

# KeizerCommunity

KEIZERTIMES.COM

## Wire Monkey Mama makes Keizer debut

Band is fronted by two MHS teachers

By ERIC A. HOWALD.  
Of the Keizertimes

Ryan Somerville and Paul Shuirman have taught alongside each other at McNary High School for more than a decade, but it took a Joe Satriani concert to bring them together as bandmates.

"We were laughing hysterically," said Shuirman, a math teacher. "There were all these people going nuts and he's looking at them and playing as if he's a god. We realized that we had a similar idea about what makes for good performances."

Somerville was more to the point in his review.

"He basically has two songs and six licks that he's run through the wringer for decades," the English teacher said. "That's when we discovered that we're both equally iconoclastic. If someone needs to be chopped down a bit, we're willing to be the ones swinging the axe — it's just we'd rather do it musically."

Shuirman played in bands for years after teaching himself how to play by ear as a teenager. One of his more noteworthy gigs was playing at Los Angeles' Whiskey a Go Go in the heyday of Sunset Boulevard. Somerville taught himself to play as a teen by poring over guitar magazines, but had never played in public until last year when the band Wire Monkey Mama debuted at Salem's The Governor's Cup.

The founding of what



Ryan Somerville, Eric Bruce and Paul Shuirman play a living room set as Wire Monkey Mama. Submitted

would become Wire Monkey Mama was relatively innocent.

Shuirman sent Somerville a list of possible song titles, Somerville picked one out and wrote a poem while the pair sat in Somerville's room after school. He sent the nascent lyrics to Shuirman who excised some of the words, rearranged others and created a demo tape.

Those first steps gave birth to what's become their creative process.

"It was really organic after that first time. We just started sending stuff back and forth via

Facebook," Shuirman said.

It's now something like a well-oiled machine:

Step 1. Shuirman comes up with a list of potentially hilarious song titles.

Step 2. Somerville picks one out, say *Freddy's Phoenix Freak-out*, inserts "Fabulous" between "Freddy's" and "Phoenix" and then starts writing a poem about a guy named Freddy who checks into a Best Western in Phoenix, proceeds to fill the pool with shampoo and gets institutionalized.

"But Freddy's going to be

okay. That's the whole point," said Somerville.

Step 3. Shuirman gets the lyrics, gives them a pinch and twist and sets them to music, sometimes with his son providing backing vocals.

"My only rule for Ryan is that he can't give me melodies to work from," Shuirman said.

Step 4. Somerville gets the song back, grieves for the shattered brilliance of his word-crafting and then comes to grips with it having evolved into a better song.

Step 5. The pair gets together with drummer Eric Bruce to flesh out the musical components.

### Why Wire Monkey Mama?

One of Ryan Somerville's hobbies, in addition to writing and making music, is coming up with band names.

The Seven Deadly Sinatras is one of his personal favorites, but Wire Monkey Mama is one he's been kicking around for several years.

"Our eponymous song is *Don't Be a Wire Monkey Mama*," said Somerville.

The name comes from a series of experiments conducted by psychologist Harry Harlow in the 1950s. Harlow put rhesus macaques that had been raised in isolation into cages with one "mother" made of wire and another made of cloth to see which the macaques would gravitate to.

Even when the wire monkey mamas were placed in the cages with food bottle and the cloth mothers had none, the macaques preferred the cloth mothers.

"The conclusion he made was that primates sought comfort even more than food," Somerville said.

Despite the somewhat endearing tale, Somerville embraced chilliness of the wire monkey concept when naming the band.

"Essentially, we're the cold, heartless maternal figures that only offer you gruel and tell you to shut up," he said.

Somerville said it works because both of them are at a point where they are willing to give over some of the creative control in the process, and because both of them approach it with an all-or-nothing sense of humor.

In the midst of conversation, Somerville will whip out his phone and start typing lyrics or song titles. In the course of the interview, this happens at least four times. The pair gets into a joking argument about the musical merits of Ted Nugent and soon Somerville is typing *Wango Tango Suite* into his phone.

"We're going to redo Wango Tango, and get it right this time," he said.

Somerville wrote a song titled *Quinoa* after he found an article on Buzzfeed about it being the top name for babies of hipsters. The pair is now trying to enlist friends and offspring to dress up as boxes of quinoa at Wire Monkey Mama's Keizer debut Saturday, May 7, at Keizer Village Shopping Center. The group is performing at 11:30 a.m. as part of the festivities surrounding Free Comic Book Day at Tony's Kingdom of Comics.

"For me, what's fun is seeing some of Ryan's ideas for a song and thinking, 'That is so stupid.' Then I realize that's why I have to go with it. It's the challenge of taking something like that and turning it into something cool," Shuirman said.

Despite his math proclivities, Shuirman approaches performing with the mindset of a sociologist. He's just as interested in the interplay between performer and audience as he is the music.

