

By Josh Krauter

Staff writer

"Yeahhhh."

Fishbone bassist Norwood Fisher drags out the word in a long, weary stretch, which is what the last several years for his band sometimes have been.

It's a "yeah" that starts out low and slow and keeps going, eventually trailing off, and it's his answer when asked if Fishbone's recent years have been tough.

Fishbone, who is playing at the Ranch Bowl in Omaha on Sunday night, opened a lot of doors for a lot of bands since its first release in 1985, but that door often swung back in the band's face. Fishbone's swinging hybrid of soul, funk, punk, reggae, ska, blues, metal and jazz defied labels and made for great albums, but MTV and radio ignored it.

Then, friends from its Los Angeles club days, such as the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Jane's Addiction, scored big hits in the new radio climate Nirvana helped to create.

Unfortunately, that climate didn't extend to Fishbone. Radio and MTV were still wary, prob-

PREVIEW FISHBONE

WHERE: Ranch Bowl, Omaha

WHEN: Sunday, 9 p.m.

COST: \$13

THE SKINNY: Cult favorites will perform soul, funk, punk and more.

ably because they didn't know what to do with a black rock band. In the world of music marketing, the drinking fountains were still segregated.

In spite of all this trouble, Fishbone kept moving ahead, pleasing its large cult audience. Then things got weird.

Guitarist Kendall Jones quit the group and joined a religious cult in 1994. The cult wouldn't let any band members talk to Jones, so Fisher snatched him, taking him on an afternoon drive in an attempt to get him back in the group. The cult pressed kidnapping charges against Fisher that were later dropped.

Then Fishbone left its long-time label, Columbia, for Rowdy Records in hopes of better promotion. Before the band could record an album, however, keyboard player and trombonist Chris Dowd quit the group to go solo.

"He was unhappy with the situation," Fisher said. "He had personal problems with a few members of the band, and he wanted to pursue a solo career. There's always more to it than that, though."

Fishbone recorded one album for Rowdy, "Chim Chim's Badass Revenge," before the label dissolved in the wake of record company mergers.

Once more without a label, the band lost long-time guitarist John Bigham and drummer Fish, who both quit the group.

Amazingly, Fishbone stayed together. Did the band ever think about breaking up amidst all the instability?

"After Kendall left, that was the only time we



gofish

Troubled times in past for Fishbone

thought

about it,"

Fisher said. "That was just a fleeting thought, though. I figured if we could make it to this point, why not keep going?"

It helps that Fishbone never really had a leader. Every member wrote songs and played several instruments, so losing members hurt the group but didn't mortally wound it.

The three original members - Fisher, Dirty Walt Kibby II and Angelo Moore - kept doing the only thing they knew how to do, writing songs and recording them. They added two new members, enlisted the help of a staggering number of guest musicians and friends, and recorded their new album, "Fishbone and the Familyhood Nextperience Presents the Psychotic Friends Nuttwerx," for Hollywood Records.

The new members, guitarists Spacey-T and John McKnight (New drummer John Steward came along after the album was recorded.) are veteran musicians, Fisher said.

"Spacey-T is like an L.A. icon," Fisher said, citing T's experience with other reggae and metal bands.

McKnight is a pro at nearly every style of music, playing with country, reggae, funk and rock bands, including Ben Harper.

Fisher said the new members are keeping up. "The shit is dynamite, man," he said. "The

band we're rolling with is not the band that wrote the material, but everybody's giving awesome performances."

He said the new Fishbone is prepared to record a new album.

Contributors to the new album include a dizzying array of famous musicians, most of whom are likely suspects (George Clinton, the Red Hot Chili Peppers), but one guest may surprise listeners: Donny Osmond provides backup vocals on a song.

"That's the one everybody's got a question about," Fisher says. "It sounds funny at first. But he really put a lot of soul into it."

One of Osmond's sons turned him on to Fishbone, Fisher said. Osmond then invited them on his show and became a fan.

The man who was a super-reck long before MC Hammer told people what they couldn't touch, Rick James, also sings on the new record. The album's producer, Steve Lindsey, was a friend of James and got him on the album.

