

# Lincoln's Blackberry Winter waits for big break

By Kathy Chenault

A Lincoln-based rock band has traveled a rough road during its eight-year existence.

Fred Bettge, lead guitarist and spokesman for Blackberry Winter contends, however, that "it's just a matter of time and luck until we get our break."

"Performing life" has been like a roller coaster ride for the members of the group, he said. "It's been full of highs and lows.

"We've weathered a lot of bad times and we're still playing. That must say something for us."

Bettge said the group is a unique local band because it performs primarily original material and has tried to keep up with national music trends.

"We're a creative bunch of people. Although you hear it all the time, I think that if we could just get that one break..." he said, sighing and taking a long pull off his cigarette.

Bad experiences group members have faced include a highway mishap in Colorado just when they were making a name for themselves through radio airing of a single.

"We ran our bus off a mountain in between gigs a few years ago. We were just getting going and wham, all of a sudden, we're hurting moneywise and are forced to keep plugging away at small stuff," Bettge said.

The band was performing 250 to 300 times a year for the past three or four years. That much touring limits a group, he said.

"When you're playing on the road all the time, you have to stay commercial—play what people are already hearing," he said.

"That's why we're concentrating now on doing our own material so we can be identifiable and hopefully land a recording contract."

Besides Bettge, group members include Luis Cusido, keyboards; Rich Lane, keyboards; Randy Sharp, bass; Elaine Donaldson, vocals; and Murray Kahler on drums. But the group's membership has changed over the years.

"About 50 people in all have probably played with us at one time or another, but now we're pretty solid and the sound is good," he said.

"We're just kinda working on our recording so we can get a contract sometime within the next couple of years.

"We have to be identifiable, so we need a lot of studio work. You can't get anything done playing those gigs all over the country like we did."

The band operates out of a house in southeast Lincoln. Members have remodeled the basement and installed equipment valued at more than \$15,000 so they can devote energy and time to studio work.

"Not many groups have set-ups like this," Bettge said, gesturing to the electronic equipment around the room.

Thick insulation on the ceiling and shag carpet on the floor and walls muffle sound and provide proper acoustics for playing.

Bettge fiddles with the mass of electronic equipment and soon the group's taped music fills the room.

Selections are diverse.

A hint of blues, a cut with a Latin-American flavor and another that teases with jazz threading through a rock core as sound wafts through the air.

The group's members have heard the songs time and time again, but Bettge and keyboard player Cusido seem mesmerized by the music.

Bettge taps his foot and nods his head to the music. Cusido thumps out his part on an imaginary keyboard.

"We do this different than when we do it live," Bettge explains.

"Yeah, it's slow," Cusido responds.

"Yeah—slow."

After several selections of taped music, Bettge switches off the speakers and confidently says, "Yeah, we'll make it. It's just a matter of time."



Blackberry Winter

Photo by M. Billingsley

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