



The Taybank - Dunkeld, Scotland

My Dream Café Stewart Hendrickson

Greg Brown has a song called [The Dream Café](#), but it's more about a mysterious woman than a café. My *Dream Café* is about music and musicians. Several years ago as my wife and I were driving from Inverness down to Edinburgh in Scotland, we stopped at Dunkeld and decided to spend the night there. Dunkeld is the home of Scottish singer-songwriter [Dougie MacLean](#). There he restored an old pub on the River Tay called the [Taybank](#). It's also called the "Music Pub" or "Scotland's Musical Meeting Place." It consists of a small pub with a piano in one corner, a fiddle and guitar hanging on the wall, a larger concert room upstairs, and a few overnight guest rooms.

We went to the pub for dinner, hoping to find a session later in the evening. There was no session that night, but I was encouraged to get out my fiddle and play a few tunes. They kindly turned off one of Dougie's CDs, and I played for almost an hour. They have a policy of encouraging visiting musicians to stop and play, and they also have sessions, music workshops, and concerts most every night. Dougie has since sold the pub to musicians Nigel and Beverley Large who continue to operate it in the same way. That's a *Dream Café*. Why can't we have something like that here in Seattle?

In Edinburgh we stopped for lunch at a small bakery café called *On The Mound*, just off the upper end of the [Royal Mile](#). This was another one of Dougie's inspirations, owned by a friend of his. Like the *Taybank* it had a piano and a house fiddle and guitar nearby. Again I was welcomed to pick up the fiddle and play a few tunes, which I did for about half an hour. Unfortunately the café no longer exists, it was closed down for political reasons.

The [Old Town Café](#) in Bellingham is another example of a musician-friendly place. I was in Bellingham in April, 2008 to give a concert at the [Roeder Home](#).

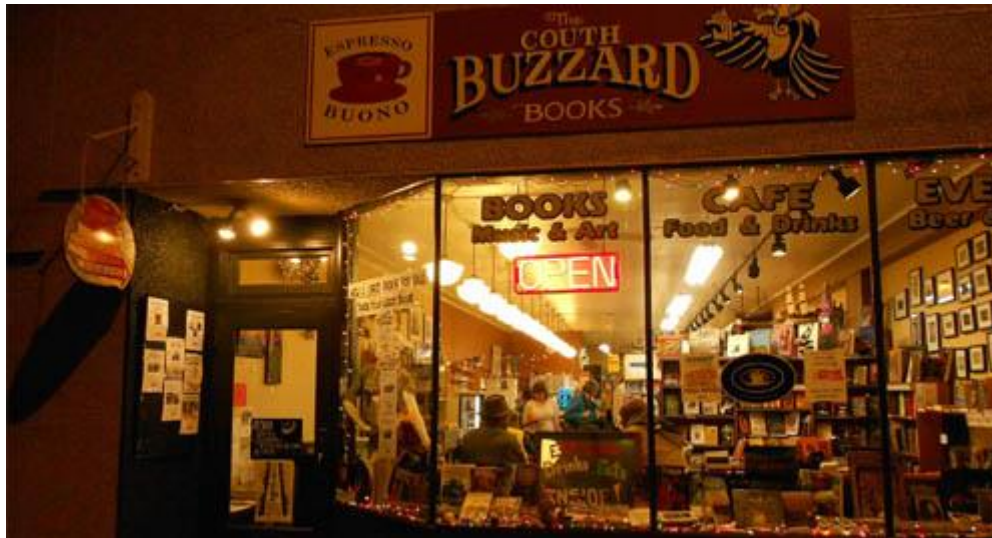
We stayed around the next day and met a friend for lunch at the *Old Town Café*. It's a [cozy café](#), open for breakfast and lunch until 3 pm, with good food, a friendly community focus, and a place where musicians are always welcome. Arriving at about 11:30, all the tables were occupied, so I signed the list and waited a few minutes until a table was available. After ordering a breakfast omelet I opened my fiddle case, went over to an area designated for musicians (with a tip jar) and started to play a few tunes. The acoustics were nice, and people seemed to enjoy it, so I played until my order came. After I finished eating, I played for another half hour or so. When the waiter came with the bill, I discovered that my meal was free, a nice appreciation for my playing, and I also had a few dollars in the tip jar. What a nice concept!

In 2008 we started a monthly 2nd Friday Coffeehouse Concert Series for the Pacific Northwest Folklore Society. We were looking for our *Dream Café*. We started out in a small, but cozy little coffeehouse on the corner of Winona, Linden and N 73rd St. It used to be the *Greenlake Espresso*, then the *Kaffé Shachor*, and yet again the *Round The Corner Café*, but that didn't last long before it closed due to poor management.

Next we booked the *Library Café*, renamed the *Crown Hill Bistro* in Crown Hill. It was a nicer venue, a bit larger, a cozy room with three fireplaces. The acoustics were not bad, but it usually needed some sound enhancement. The food was okay, not great, but it never did a good business and closed after a about a year.

We then moved to the *Wayward Coffeehouse* in Greenwood for our Coffeehouse Concerts. The *Wayward* had its problems. It was a larger room with a full coffee bar, but it was long and narrow with a high ceiling. It definitely needed sound reinforcement and even then the acoustics were not great. The assortment of odd tables and chairs made seating a problem. Parking was difficult and the management did not do a good job of promoting the music.

I still had my fantasy of a *Dream Café* – a venue seating about 40 people, totally acoustic, requiring no sound system, good food and drinks, and a management that appreciates and promotes good music.



When [*Couth Buzzard Books and Espresso Buono Café*](#) opened in Greenwood, a couple of blocks south of the *Wayward* in early 2010, I was there for the grand opening. There was live music – a variety of local musicians – food and drink, and a lively community spirit. I talked to Theo, one of the owners, and he was quite interested in bringing music into the store. When I suggested moving our Coffeehouse Concerts to the *Couth* he was very enthusiastic.



We had our first concert at the *Couth* on May 14, 2010. The performance area in the back is created by moving several bookshelves on wheels up to the front of the store. The space seats about 40 people and has great acoustics – no sound system required. And parking is much better just a few blocks south of the *Wayward*. We love doing our concerts there – no sound system to set up, good food and drinks, including beer and wine available, adequate space for audiences both small and large (standing room only), and a comfortable community feel.

There is something happening almost every day at the *Couth*: writing groups on Monday and Tuesday evenings, an eclectic open mic on Wednesday, concerts on Friday and Saturday, games or music on Thursday evenings, an Irish session every first and third Saturday from 11am to 1 pm, and a folk music jam every

fourth Saturday around noon. One of our local musicians said, “the *Couth* doesn’t have customers, it has residents.”

Theo has done a great job in bringing the community together at his bookstore. Oh yes, he does sell books – mostly used and some new. If you bring in your used books for credit you can buy other used books at half price or new books at 10% off – that’s the best deal in town.

But independent bookstores, even those with a café and music venue, have a hard time surviving, particularly in this poor economy. We need to support the *Couth* now more than ever to keep it viable – it would be a tragic loss to the community, music and the arts if it does not survive. Buy books, eat and drink at the Café, come to concerts, partake in other activities, and introduce friends to this special place. It’s my *Dream Café*, and bookstore, and more.