"He asked us how we felt about getting Rick James on the album, and I was like, 'Hell, yeah,'" Fisher said.

Chili Peppers' Flea, John Frusciante and Chad Smith show up on "Shakey Ground," and Flea provided more than just his bass, Fisher said. He also made the musicians record the song in the nude, refusing to otherwise.

"He was a real bastard about it, too," Fisher said. "But it was OK. Everybody let their sacs hang loose."

Fisher said the band is still after elusive mainstream success. This may seem surprising coming from a man who has had bad experience with labels, but Fisher thinks the current climate is welcoming.

"I think the industry right now is more receptive to bands like Fishbone. We broke barriers. The possibility for commercial success is more resonant now than it's ever been."

Fishbone's latest offers impressive backup, format

By Josh Krauter

Staff writer

It's not a good sign when a band loses half its members and decides to record an album anyway. It's also not a good sign when the album features more than 20 guest musicians and three of the songs are covers.

That's why Fishbone's new album is such a pleasant surprise. It's not up there with the band's best work, but it's a smooth, soulful party album that bodes well for the band's future, especially now that the lineup is stable once again.

The album's title is almost as long as the guest list, "Fishbone and the Familyhood Nextperience Presents the Psychotic Friends Nuttwerx."

And, wow, that guest list is staggering. P-Funk's George Clinton, Rick James, Bad Brains' H.R., ex-Jane's Addiction vocalist Perry Farrell, three-fourths of the Red Hot

Chili Peppers, a couple Neville Brothers, Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart alums Bruce and Walt Fowler, ex-Steely Dan guitarist Jeff "Skunk" Baxter, No Doubt's Gwen Stefani, Los Fabulosos Cadillacs and, the icing on the cake, Donny Osmond, all contribute their talents.

It would be easy for the band members to get lost in the shuffle, but they don't. All the guest musicians have smoothed out some of the rough edges - this is the slickest Fishbone album yet - but the songs are still there.

"Shakey Ground," a Funkadelic cover, is the highlight of the record, a soulful chunk of funk that is sure to shake even the tightest booty. "The Suffering" and "One Planet People" are catchy mixtures of soul, reggae pop and ska. "Where'd You Get Those Pants" is a melodic throwback to '70s R&B that gets points for rhyming "chocolate shakes" with

REVIEW FISHBONE

TITLE: Fishbone and the Familyhood Nextperience Presents the Psychotic Friends Nuttwerx

LABEL: Hollywood

Records

GRADE: B

FIVE WORDS: Fishbone more resilient than Rocky.

"double chili cheese and bacon cake."

Throughout, singer and sax player Angelo Moore's voice never has been better. Moore hits melodic highs he never would have attempted on the band's earlier stuff.

There are a few missteps. The cover of Sly and the Family Stone's "Everybody is a Star" is played completely straight, differing from the original not at all until an ill-conceived punk rock finale. The produc-

tion is way too slick on this track, squeezing out any spontaneity and energy.

Still, it's interesting to hear the song's four-way vocalpalooza, including Moore, Stefani, Clinton and James. Stefani even manages to beef her voice up a little bit.

"Just Allow" is a slight mix of '80s new wave and metal that never takes off, and the rest of the material is a little lightweight by the band's earlier standards, but still fun.

The album's best track, a cover of David Baerwald's "Aids & Armageddon," provides an antidote to the lighter stuff with a lean blues riff, funny lyrics and a reggae-tinged rock chorus.

"Nuttwerx," the third in the band's series of long, long titles (the last two albums were called "Chim Chim's Badass Revenge" and "Give a Monkey a Brain and He'll Swear He's the Center of the Universe") is a



welcome relief from the army of lesser bands who got famous for playing lousier versions of the Fishbone style, including Mighty Mighty Bosstones, 311 and Sublime.

It's not as eclectic as "The Reality of My Surroundings" or as driven as "Truth and Soul," but it's a hell of a lot better than most albums by bands that probably should have broken up a long time ago.