tuned in but here the crowd was amazing."

Thomas' soft yet energetic performance consisted of three covers: John Denver's *My Sweet Lady*;

Neil Young's *Long May You Run*; and *That Song about the Midway* by Joni Mitchell

The next performance featured the John Mayer-like talent of Ben Thompson, who moved to Squamish from Ireland.

Perhaps it was his choice of music or just his ability to play but Thompson seemed to get the biggest reaction from the crowd.

His rendition of the Barenaked Ladies' hit *Brian Wilson* had most of the crowd singing along. Thompson's voice was inspired and original, with his playing both poised and powerful.

Audience member Amy Wooding, who has been to two previous Open Mikes, said she has enjoyed both events immensely.

"The music seems to create a pleasant atmosphere," said Wooding. "You can tell it's of a good quality without it being distracting."

Following Thompson was local Dana Marie Battaglia, whose set consisted of Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*, Smashing Pumpkins' *Disarm* and the Cranberries' *Zombie*.

Despite performing covers, Battaglia's singing seemed to come from a genuine experience, with enough heart to make a perfect melody.

The Squamish songstress, who has attended countless Open Mikes, said she was glad to see the amped-up crowd support the acoustic entries.

"I'm not surprised it's been so successful. There's a sense of community.

"And I like the drunk people," she laughed. "It's fun to entertain them and it entertains me."

The night closed with Jason McMillan covering the Rolling Stones' *Wild Horses*. His performance was raw, pure and full of conviction.

Despite the thinning crowd, McMillan was able to elicit some crowd participation during the last few verses of the Stones' staple.