

Local group Main Squeeze's first full-length album out next month

By Jimmy Jenkins

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BLOOMINGTON — The Main Squeeze is an entrenched Bloomington band, but as their lead singer attests, its members came from different places: musically and geographically speaking.



The Main Squeeze, with Corey Frye, center, played a benefit show in IU's Dunn Meadow last week. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

The name of the band comes from a former member who dreamt that in a moment of agonizing thirst, divine intervention lead him to a refrigerator full of oranges just waiting to be ... squeezed. Above the refrigerator a neon sign read "Main Squeeze."

Perhaps it was divine intervention that brought the band together, but a likelier reason is the thriving Bloomington music scene. Lead singer Corey Frye is from Indianapolis, and since moving to IU for school, he has been involved in two other major Bloomington ensembles: Straight No Chaser and the IU Soul Revue.

"I started singing when I was very young, did a little gospel choir but not a lot. I mostly sang in choirs through school." He developed an affinity for singer-songwriters and good producers of the R&B sound, including Babyface. While Frye is the front man, he is a newer addition to the group, which was formed by Ben Silverstein and Max Newman.

Ben "Smiley" Silverstein is from Florida. Beginning with a classical piano background, his tastes have moved from jazz to funk to jam bands to fusion.

"My dad was a total Dead Head, and listening to that music led me to the Allman Brothers. Then in high school jazz band, we played a lot of James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Tower of Power." Silverstein came to IU to study business. While here his interest in soul music and skillful keyboard play led him to the IU Soul Revue.

Max Newman, a classically trained cellist and New York native, met Silverstein at a summer camp when they were younger, and their friendship was maintained through music. Newman began playing cello when he was 5.

"I went to a music-centered elementary school that was loosely constructed around the Russian Conservatory System," he explained at a recent Squeeze jam session. This classical introduction to music turned to an interest of rock music when he entered high school. "I started playing guitar, started listening to Jimi Hendrix — Hendrix is like, my guy," Newman said. He came to the Jacobs School as a classical cello performance major.

While studying for a year and living in Read, Newman lived next to drummer Reuben Gingrich.

"That's the great part about Bloomington. I knew that even if the music school didn't work out there would be plenty of people to collaborate with," Newman said. Gingrich, who has played drums since he was 12, grew up in Goshen. He came to Bloomington to study music and recently earned his degree in jazz drumming from the Jacobs School. "While we were living in Read, I would jam with Reuben in his room and I realized what a sick drummer he is," Newman said.

Gingrich offers lessons, plays in several groups, and composes beats. His videos of

compositions and drum solos have been viewed more than a million times on YouTube. Like Silverstein and Frye, Gingrich was also a member of the IU Soul Revue, as are both of The Main Squeeze's bass players: Willie Robinson and Ollas Ortwein.

The Soul Revue is run by the African American Arts Institute at IU. They perform R&B, soul and urban Black popular music.

Robinson comes from a strong gospel background, while Ortwein grew up with show tunes and dabbles in heavy metal. "The first bass-tab I ever learned was 'Enter Sandman,'" Ortwein said.

"So we're really a coming together of different sounds and experiences," Frye explains. "We started playing mostly covers, then developed our own music. We all have gotten into each others' music. Before I was in this group, I didn't listen to as much funk as these guys do, but now I listen to a lot of funk — like Soulive, Lettuce and Snarky Puppy."

Silverstein added, "What you see us perform is what we all approve of. What you hear from us is what we all agree on. We have a good system of checks and balances, so when a piece makes it through all of us, you know it's gonna be solid."

Newman thinks they have developed a "funky, feel-good, soulful sound. And now with Corey there has been more of a pop and R&B element. We're also starting to incorporate a more electronic sound into the mix."

Whatever you call it, it works. The band is known for energetic concerts full of skillful musicianship and packed dance floors. While their regular gig is at the Bluebird, they can also be seen around town at frat parties

during Little 500 and the occasional appearance in Dunn Meadow. Their popularity won them the title of "Bloomington's Best Band" as voted by the Indiana Daily Student last year, as well as the grand prize in a recent Rolling Stone Magazine Contest. Narrowed down to the top three vote-getters out of hundreds of entries from around the state, the Squeeze was chosen by Rolling Stone to open for The Roots and Jane's Addiction at their Super Bowl tailgate party.

"We made it into the top three at the last second," Silverstein said. "We were on campus, at the library, asking people to vote for us, and they put us over the top."

They appreciate the love Bloomington has shown them, and try to always give it back.

"We know the significance of playing to your crowd," Frye said of the task of entertaining. "You wanna give the people some of what they know as well as do your own thing — you want to put on a show and smile and have a good time. As the vocalist, I'm up in front, I can interact with the crowd and feel them out. I just always wanna make sure they're having a good time."

Newman notes that the Beatles, an inspiration for all of them, came from the same beginnings. "They became famous for putting their own spin on covers, and then taking from those styles of music and developing their own sound. And we feel like we're on a similar path."

The Main Squeeze released an EP in March 2011 with seven original songs. In early May, they will debut their first full-length album.

"We see it as a thank-you to the fans who've stuck with us as we developed our sound, and I think everyone is excited to see what

comes next," Frye said.

The band used the online service Kickstarter to raise more than \$5,000 to pay for the recording costs. As a reward to those who contributed, The Squeeze will release a special video, early digital downloads, limited edition T-shirts, and other extras. One significant donor earned a private live show.

Recorded at Bloomington's Airtime Studios and self-produced, the album features 13 original tracks which will also be released on their website as they are produced and mastered.

"The album features a whole new level of professionalism for the group," Newman said. "We have taken our time to pay attention to the fine details and put out a really quality recording that will include horns and even strings."

You can catch The Main Squeeze at their first ever two-night stand at the Bluebird on Wednesday and Thursday nights. They promise to bring fresh set lists, guest features, a horn section and, of course, The Funk.

Get squeezed

The Main Squeeze plays a two-night gig at the Bluebird, 216 N. Walnut St., Bloomington, Wednesday and Thursday. See www.thebluebird.ws or call 812-336-3984 for details.

Learn more about the band online at www.mainsqueezemusic.com.