

# NOT A Beer Commercial

**JACK MCARDLE - Guitar and vocals**  
**BARRY ARBOGAST - Saxophone**  
**BRUCE HALE - Guitar and vocals**  
**JOHN BENSON - Bass**  
**JOHN PRYBYLSKI - Drums**

For those of you who are not familiar with the group 12-Pack Jack, this is not a beer commercial. Truth be told, the name of the group was taken from a nickname that Jack McArdle had been given a number of years ago. So how does a group end up with a name like 12-Pack Jack? About 7 or 8 years ago Jack was invited to a recording session on a Wednesday night for a friend of his. As the story goes, the recording studio was in a basement, and there were about 12-15 musicians there. In the refrigerator there was exactly one can of beer. Now it doesn't take a math wizard to figure out that one can of beer does not come anywhere near close to taking care of a recording session for 12 musicians (or for that matter any gathering of a dozen folks where music is involved). Being the concerned and altruistic individual he is, Jack went out and came back shortly with a 12-pack of beer under each arm. I'll let you figure out the rest. Anyway, when it came time to give the group a name, the guys decided (and not at Jack's urging) that 12-Pack Jack would be a good catch name.

As with many bands the development of 12-Pack was over a period of time, and was also a family affair of sorts. **Barry Arbogast**, the group's sax player, has been married to Jack's sister for 21 years. So Jack and Barry have been involved in a number of projects over the past 20 years as relatives and friends. So now the whole thing gets a little convoluted - but interesting. Jack went to Kansas University for and worked in the field of microbiology. Now without casting aspersions, Jack's stage demeanor, size, and appearance just some how doesn't fit into my perception of

*Featured  
Artist  
by Karl Bauer  
Photos Karl Bauer*

someone who would be working in that field. And as it turned out, when they started getting PCs into the labs that Jack was working in, he developed an interest, learned a lot more about it, and now works in the systems and programming area. But back to the family spin. Barry went to school for and got a degree in music at the Denton School of Music at North Texas State in Denton, TX, now called the University of North Texas, which is located just north of the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. I would guess that many of you



have heard the name Denton, but like myself, had no clue as to where it was located or the prominence that it enjoys in the world of music. Barry explained that, "Groups like the Glenn Miller orchestra are heavily populated with graduates of Denton, and many others are and have been such as Stan Kenton." Hey, what did I know? As **Bruce Hale**, the group's other guitarist puts it, "Barry is the monster musician in our group, and he's jazz influenced." Which brings up an interesting point. I don't recall who said it, but one of the band's members said, "We are not a 3-chord,

12-bar blues band."

Sorry, back to the band's development and coming together. Barry and Jack had both been out of the area for a number of years, and like many others, both had played music when they were young. When Jack's son was 4 years old Barry chased Jack out into a wedding band to get him back to playing. As a side comment to how intertwined the Western New York Community music scene is, Maria Aurigema was 16 years old at the time and playing in the same band. "That's when the band progression began", as Jack and Barry did a number of different things over the years. Along the way was a group called Blue Streak and a stint doing classic rock with John Lamond of the local country music scene. A couple of years ago, the two of them decided to put a blues band together. Well if you're going to look for other musicians, one of the best ways to find them is at the open mikes. They were actually looking for a keyboard for the group when they met up with Bruce Hale, who was spending a lot of time sitting in with Harvey and the Hurricanes at Zuzon's and Sonoma. They were impressed with Bruce, Bruce was looking for a regular gig, and the

decision was made to go with two guitars, sax, and a rhythm section. Jack and **John Benson** the bass player met a number of years back when Jack was doing the sound for a band that John was in. John was 23 at the time, and shortly after that, they both (Jack and John) ended up in another group for a while. John's joining 12-Pack came about as Jack had called John to fill in a number of times over the course of a year, and about a year ago

they decided that they wanted him on permanently. The band finished rounding out when **John Prybylski**, the drummer, came to hear them at Super Jam 2007. The current drummer was going to have some shoulder surgery, and they needed a fill in. As it turned out, the temporary arrangement became permanent.

