

Absolutely Fresh All Stars

Performing at the 40th Anniversary of

Absolutely Fresh Seafood Company

September 22nd, 2019

Core Band

Bucky McCann, vocals, sax, keys and Music Director

Mitch Towne, Hammond B3

Craig Balderston, vocals and bass

Dan Maca, drums

Brian Eckleberry, vocals and piano

Neil Johnsen, vocals and guitar

Horns

Joel Edwards, trumpet

Jim Schweigert, trumpet

Davey Polson, baritone sax

Darren Pettit, tenor sax

Guest Performers

Hector Anchondo, vocals and guitar

Kris Lager, vocals and guitar

Sarah Benck (Tardy), vocals and guitar

Joe Putjenter, vocals

Joe McCarthy, vocals and guitar

John Crews, vocals and harmonica

Steve Dallas, guitar

Hector Anchondo, vocals and guitar

I started playing when I was 16, moved to Omaha at 19, and started jamming with Omaha's finest at Pheasant Tavern with Dave Barger's jam. That helped me take my playing to the next level. All I wanted was to play music professionally and put out albums. Now that I get to play at a pro level, I still love it just as much as I did back then, jamming with all the guys and Dave. I still have a dream of getting into the Billboard blues charts and getting a BMA, and maybe even a Grammy one day. Time will tell. Until then, I'll keep grindin.'

Winner of the 2015 Nebraska Blues Challenge

Finalist in the 2016 International Blues Challenge

Multiple award winner of the "Best Blues" category through the Omaha Entertainment and Arts Awards

-Finalist in the 2016 International Blues Challenge in Memphis, TN (top 8 of 240 acts worldwide)

-Semifinalist at the 2015 International Blues Challenge in Memphis, TN

-Winner of the 2014 & 2015 Nebraska State Blues Challenge

-Winner of the 2013, 2014, 2015, & 2018 "Best Blues" award by the Omaha Entertainment and Arts Awards

Craig Balderston, vocals and bass

Craig has been a mainstay on the Omaha music scene since relocating here in 1992, to play with the Mighty Jailbreakers. He's played with many of the area's most popular and respected bands.

In addition to a rigorous playing schedule, he has also been a clinician for the Blues Ed program since its inception in 2002, teaching young players how to take his gigs!

Sarah Benck (Tardy), vocals and guitar

Sarah is a veteran of the Omaha music community, writing and performing for more than 20 years. As a four-time OEA award winner, Nebraska Blues Challenge winner, and International Blues Challenge semi-finalist, Sarah can currently be found performing with the Rex Granite Band. As a wife and mother of two children, Sarah appreciates more than ever the gift of music and the beauty that it brings to the lives of her family and others that share in its sacred exchange.

John Crews, vocals and harmonica

John was born in Omaha, NE in 1949. He is one of two identical twins born in February that year. His parents raised John until age 10 when John lost his father who passed away. Shortly after he spent the next three years in Boys Town, NE where he started formal music classes. Some of his earliest inspiration was the Boys Town choir, which sang in Latin. It was spiritually enhancing to him. He also learned various musical instruments as he grew up. Elvis, Bill Haley & The Comets, B.B. King, Luther Allison, Paul Butterfield Blues Band and more inspired him. They all opened the door to rock & roll and the blues. At eighteen, he enlisted into the Marine Corps where he was sent over to Vietnam for fourteen months. His last duty station was Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, where he decided to live after the Corps. He played the local island music scene for a decade playing acoustically in clubs.

After Hawaii, he relocated to Seattle and played up and down the coastline with various bands. This helped develop his song writing abilities. John moved back to Omaha in 1979 meeting the love of his life, Barbara. Together they were blessed with a daughter, Lindsay. Shortly after that, John lost his wife Barbara, who passed away. The intense sense of loss is immortalized in John's songs like "Sweet Tennessee" and "Palm of Your Hand". John raised his daughter on his own and is currently residing in Omaha where he continues to play music in the local circuit. His former CD's were "Hearts for Eyes" in 2000 and "King of Broken Hearts" in 2003. God Bless you and may God's love through music heal you all.

