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Zayante

Club Z Slates Final Big Blow Out Saturday

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It certainly won't be the biggest New Year's Eve party in the county — but it may be the most historic. For after the last note is played, after the last drink is served, after the last hanger-on has said good-night, the front door will close for good on the Club Zayante.

Deep in the redwoods at the juncture of Valley View Ave. and E. Zayante Road, the "Club Z" looks less like a nightclub than a peculiar artist's dream. Murals cover its outer walls with renderings of purple mountains and a large portrait of George Washington, lifted directly from a dollar bill. You can't see the swimming pool from the road, but it's there, just behind the high redwood fence. In the summer the pool is crowded with sun bathers, most without swimming suits or any attire at all.

Less a place than a state of mind, the Club Z started in the spring of 1969. Since that time it has gone through many changes. It has been a steak and lobster restaurant, and a kiddie swimming pool littered with popsicle wrappers.

It has been the launching ground for many local musicians — Warmth was playing here while the Mall was still a figment of someone's imagination — and has also been a beacon for an impressive roster of "name" performers from outside.

Mose Allison, John Lee Hooker, Clifton Chenier, R. Crumb and His Cheap Suit Serenaders — all have made their way into the eerie stillness of the towering trees to play here. For many of these stars, the Club Z is the only place in Santa Cruz where they will play. That's the kind of place it is. Or was.

Everything the Club Zayante has been — the swimming pool, the night club, the kitchen, which even last week was serving up full turkey dinners for \$2.95 — are all the result of one person, club owner Tom Louagie.

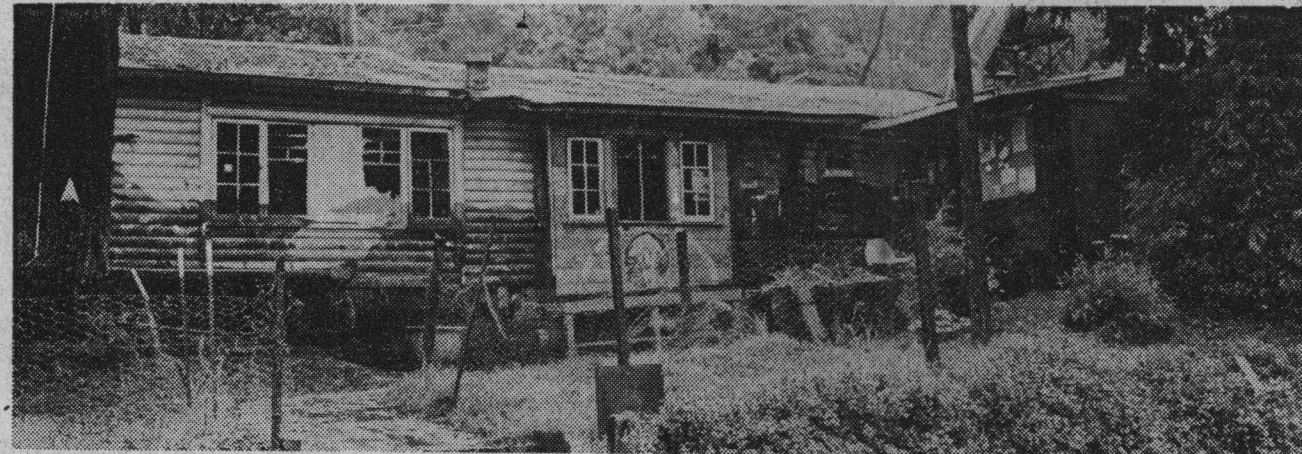
Tall, with an engaging smile and a face that looks young for 41, Louagie has created the club, almost as an extension of his own personality.

Although he has brought in some of the best talent in the area, and provided an intimate setting for it (where else could you hear Clifton Chenier and Alfredo Ortiz, the Paraguayan harpist, both in the same week — and then step up to the bar and have a drink with them?) still he claims to know nothing about music.

"I just know what I like, and try to bring it up here," he explains, by way of explaining the coincidences that have brought the various Bay Area headliners into his homey, funky roadhouse.

Louagie took some time earlier this week, to muse on what the club has been, the changes it's gone through, and what its closing means. Sitting at the bar with gray skies and dripping redwoods visible through the windows, he briefly relived the club's history.