There are some common threads that run through the group. They're intent on the chemistry within the group and quite pleased with the chemistry that they have. They're also intent on crowd pleasing and having

chemistry with the crowd. And while Jack's business card for the group has the expression, 'Expose yourself to the blues' on the back of it, they're not locked into conventional pure blues. Recall that Barry's jazz influence is strongly there. An example would be the group doing Buddy Guy's version of the old Peggy Lee standard *Fever*, but in the middle of the song they interject a little of Henry Mancini's *Pink Panther*. Speaking of punctuation, John Prybylski and John Benson clicked from the first time that they jammed together, and have very quickly developed into a solid rhythm section. When a rhythm section is solid, and dropping in the occasional fill is a bonus, the rest of the group has the opportunity to move around and take some liberties with solos, etc. The irony is that John Prybylski is the group's oldest member and old enough to be the father of the group's youngest member, John Benson. Not surprisingly the guys refer to him as Baby John. That being said, I heard the comment several times by others in the group that, "He does things that you just wouldn't expect from a 31 year-old bass player." Several of the group also mentioned that their drummer seems to regularly add accents and fills that they haven't heard before. "Every set it's something different."

In addition to the common threads mentioned earlier, there are some real differences. Unlike different groups I've interviewed and written about, not all of them had a blues orientation to begin with. Jack did the garage band thing, and said, "I learned my first C chord was I was 10 years old, and I've gone in many different directions. I don't always do things conventionally, and fortunately I realized that most of the rock that I liked was blues oriented". John Prybylski grew up in the 60's and favored R&B, as well as being a fan of Stan & the Ravens. He still also has the two original vinyl recordings done by the Ravens. He did the standard rock and country blues but sold his drum set and gave up music for 15 years to spend more time with his kids as they were growing up. That gesture and time must have been appreciated, as his son bought him a set of used drums for a gift a couple of years ago, and he started back playing. He auditioned for over a year and a half and was just about ready to give up, when he hooked up with 12-Pack. As mentioned earlier, it clicked, and John really likes it as "there are just too many bands doing SRV and not much more." The kid thing is also a factor with Bruce Hale. Like many, he had played in cover bands in his early years. But because of a time-wise demanding professional career, Bruce who had played since he was 14, took an "artistic hiatus" as he called it from music. Nine years ago his 16-year old son had wanted to play guitar so Jack bought him a Stratocaster. This

triggered Bruce getting back into it. Anyway, a golf buddy Joe Calbrese (who helped launch last year's Blues 'N March event) suggested that he come out to the Monday night jam held by Harvey Murello, or The Hurricanes, if you prefer. Bruce wanted me to make sure that I note that he credits Harvey for giving him the opportunity, Paul Ianello as a huge influence, and Joe Mahfoud, his instructor, for challenging him to play outside of the pentatonic box. John Benson, who always takes a lot of flack because of his age, started with guitar and did a lot of 103.3 type of alternative music. He also has done drums but doing open mikes with Dave Viterna got him into the blues. "I really enjoy the blues, because it's more regular and not chaotic." So are you ready for a real, honest to goodness blues story. John Benson notes that one of the reasons he got into the bass was

pleasing from a crowd and blues standpoint, but he is also becoming very technically articulate.

Bruce Hale – "I've never had more fun in my life. I have no regrets, and I'm as a fulfilled a person as you'll ever meet."

Barry Arbogast – "This band is part of my existence. I'm extremely fortunate. I get the luxury of a sax solo every song we do, and we're having a ball."

Jack McArdle has recently become a member of the Board of Directors for the Blues Society of Western New York.

Jack McArdle – "The blues society is a wonderful thing. They've helped us a lot and others a lot, and I just want to give back. (Per Jack, this one is important) 12-Pack Jack is NOT my group. It's my nickname, and the group chose it. And as it reads on the back of my band business card – Expose yourself to



that at one time he had to sell his guitar to make bail for a traffic violation, and his next instrument ended up being a bass instead of a guitar. Barry Arbogast stayed in the Texas and Oklahoma area after graduating from Denton and played in country and Mexican bands for a while. That's certainly a beginning I hadn't heard before.

John Benson, about working with John Prybylski – "It's like having a conversation, and as a result, there's a lot of tasty fills."

Before offering some things Bruce Hale said to me, I want to mention that he is retired from National Fuel Gas and is spending 20+ hours a week honing his guitar skills and playing - just like a teenager. Now I hardly ever offer something like this, but this guy is a monster player in the making. He's not only

the blues, but not in a single vein or a pure form."

I know I overuse this closing, but these guys are having fun, and they want you to have fun too. So catch them, please. And to offer a little spin on them, at the bottom of all of Jack's email is the following little tidbit:

Son: "Hey Dad, when I grow up, I want to be a musician!"

Father: Sorry son, you can't do both!"

So if they don't want to grow up, and their name denotes a relationship to adult liquid refreshment, why wouldn't you want to catch them? You can see where they're playing at [www.12PackJack.com](http://www.12PackJack.com).