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Last Call

[With Jessica Bowman]

Musings on spring flings

As Alfred Lord Tennyson once said, "In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." And with the grass beginning to show, the sun appearing on our way to work and the scent of summertime in the air, every gender is feeling the springtime lift. And nothing goes better with spring than a fling. But where to find one?

On my blog, a reader commented that a bar is the last place a single should look. Yet flocks of fun-lovers throng local bars every weekend, mingling with the hopes of finding someone special. It must work some of the time, right?

For Mike Casagrande, bartender at the **Avenue Bar** (338 W. Fourth Ave.), "it depends on which bar you hang out in more than anything."

Though he didn't meet his girlfriend in a bar, he agrees that finding a date is possible. "I hooked up a couple of friends that met at bars," he said.

Casagrande also noted, "There's a lot to be said about alcohol and hooking up. For good or for bad."

Clearly, when a date-seeking venue is a bar, alcohol plays a factor. But maybe it depends on whether your scene is a low-key pub or a flashy, brightly lit club.

At **Platinum Jaxx** (901 W. Sixth Ave.), for example, is it possible to find a date or just someone to dance with until 2 a.m.? One of the bar's co-owners, Jess Hepper, answers yes to both.

"I have one couple who've been married in the bar. They originally met there," he explained, then added, "Everybody in here has fallen in love for a night." Sure, but one wonders whether love is really lust in disguise when alcohol is involved.

Then again, maybe love is just around the corner of the bar.

Shawna McIntire, bartender at **The Anchor Pub and Club** (712 W. Fourth Ave.) and a restaurant-industry veteran of 15 years, once found the idea of love in a bar preposterous.

"People always say you're never going to meet someone in a bar," she said, "but the last three boyfriends I've had I met in a bar."

"It just depends what bait you want to use."

There are always those who overcome the odds, like Jana Goff and Chad Luna.

"I actually met my fiancé at Reilly's," Goff gushed. "(Chad) was my bartender, and I was his waitress."

I asked Goff if she would have said a bar was a good place to meet a date.

"No," she said, "I would've said the exact opposite." And yet, "we're getting married in April."

It could be bar-enhanced love; it could just be her fiancé's particular type of bait. Still, it seems romance can be found at local watering holes. If you like a laid-back bar or a hopping club, chances are you might meet and click with someone who feels the same way. There just might be a fanciful spring love in your future.

And that calls for a cocktail.

▶ Contact nightlife columnist Jessica Bowman at adn.com/contact/jbowman.

By Sarah Henning
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In the past 18 months, Bearfoot has opened for Lyle Lovett and performed at the Kennedy Center.

In July, the Anchorage-bred band will jam alongside folks like Ricky Skaggs and Ralph Stanley at Merlefest in Wilkesboro, N.C., a 13-stage music festival that drew more than 76,000 people last summer.

But the sweetest (and scariest) moment so far came last May, when the 20-something musicians all said "adios" to their day jobs.

"We're real, professional musicians," said fiddler Angela Oudean, 24.

"Or real, professional bums," added mandolinist Jason Norris, also 24.

Alaska fans witnessed the Bearfoot evolution as the green teens matured into poised adults, as their bluegrass sound flowed toward a broader Americana style.

Now the band transitions from passion to profession. For proof, clear your schedule for 7:30 p.m. today, when Bearfoot hits the stage at Wendy Williamson Auditorium.

You'll see the musicians geared up with wireless mikes, so they can run around the stage like Steven Tyler if the mood strikes. They sell merch: T-shirt anyone? The women have adopted a dresses-and-heels uniform. (Not to be outdone, Norris bought himself a snappy pair of suspenders.)

But as they've settled into a two-weeks-on, two-weeks-off national touring schedule, much remains the same. They still play a rootsy, acoustic style and sing perfumed harmonies.

And, ever humble, they still rock a Town & Country minivan.

"Lyle Lovett has, like, five buses and two semis. Semis!" said bassist Kate Hamre.

"And then there's us with our minivan on the other side," Oudean said.

"But we did get a GPS," Hamre said. "Her name is Janet."

Fine tuning

These days the Bearfoot machine employs three agents and two publicists, a far cry from the homespun, parent-driven operation they had as teens, when they regularly played around Alaska for free.