Steve Dallas, guitar

Steve's been playing guitar since the age of 13, and his music influences came from radio stations when he lived near Memphis, TN as a teen. He developed a love for blues, R&B, soul jazz and rock, listening to these stations early in life.

He has been living in and out of the Omaha area for three decades, and lived in California for 8 years. Steve has opened shows for The Sons of Champlin, Taj Mahal, Maria Muldaur, Weird Al, Natalie Cole, Tower of Power, Los Lobos, and Starship. He also recorded with Grey and Hanks (album Prime Time) on RCA Records plus Alton McClain and Destiny on Polydor Records.

Currently, he is collaborating with 3-time Grammy nominee Roger Smith (organist with Tower of Power and Dave Mathews Band) on a project. He is also collaborating with international entertainer Donny Dee on various projects.

Locally, Steve has worked with The Shades and Danger (guitar and keyboards, for 6 years) and The Mighty Jailbreakers (guitar for 7 years). He is also seen working with Waterfront Blues, Chad Stoner.

Brian Eckerberry, vocals and piano

Originally from Savannah, Georgia, Brian is a veteran of the US Air Force, where he doubled as a Command & Controller and musician. After a tour of Europe, he landed at Offutt AFB in 1989 and fell in love with the Midwest. Since then he's had a successful music career in Omaha as a singer/pianist for Head Over Heals, Knucklehead, Planet Boom and most recently Eckophonics with his wife, Annette. He's VERY proud to be a former clinician for the Blues Ed Program and honored to be a member of the Absolutely Fresh All Stars!

Joel Edwards, trumpet

Born in Des Moines, Iowa and moved to Omaha, Joel received a BA in music education in 1977 and received a MS in Audiology in 1984 and Doctor of Audiology (Au.D.) 2011. He is currently an audiologist for Boys Town National Research Hospital West Hospital.

Joel's trumpet teachers include Jim Hill, recording jingle artist for the Minneapolis and Omaha areas in the early 70's, Gene Badgett (2nd trumpet Omaha Symphony in 1973-77), Dennis Schneider (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) 1980-83, John Henes, Chicago Metropolitan Opera trumpet section (Alexander technique for trumpet) 1995.

Joel has performed with various groups in the area that include the Palladium Brass, Omaha Brass Works, Solid Brass Quartet, Omaha trumpet Ensemble, Lincoln Trumpet Ensemble, Omaha Big Band, Resurrected Swing Big Band and the Omaha Jazz Orchestra, Las Vegas Big Band, Ozone Big Band. He performs regularly with the regional blues band, Blue House with the Rent-to-Own Horns, starting to record their 4 CD. Joel has also performed with the Ray Charles, Temptations, Four Tops, The Mighty Sam McClain, Johnny Mattis, Omaha Symphony Pops Orchestra and plays Broadway shows coming through the Omaha Metro that include Grease, Cinderella, Annie, Sound of Music, Damn Yankees, Crazy For You, Dream Girls (Dianna Ross Story), How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, Fiddler on the Roof, Aladdin, White Christmas to mention a few as well as a local favorite Finest Hour, Jailbreakers (sub), Confidentials (sub) Mannheim Steamroller for Equestrian 2017 (section player). Also listed to his credit is the longest running locally produced professional show called Bee Hive, music review of the 50's and 60's rock era.

Neil Johnsen, vocals and guitar

Veteran Omaha area guitarist, singer, songwriter and audio engineer for over 40 years. Neil has played many styles of music in numerous bands including Powerglide - early 70's, Triple Play acoustic trio - 1980's, B and the hot Notes, Joe Cabral Quartet, The Inferno club - 80's-90's, The Whoz Drivin band, The Wheels (country band), The Johnsen Brothers Band (all with Steve & Mark Johnsen) - 80's-90's. Owner of Neil Johnsen Signs & Design for 32 years. Pretty much retired from the music scene but it's always fun to get out there and do a show now and then.

