

# Lincoln's favorite cover band: The Wheezetones

Group has been playing together for almost two decades.

By **JEFF KORBELIK**  
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The Wheezetones came together on a whim, with the founders singing a cover of Pure Prairie League's "Amie" during a high school reunion.

"The blend was so good," said John Ballew, who harmonized that night in 1991 with Doug Dickeson and Paul Burner. "Right off the bat, it was just right."

So the trio began working on more songs, gathering in Dickeson's basement to harmonize other rock classics from the 1960s and '70s.

They booked their first gig at the city's Foundation Gardens lunchtime concert series in September 1992.

Nearly 20 years later, the Wheezetones are still at it, adding three more members — Bob Creager, Keith Cornelius and Ted Larson — along the way.

"Paul always likes to joke that we're not any better, we just have more stuff," Ballew said.

"I also like to say I have lot less hair and more weight," Burner added.

Jokes aside, Lincoln music lovers have a place in their hearts for the longtime cover band. They voted The Wheezetones as their favorite during the Journal Star's three-week Music Madness contest.

The sextet defeated Soul Dawg in the final vote, 53.9 to 46.1 percent. The final drew 2,153 votes. The Wheezetones reached the final by beating No. 1 seed



Courtesy photo

**Doug Dickeson (from left), John Ballew, Bob Creager, Keith Cornelius, Paul Burner and Ted Larson, better known as The Wheezetones, won the Journal Star's cover band contest.**

Groove Puppet. Soul Dawg also upset a No. 1 seed, D\*Funk.

On a side note, local musician Ted Larson is a member of The Wheezetones and Soul Dawg. In fact, Soul Dawg's horn section has played with The Wheezetones more than once. The two bands, by the way, will headline Celebrate Lincoln in June.

"It's an amazing little coincidence," Burner said. "The two bands in the finals will play Celebrate Lincoln. I think it's a very cool thing."

To coincide with college basketball's

March Madness, the Journal Star presented a Lincoln cover bands bracket. We started with a Sweet 16, with an online vote determining the outcome of our "games."

Narrowing the field to 16 was difficult. More than 40 cover bands call Lincoln home. Our "selection committee" chose "teams" based on popularity, websites, word of mouth, Facebook pages and our knowledge of the Lincoln music scene. Our No. 1 seeds were Groove Puppet, D\*Funk, Bossphilly and Cactus Hill, arguably four of the most visible cover bands

in town.

Sure enough, just like with March Madness in college basketball, we took some heat for leaving some bands out of our big dance.

An online vote determined the winner of our games. Ballew of The Wheezetones believed the band's fan base in western Nebraska helped them win the contest. Only one vote was allowed per computer.

The Wheezetones are regulars at Dugan's Pub; the band's next gig there is April 15. The group primarily covers songs by such 1960s and '70s artists as the Beach Boys, Moody Blues and Crosby, Stills and Nash.

"We try to do classic rock songs that not everybody else does or can do," Ballew said, noting CSN's "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes" and the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations" as examples. "All of us have tremendous passion for this music."

The band has written some originals over the years but prefer to play covers instead. That's what their fans want and expect.

"Our audience is 50 and 60 years old," Burner said. "They don't care about (new) stuff. They want to hear cover versions of songs they know."

The Wheezetones know they are connecting with their fans from the compliments they receive after performances.

"I don't want to sound egotistical, but one of my favorite things is when someone says we do a song better than the original band," Burner said. "That's one of my biggest thrills."

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