In the mid-sixties, Louagie started a small bar known as the Local in Capitola. One of the first "hippie" establishments in the area, Louagie, whose hair is short and who looks like a



Club Zayante's New Year's Eve party will be the final act.

respectable member of the business community, foresaw the Club Zayante as a very different kind of place.

"The Valley was extremely conservative in those days," he explained. So much so that the new club owner put on a suit and went around introducing himself to the neighbors, describing the club he wanted to create as being posh but reasonable, a place that would fit into the Valley's "straight" lifestyle.

"In those days we served steak and lobster for \$3.25" he said. "A summer-long membership for the pool was \$25."

But that period wasn't to last long. Although his patrons were enthusiastic, their appearances became less and less frequent, a condition that put Louagie into financial straits that ultimately led to the break-up of his marriage and family.

At a personal low ebb, Louagie realized that massive changes were needed. Remembering his luck with the old Capitola Local, he saw a possible alternative.

"I figured that nothing else was working, so I might as well go back to what was making me happy in the old place," he explained.

Featuring the local musical group, One Hand Clapping, the club seemed to be back on the road to recovery. The population of the Valley was changing, and Louagie had begun to establish a following. But then a fire practically leveled the place in 1973.

With no insurance to cover the loss, what could have been the club's demise became instead an act of rebuilding, with friends and neighbors donating their time to bring the club back.

"We had a sauna then," Louagie said, "and a after a hard day of work, people would take a sauna, then jump into the pool." At first it was only at night, but then the nude dips in the pool

spread into the afternoons.

"Pretty soon people started dropping in just for that," Louagie remembered fondly. "Even now there are people who have been coming to the pool for years, who have never set foot in the place at night."

With the pool going in the afternoons, Louagie turned his attention to the entertainment aspect of the club. Among the many musicians who have found work there are the Dirty Butter Jug Band, Red Ragged Rose, Jill Croston, Ron Thompson, and Bob Brozman, who has been playing the club regularly for the last three years.

Louagie speaks warmly of most who have played at the Club Z, and their respect and feelings for him are mirrored in the sense of loyalty that the place seems to inspire. For all of the good feelings though, the club has once again fallen into the state where great musicians are playing to an empty room, and the famous Club Z barbecues and dinners are divided among the band and the kitchen help.

"Everything's changing," is Louagie's analysis. "This area used to be a good place for poor people, but now poor people can't afford to live here."

He also looks askance at the escalating ticket prices for entertainment, and the slick, Carmel-like atmosphere that is finding its way to this side of the bay. One thing the Club Zayante has never been is slick.

In looking at recent entertainment trends, Louagie comments sadly, "it may be show business — but it's not music."

He sees the future holding two choices for Santa Cruz County — it will either become more Carmel like, or else an extension of San Jose.

"If the rich people get it, they'll protect it like Carmel. Otherwise, the developers will eat it up..."

In either case, Louagie is relinquishing the prominent place he has held in the evolving culture for almost a decade. Ironically, Louagie admits that he has never been a "public person." Even the act of introducing musical performers makes him nervous.

With the closing of the club, he now plans to try his hand as a manager, beginning with efforts to set up a tour of college campuses for the folk musician, Alfredo Ortiz. Eventually Louagie would like to retire from the spotlight entirely, acting solely behind the scenes to promote entertainment in areas where it doesn't currently exist.

"I'd like to take some groups from around here on the road, maybe up north where there's no music."

Preferring small towns, he speaks of having barbecues, and "getting away from the liquor trip."

All he would like, he says, "is to go into one of those towns, and just make everybody happy for a night."

The Club Zayante is for sale. Although the number of inquiries from possible buyers is dwindling, Louagie insists that he will not be able to open the place again in the spring, the way he has for years. He just can't afford to.

"People come up to me on the street, and tell me that I can't close the place," he said sadly. "They all love the club — they just never come to it."

The place will inspire many memories, and once it's gone will probably assume legendary proportions.

Louagie looked off through the windows at the deserted swimming pool.

"I never wanted a legend," he said, "I just wanted a club."

NOTICE — CANCELLATION

Our Sunday, January 1 Pancake Breakfast will not be held on New Year's Day.

We will resume our breakfasts on Sunday, February 5th and continue on each first Sunday of the month.

Our best wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year to all our friends.

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Pancake Breakfast

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Next Breakfast Will Be Feb. 5th