Kris Lager, vocals and guitar

Kris is a one of a kind entertainer. An artist who sets out to lift up the spirits of the audience and engage the listener in a feel good and interactive musical experience. He has been honing his craft on the road for almost two decades ever since he was just a teenager. All of the while fine tuning his funky eclectic blues stylings and mastering his feel good positive vibe. Kris and his band are constantly touring and have just released another album entitled Spectrum. The album was mixed by Grammy Award winner and Memphis legend, Jim Gaines (Stevie Ray Vaughan, Santana, Van Morrison)

Dan Maca, drums

Dan is a UNO graduate, and has played drums for several bands in the Omaha area over the past 30 years. (Dan really paints a picture here!

Bucky McCann, vocals, sax, keys

~ ~ Music Director of The Absolutely Fresh All Stars! ~ ~

Bucky was a composer and arranger, and the saxist for the 70's Nebraska / L.A. horn rock band, STRAIGHT. At the end of the decade, he landed back in Omaha to join the RIVER CITY ALL-STARS. In the 80's, he put together the Omaha dance band, ITCHY BROTHER, and had a good long run.

He has always tried to keep an ear in the recording studio and has supervised many productions. In the 90's Bucky got the blues with his own band, The LONGSHOTS, David Barger and others. He has appeared in several "Playing With Fire" concerts, and once got to perform with the late, great Stevie Ray Vaughn.

Bucky is a singer and multi-instrumentalist. He did a three-year ride with popular Omaha band, PEACE, LOVE, ETC., and has added studio chops to recordings by Little Joe McCarthy, Dave Steen and Jailhouse Tattoo, and Rex Granite with Sara Benck. For the last few years, he has fronted DADDY MAC & THE FLAK playing rock, rhythm and blues.

Joe McCarthy, vocals and guitar

Joe is a singer/songwriter from Omaha, playing original homegrown roots.

In 2012, I took what some would call a 'leap of faith'. I walked away from a job in the trades (HVAC), in order to pursue music in a full time capacity.

From that day forward music no longer took a 'back seat' to some 9-5 job. My music would get the best of my energy, and not just what was left of me after a long day on the job.

For me, that day in 2012 wasn't so much a 'leap of faith', but more simply I surrendered to a life long desire to make music.

The feeling I get from the listener that relates to the spirit and message of an original song is it for me.

The satisfaction I feel from crafting a song from its early concept to its finished master only serves to energize my desire to do more.

I don't think about my life in terms of retiring or some sort of finish line. I just simply relish each step on the path, which I have chosen. My path!

Dr. Darren Pettit, tenor sax

Dr. Pettit is the Assistant Professor of Music Theory and Composition at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. He received his bachelor of music degree in saxophone performance from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 1995, where he was awarded the Presser Scholarship and the Dean's Award from the College of Fine Arts. He then received a full scholarship to the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music where he completed a master of music degree in saxophone performance. He received his D.M.A in Jazz Studies/Composition at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where he studied with Dr. Eric Richards. Dr. Pettit's duties at UNO include directing the Jazz Combo I, coordinating curriculum between Chinese institutions and UNO for dual campus degrees, coordinating both dual enrollment and music theory for the School of Music, teaching Music Fundamentals, Music Core Curriculum I & II, Jazz Arranging, Orchestration, Pedagogy of Music Theory, and Analysis for Performers. In 2003 Dr. Pettit co-founded both the Omaha Jazz Workshop and the Metropolitan Area Youth Jazz Orchestra. The Jazz Workshop has since become the UNO Jazz camp featuring the Jim Widner Big Band and attracts over 150 students a year. Dr. Pettit has performed/premiered original compositions in Shizouka, Japan, Seoul, Korea, the Beijing Contemporary Music Academy, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, the South China Agricultural University in Guangzhou, Jāzēpa Vītola Latvijas Mūzikas Akadēmija in Riga, Latvia, the Saulkrasti Jazz Festival in Latvia, the Kintai Music Festival in Lithuania, the University of Illinois, the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association Regional Conference, the Jazz Education Network in Dallas, the