Three of the five musicians still live in their home state: Oudean and Norris in Anchorage, and guitarist Mike Mickelson, 24, in Cordova. Fiddler Annalisa Tornfelt, 25, calls Portland, Ore., home, and Hamre, 23, has settled in San Francisco.

In the past year, tours have taken them beyond the familiar music halls to large outdoor festivals and blues and rock clubs, such

Bearfoot

When: 7:30 p.m. today
Where: Wendy Williamson Auditorium
How much: \$20, \$15 ages 17 and younger, \$10 for UAA students
Web: www.bearfootbluegrass.com, www.myspace.com/bearfootband

• Bearfoot will perform in Homer and Juneau in June. Check their Web sites for details.



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BEARFOOT VIDEO: Watch Bearfoot pickin' and grinnin' at play.adn.com

as the House of Blues in Cleveland and The Vic Theatre in Chicago.

Opening a string of shows for an Irish rock band, The Saw Doctors, the members of Bearfoot learned that flexibility isn't just for gymnasts.

"At first, the crowd didn't really know what to make of us," Oudean said.

"The first gig I was like, 'Where are we? What are we doing? Oh my God!'" Hamre said. "But by the fifth one, I think we'd learned."

They gradually adjusted their set list to include more rowdy, upbeat songs and some pop tunes penned by Tornfelt. The percussion-less outfit borrowed The Saw Doctors' drummer. Norris took advantage of the opportunity to play songs with cuss words in the lyrics, since their shows typically meet Mr. Clean standards.

Now, Bearfoot members are obsessed with covering a rock song. Once they can agree on one.

"Democracy is a slow process," Norris shrugged.

Past, present, future

Bearfoot's latest recording may cause an epidemic of deja vu.

The band is in the midst of nationally releasing "Follow Me," the 2006 disc they only officially released in Alaska. The marketing move has helped them secure distribution with national vendors, such as Borders Books and Music, and will likely assist their push to get radio play.

"We've tried to send our music to radio stations ourselves before, but this time it'll be better, since we have somebody who actually knows how to do it, somebody who already has a relationship with the person at the other end of the phone," Norris said.

Next year the band will toast its 10th anniversary, and by then the musicians hope to have enough fresh material to record their fourth album. Because they live in three states, that means ferreting out time during the touring grind to arrange new songs.

"We're getting better about doing that, but when you spend six hours in the car to get to a town at 2, sound check is at 2:30, then bladi-bladi-bladi until the show," Hamre said. "It's hard enough to practice the songs for that night, but finding extra time to practice additional songs has been really hard."

"It would be a lot easier if we lived anywhere near each other," Oudean said. "But we don't like to make it easy on ourselves."

"Yeah," Norris added. "That's not how we roll."

▶ Find Play reporter Sarah Henning at adn.com/contact/shenning or call 257-4323.

The Best Q&A Ever

With Bearfoot bassist Kate Hamre

One of the best lyrics I've ever heard? Recently, I have been loving the lyrics from "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," because they are epic!

Signature piece of clothing? My pinkish/purple fleece slippers with fuzzy balls attached.

Death bed, one meal from an Alaska restaurant? Double Musky. I have very fond memories of sitting on the barstool when I was about 8 with my grandfather, Stumpy Faulkner. ... And they have some kickin' good steaks.

If you could adopt an old-timey, bluegrass name, what would you choose? Won't Get Drunk No More.

Pretend you're 15: What three songs would you put on a mix tape for a boyfriend? "1952 Vincent Black Lightning" by Del McCoury, "Roxanne" by Sting, "Two Little Bugs" by Stumpy Faulkner.

Which superpower do you wish you had? I wish I could fly. Getting my bass to gigs would be much easier!

What would be the title of your autobiography? "My Life With Easter Colors: The Kate Hamre Story"

Online poll

Bearfoot members are having a tough time agreeing on what rock song they should cover. Want to see Jason Norris sing "Do Ya Think I'm Sexy" in his suspenders? Think "Sympathy for the Devil" is in desperate need of a bluegrass makeover? Plug in your suggestion at play.adn.com, and you just may hear it at a Bearfoot show soon.

Bearfoot is, from left, Kate Hamre, Jason Norris, Annalisa Tornfelt, Mike Mickelson and Angela Oudean.



Photo courtesy of Zach Lewis

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