"There's a challenge in playing in front of a new group, I'd rather do that than play in front of a bunch of friends who won't tell me I suck," he said.

It might seem like they're trying to play a joke on the audience, but Somerville and Shuirman are hoping the audience sees it more as an invitation.

"I figured 49 years old wasn't too late to start a punk band — better late than never. I love it, my students love the idea of it. I have no delusions of being a polished performer, but we are seriously trying to create good songs," Somerville said. "We just want people to come and have fun. Laugh with us or laugh at us, but have fun."

### Free Comic Book Day and more at Keizer Village May 7

Wire Monkey Mama takes the stage at Keizer Village as part of Free Comic Book Day at Tony's Kingdom of Comics, 3856 River Road N., Saturday, May 7.

The Wire Monkey Mama's set begins at 11:30 a.m., but they are only part of a slew of activities planned for that day at Keizer Village Shopping Center.

Musical acts include Captain Wails and the Harpoons and Coot & Codger in addition to Wire Monkey Mama. Tony's will have visiting artists in addition to free comics (two per customer). El Patron will be offering \$1 tacos. Birdie's Bistro will have free samples. Ireland's ATA and Karate for Kids will be running board-breaking demonstrations. Costumed heroes and pop culture icons will be in attendance for photos and the Rockabilly Rust-O-Rama Car Show will be set up in the parking lot.

Donations to Keizer Community Food Bank will net visitors an extra free comic and there will be a silent auction and raffle in support of Doernbecher Children's Hospital. Tony Grove, owner of the comic shop, said he's already raised more than \$1,000 for Doernbecher and the event has yet to begin.

The fun begins at 11 a.m. and runs to 8 p.m.

WE ARE  
EVERYTHING  
EXCEPT  
OVERPRICED

Simple  
Cremation  
\$795

Inexpensive Burial  
and Funeral Options

Pre-Planning Available

On-Site Crematory

**Keizer**  
FUNERAL CHAPEL

4365 RIVER RD N, KEIZER  
503.393.7037

**younglife.**

**HUGE  
GARAGE SALE**

**SATURDAY MAY 7**

7:30 AM TO 2:30 PM

Dayspring Fellowship gym, 1755 Lockhaven Dr. N.E.

QUALITY ITEMS, INCLUDING HOUSEWARES, TOOLS,  
ITEMS FOR KIDS AND BABIES, FURNITURE, ELECTRONICS, ETC

ALL PROCEEDS BENEFIT KIDS GOING TO CAMP THIS SUMMER!

## WorshipDirectory

These Salem-Keizer houses of worship invite you to visit.  
Call to list your church in our Worship Directory: (503) 390-1051

**JOIN US FOR  
SUNDAY WORSHIP**  
8:30 am • 10 am • 11:30 am • 6 pm  
**PEOPLESCHURCH**  
4500 LANCASTER DR NE | SALEM  
503.304.4000 • www.peopleschurch.com

**SAINT EDWARD Catholic Church**  
393-5323  
5303 River Rd. N., Keizer  
Father Gary L. Zerr, Pastor  
Saturday Vigil Liturgy: 5:30 p.m.  
Sundays: 8:15 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.  
La Misa en Español: 12:30 p.m.

**John Knox Presbyterian Church**  
452 Cummings Lane North • 393-0404  
Rev. Dr. John Neal, Pastor  
Worship - 10:30 a.m.  
Education Hour - 9:15 a.m.  
Nursery Care Available  
www.keizerjkpres.org

**Faith Lutheran Church**  
4505 River Rd N • 393-4507  
Sunday Schedule:  
9:00 a.m. Children's Church  
9:15 a.m. Adult Bible Study  
9:30 a.m. Children's Activities  
10:30 a.m. Worship with Communion  
Pastor Virginia Eggert

**dayspring fellowship**  
Celebration Services  
Saturday Evening 6:00 pm  
Sunday Morning 9:00 am and 10:45 am  
Children's Programs, Student and Adult Ministries  
1755 Lockhaven Dr. NE Keizer  
503-390-3900  
www.dayspringfellowship.com

**Keizer Christian Church**  
(Disciples of Christ)  
6945 Wheatland Rd. NE 393-6843  
Pastor Bob Arnold  
3 and 4 year Old Pre-School  
Worship and Children's Church • 10:00 a.m.  
Office Hours 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Mon. - Fri.

**Jason Lee UMC**  
820 Jefferson St. NE  
Salem OR 97301  
Dr. Jon F. Langenwaller, Pastor  
The church with the purple doors  
503-364-2844  
Worship at 9:30 am • Child Care Available

**Countryside Christian Church**  
countrysidechristianchurch.org  
Corner of Lockhaven and McLeod, KEIZER • (503) 540-1989  
9:00 am & 10:30 am  
Sunday Worship  
Classes for all ages