North American Saxophone Alliance Regional and National Conferences, the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Mercer University in Georgia, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln & Omaha. He has toured extensively throughout the United States as the music director for Yesterday and Today and Rave On, and has performed with the Jim Widner Big Band, the Omaha Big Band, the Las Vegas Lab Band with Mike Gurcuillo, the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra, the Omaha Symphony, the Omaha Community Playhouse, the Mighty Jailbreakers, Randy Brecker, Diane Schuur, Debbie Boone, Delbert McClinton, the Temptations, the Four Tops, David Foster, Michael Buble, Frankie Valli, and many others. Dr. Pettit is a D'Addario Artist/Clinician.

Dave Polson, baritone sax

Dave is a veteran of 50 years and counting on the Omaha music scene. For 15 years he was with the Mighty Jailbreakers & since '99 has worked with the Confidentials. As a sideman, Davey can't drive across town with 1490 on the radio without hearing someone he has performed with.

Joe Putjenter, vocals

Joe was born and raised in Omaha, and started playing drums when he was 10 years old, playing his first professional job when he was 14.

His band Blue House with the Rent to Own Horns was founded in 1990, and it has to date released 6 CD's. They have played with Ray Charles, The Four Tops, The Fabulous Thunderbirds, John Mayall, The Temptations, Dizzy Gillespie, Son Seals, Joe Bonamassa, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Maroon 5, and many others.

In 2018 Joe, along with his Blue House band mates, were inducted into the Nebraska Music hall of Fame.

His Song Barbecue Shoes is the theme song for the BBQ Pit Boys show on You Tube, and is heard over 2 million times a week worldwide.

Joe, along with Brad Cordell, Dave Barger, Terry O'Halloran, and Greg Lindberg, is one of the founding members of the Blues Society of Omaha.

He is also a local artist and sculptor, proud father of his son and fellow musician Dan, and is happily married to his wife Lisa.

Jim Schweigert, trumpet

A native of Pierre, South Dakota, Jim Schweigert has been a professional trumpet player in the Omaha metro and Midwest music scene for the past 20 years. He's performed with Gooch's Las Vegas Lab Band, Omaha Big Band, Paul Anderson and the Blue Fretters, the national Rat Pack tour at the Orpheum in Omaha, Brad Cordle and the Jail Breakers, Brian England's Groove Prescription, and numerous other groups ranging in styles from jazz, blues, pop, and classical.

He's also performed on stage with the jazz legend trombonist Curtis Fuller at the Art Farmer Jazz Festival and other players such as John Faddis and Eric Marienthal.

He currently performs weekly with the Monday night Ozone Big Band and Bob Fields Swingtime. In addition to performing at venues like The Waiting Room, Jambo Cat, Gorat's, and The Jewel, he also performs at The Omaha Community Playhouse, weddings, and jazz services at different churches in the metro area.

Mitch Towne, Hammond B3

Mitch is a keyboardist and touring musician, and is widely considered as the "go-to" Hammond organist in the Midwest. His ability to move seamlessly between diverse styles has made him a sought-after side-man with artists as varied as jazz/R&B artist and Grammy-winning producer Terrace Martin, jazz heavyweights Ryan Kisor, Dave Stryker and Adam Larson, blues artists

Eric Gales and Ben Poole, and multi-platinum artist Aloe Blacc. In 2015, Towne played organ on the track "Push" for the album "Velvet Portraits" by Terrace Martin, which was nominated for a 2016 Grammy for "Best R&B" album. Towne is an endorsing artist for Crumar Instruments, Motion Sound Amplifiers and Lounsberry Pedals.

Note from Greg Lindberg

-- Hey out there: I hope you can appreciate the tens of thousands of hours these musicians have invested. True professionals, indeed. Bucky McCann is carrying the load here, with a good assist from Craig Balderston, arranging music as well as practice time, arranging, and herding cats. Enjoy this very rare opportunity, my friends!