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The Shanachie invites musical storytellers to participate in open mic competition

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The crowd looks on as Steve Hutchman, of Ambler, performs at The Shanachie's Open Mic Night, June 17.

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By Jesse Reilly
Staff Writer

Considering that Shanachie means “storytelling” in Gaelic, Ed Egan, owner of The Shanachie, Ambler’s popular restaurant and pub, said that its newest venture in live music should prove successful.

“We’re just hoping that some people coming here to perform will be able to share their own story musically,” he said of the pub’s recent partnership with Slot-One Productions recording studio to host an open mic night. “It’s something we definitely want local artists to make their own.”

Although this is a new event, the Ambler venue is no stranger to live entertainment.

Keeping true to its roots, the restaurant hosts traditional Irish music every Tuesday evening that is open to all musicians, Egan said, adding that bands frequent the small stage every weekend.

Since its inception late last month, the open mic night has averaged about half a dozen participants and the past several weeks have just been a warm-up, Egan said.

The real competition begins this Wednesday, kicking off a 12-week run that will produce a dozen winners who will go against each other in a semi-final round Sept. 16 and a final round the following week.

The winner will receive free recording time at the Ambler-based studio.

“Just winning studio time means nothing,” Rick Denzien, owner of the studio, said. “But I work with top songwriters and have major connections in the business; we can help the winner shape his or her own distinctive sound.”

Other weekly prizes include gift certificates and Phillies tickets, Egan said.

Although Egan and Denzien said they preferred to keep the judges anonymous, they did say local radio, music and production talent will be tallying the scores.

Scores will be based on stylistic and technical components of the performance, Denzien said.

“Did I think his [or her] performance was good or bad, did they get nervous, was the song pitchy, did they screw up and forget some words or chords,” Denzien said, illustrating some questions that will be running through judges’ minds.

Covers and original music are welcome and although Denzien said that those singing covers will initially lose points for creativity, they can quickly make them up by adding themselves to the song.

“It’s not about the song all the time, it’s about making it your own,” he said.

Staying away from the stigma of karaoke, Denzien and Egan said that those who come to perform are serious about their craft — regardless of their level of formal training.

“Since we started this, I have been surprised at how many talented musicians there are locally,” Egan said. “It’s remarkable.”

The evening has seen a range of ages, skills and genres, they both said, adding that you do not have to be 21 to participate.

With the most popular sound Wednesday being folk-rock, Egan said that the contest will allow the pub to expand its horizons.

“We’re really trying to open ourselves up,” he said. “We are known as an Irish bar and love that, but we are welcoming all genres; we’re looking for a wide spread.”

Denzien said that he is hoping to create the feel of an “MTV Unplugged” session for this family-friendly evening out.

“Because the stage is not big enough to get a lot of equipment up there, we are really going for an acoustic sound,” he said. “Most people bring their guitars with them and we’re hoping to have a keyboard soon.”

Hoping to see an increase in musicians and spectators, Egan said he thinks the next few months hold a lot of promise.

"I am excited to see it grow," Denzien said. "It should make for a great summer of live music."

If You Go ...

The Shanachie Irish Pub

& Restaurant,

111 E. Butler Ave,

Ambler, PA 19002,

in conjunction with

Slot-One Productions,

will host open mic

night for local talent

every Wednesday.

The competition begins

9 p.m. Participants can

register starting 8:30 p.m.

Info: contact Denzien

at 215-643-1313.

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