

# Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate have ties to top Blues musicians – Bluedog Blues Band

By CD Floro  
Sota Editor

That's correct. Our Sissetonwan Wahpetonwan Dakota Oyate have ties to the Bluedog Blues Band – even though their adopting the name Bluedog was not done because of our BlueDog tiospaye. But members of the BlueDog family are aware of the great music the band does!



**Not only lovely to the eyes, this lady can really make the pulse of the Blues blast right through your heart.**

I'd like to see our Sissetonwan Wahpetonwan Dakota Oyate "adopt" Bluedog as their own favorite Blues band. And mitakodas everywhere.

Music gives me support for my journey, and I enjoy encouraging especially young people to enjoy music – at whatever level, in whatever way. Hopefully, our Oyate youth can find in Bluedog role models for their own lives.

Ran into Gordon (the "Chuck Berry" of Indian Country") and JoAnne Bird a week ago and talked about Bluedog. Certainly, the Bird Family has mentored many Oyate musicians, and Jackie Bird continues that tradition.

They would approve of what the Bluedog Blues Band is doing.

Take a listen to them when you can, buy a CD, and make certain to come and see them perform live whenever you can.

Some of what appears here comes from the Bluedog's website, some from a visit with them during a practice at their home – what a privilege. Like having a personal concert!

The Bluedog band is the 2010 NAMMY (Native American Music Award) winner in the "Group of the Year" category. The band was originally formed in 2001 by Joni (Weston) and Eric Buffalohead. Bluedog released their debut CD "From All Directions" in April of 2005. The CD was recorded at Oyate Studios in Albuquerque, NM. The CD received two nominations (Best Blues and Debut Recording) from the Native American Music



**Mom and daughter working harmony and filling the practice room with gut-punching vocals.**

Awards; and was also nominated for the best blues category for the Indian Summer Music Awards. Bluedog released its second CD "A Little White Lie" in December of 2006. This CD was recorded in Minneapolis, MN. The recording received a Native American Music Award nomination for Best Blues recording. In 2010 the band released a single called "Get Up & Get Out"; and, nominated in the Best Blues category for the 2010 Indian Summer Music Awards. "Get Up & Get Out" was also nominated in two categories (Best Blues & Group of the Year) for the 2010 Native American Music Awards (NAMMY's). Bluedog's latest recording, "Just Living the Blues" was released in December of 2011. This CD was recorded at Untouchable Studios in Grand

Forks, ND and produced by blues guitarist Little Bobby and Joni.

The music is influenced by life experiences of Native people. Joni says that "Native people have the experience the blues too. For us it reflects a significant part of life for Native people and our relationship with the U.S. government: in the past, present and future. All the pain we've endured from massacres, boarding schools, and forced removal from our homes, etc... all attempts to erase our culture and our people. We are still here. Our music celebrates life, the good and bad."

The band has performed



**Belting out the lines with soul.**

across the United States in support of their original recordings in locations such as: Hollywood, FL (Native American Music Awards), Milwaukee, WI (Indian Summer Music Awards), Toppenish, WA (Yakima Tribal Jam), Minneapolis, MN (Indian Summer Music Festival), and the Thief River Falls, MN (Last Ride Blues Festival 2009 to 2014). The band has fronted notable blues acts including: The Robert Cray Band, Indigenous, Los Lonely Boys, Corey Stevens, John Mayall, Kenny Neal Band, Lil Ed and the Blues Imperials, Coco Montoya, Ana Popovic, Walter Trout, Shannon Curfman, and the Jerry Garcia Band. The Bluedog band is a five member blues/rock band out of Minneapolis, MN.

#### Members of the Band

Joni (Weston) Buffalohead — Lead Vocal

[Bdewakantowan/Dakota: enrolled member of the Sisseton-

Wahpeton Oyate Sioux Tribe in South Dakota]

Co-founder and singer-songwriter.

Growing up and attending church, Joni did not believe she could sing, she could not hit the high notes as the fellow church ladies. Later in

life after becoming a mom she was discovered by her children. When Eric's band toyed with the idea to add female vocals, Joni's children highly recommended Mom to take that slot. After a few months of singing cover songs, Joni started to write music with Eric. This was the beginning of Bluedog.



