

## LIFE

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### AnnieMac

#### ***Musical dreams come true for the local dance band***

BY JENNIFER STRANGE  
Mail Tribune

Rehearsing in a newly built and freshly painted studio, Ashland-based band AnnieMac launches into a French bistro-inspired tune called "Forget About Love."

Songwriter and frontwoman Annie McIntyre's wild and soulful voice warbles into a beret-sporting, Edith Piaf vibe that somehow complements an occasional country twang. Keyboardist Allen Crutcher rolls out a player-pianoesque ending, giving a vintage feel to McIntyre's final wry lines.

"This song is something new for us," says McIntyre afterward. "We're just seeing how it sounds." She faces the musicians. "What did you guys think? Did it work? Did I get the bridge right?" Feedback pours in: guitarists compare notes, drummer nods, keyboardist asks about his harmonica solo. It's obvious this is not a trickle-down band.

Collaboration and freedom of creative expression seem foremost to AnnieMac's formula.

"It's the synergy of creating something bigger than each one of us individually, and having the result be good," explains McIntyre. "It surprises me every night how different but equal our skills are."

Often described as a "gritty gravel road of sound," AnnieMac is comprised of six wise, been-round-the-block musicians who not only remember danceable classics like Dav.id Lindley's "Mercury Blues" and Etta James' "99 and a Half", but rocket them out at full speed to a crowd of dancing maniacs.



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□ AnnieMac is Annie McIntyre (foreground) and (left to right) Brent Norton, Allen Crutcher, Steve Sutfin, Jim Calhoun and Joe Diehl. (Mail Tribune / Bob Pennell)

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The group will perform at 9 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 24, at the Jefferson State Pub, 31B Water St., Ashland.



For video clips featuring a short bio of AnnieMac and two songs, visit [www.mailtribune.com/multimedia](http://www.mailtribune.com/multimedia).

Their fan base — partying college kids, music fans and not a few baby boomers — appears addicted to the old-school R&B riffs, deep soul and human emotion-inspired lyrics sung and often written by McIntyre.

"This band it's like my dream come true," says drummer Steve Sutfin, who played in bands in the L.A. area through the 1960s and early 1970s, until a "big push to leave the city" brought him to Southern Oregon.

Like the rest of the musicians in AnnieMac (who, with the exception of forty-somethings Joe Diehl and McIntyre, all hover around the 60-year-old mark), Sutfin pursued straight jobs while continuing to drum at night and on the weekends.

Gradually, his varied gigs landed him in a country band with famed local lead guitarist Diehl, whose former Northern California bands opened for the likes of Michael Franti. While carpooling, Diehl and Sutfin waxed philosophical, finally agreeing they were sick of C&W. The revelation transformed into the roots of AnnieMac.

"It spiraled out of us playing in that band," says Diehl, who ultimately yearned to play dynamic rock guitar in a "yin-yang" situation with a strong female voice. "And I wanted to put together something with more seasoned, mature guys that didn't have ego issues or were grandstanding like a lot of younger guys."

Several years earlier, when both Diehl and McIntyre were cutting their respective musical chops in the Mill Valley, Calif., area, Diehl subbed for the singer's band. He always remembered McIntyre's singularly raw and real voice, with emotionally ragged lyrics to match.

"My jaw hit the floor the first time I saw her sing," he remembers. "I knew I wanted to work with her, but she wasn't ready to do music seriously yet."

Fast forward to 2005. Diehl's walking down Main Street in Ashland. He sees a flutter of dark hair and a determined stride on the opposite street. "That looks like Annie Mac!" recalls Diehl, who ended up housesitting for McIntyre soon thereafter. "Then, a little while later, she said she was ready."

With Sutfin on drums, Diehl focused on filling out the rest of the band. Brent Norton, a Berklee College of Music-trained guitarist who loved the Tower of Power as a teenager in Marin County and who played in a "tuxedo band" in his off-hours once he moved to the Rogue Valley in 1989, came on board opposite Diehl, creating a double wall of shredding guitar.

When Diehl contacted Crutcher, the keyboardist had been jamming with an improv group in Ashland for about seven years. Having started his first band in third grade then proceeding to travel the college band circuit, Crutcher was both experienced and in search of something where he could play original music.

Then, in a "This is Spinal Tap" moment, Diehl left a message on bassist Jim Calhoun's answering machine. Calhoun's background in everything from bluegrass (with Siskiyou Summit's Crystal Reeves) to jazz to playing with Diehl at Oregon Shakespeare Festival made him a natural choice for the burgeoning band's freeform, no limits attitude.

"They give me an incredible canvas to sing on," says McIntyre of the band's meld of disparate talents. "I got six times lucky for all of us to be together."

While building a local reputation has been huge fun for the band, their sights are set on national and international fame. A new CD, "The Wait is Over," is in production and a MySpace page, [www.myspace.com/anniemacmusic](http://www.myspace.com/anniemacmusic), offers music and story samples.

Admission to the show at the Jefferson State Pub costs \$5. Call 482-7718.