**Daughter Alex owns those keys, and besides inheriting her mom's good looks she is coming into her own as a Blues singer.**

Eric Buffalohead — Guitar

[Ponca: enrolled member of the White Eagle Southern Ponca

Tribe in Oklahoma]

Co-founder and lead guitarist,

Eric's 20 years of guitar playing has taken him on a journey of performances in various categories of music including: classic rock, oldies, blues, country and reggae. His real love is the genre of blues and the Bluedog Band has been his chance to play the music that is in his heart.

Alexandra Buffalohead — Keyboard [Bdewakantowan/Dakota: enrolled member of the Sisseton-

Wahpeton Oyate Sioux Tribe in South Dakota]

Alex is the youngest member

Bluedog lineup. Alex became a

member at the age of 16. The

daughter of lead vocalist Joni and

lead guitarist Eric, Alex has the

ability to emulate her mother's

voice exactly. She has provided well

rounded backing vocals and has

put years of piano lessons to good

use by playing the keyboard, organ

and guitar. But there's no telling

what else she may be doing. While

watching them practice, Bob wasn't

around that night, so Alex sat at the

drums for a few songs. (Joni, why

in the world do you call this young

lady "Big Al?") Doesn't figure.)

Alex and her mom were

selected to attend an Indigenous

project, the Hopson Lessons in

last year for the Blues Women

International. The mother-daughter

duet came away with what I

objectively (don't call my objectivity

into question) see as the absolute

greatest cut on the compilation

album: "I Think He's Cheating This

Time." So one of you young guys

get it in your mind that you'd like

to get to know Alex you'd better

understand up front she's not going

to stand for any cheating!

Tom Suess — Bass

[Purely mixed European descent,

longtime associate (20+ years)

of Eric & Joni's]

Learning basic guitar as a

young boy in the western burbs

of Minneapolis, Tom picked up

his first bass in Okinawa while in

the Marines and hasn't stopped

learning. While drawing on his

country, folk and rock upbringing,

he is also influenced by pretty much

everything he hears from classic

& modern blues, jazz, alternative,

and new age. In addition to

playing the 5-string bass, he also

provides backup vocals in addition

to occasional lead vocal and

harmonica.

Not only is Tom a great

musician – for a wasicu (oh no

no, just kidding there!) – he is

an integral part of the chemistry,

the electricity that flows through

all these folks when they are

performing.

Even in the practice room in

the basement of the Buffaloheads'

home, that chemistry happens.

It's the invisible force that

drives Bluedog's live performances

and makes people want to jump up,

clap, holler, and dance.

Bob Simons — Drums

[Bdewakantonwan/Dakota/

Assiniboine: enrolled member

of the Flandreau Santee Sioux

Tribe]. Bob also happens to be

a cousin to Joni.

Bob is the newest member of

the Bluedog Band. Along with over

30 years experience on the drums,

Bob brings to the table a plethora

of musical styles, including Rock,

Fusion, Funk, R&B and Swing.

But it wasn't until playing a gig

with The Legendary Blues Band

(Muddy Waters' backing band) back

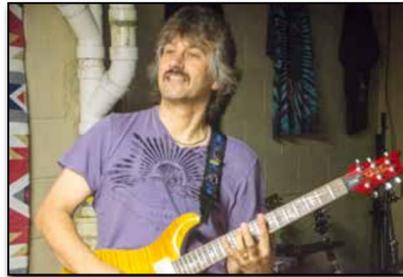
in 1986 that Bob became a true

disciple of the Blues. Bob's 'windy'

interpretation of the Bluedog sound



**Gathering in the living room, are: Tom Suess, Joni, Alex and Eric Buffalohead. Only band member missing from this practice session was Joni's cousin Bob Simons, the drummer. It was early on a Friday evening before several hours of great Blues jamming downstairs in the practice room.**



**Dad, Eric Buffalohead, can stand with anybody on the guitar. Or, actually, on any of many guitars he keeps on hand. His Blues licks slide up and down the fretboard making it look easy. He can work magic on electric and acoustic models.**

and culturally Programs our families, significantly family services, legal services, chemical cultural other family and

Our MIWRC's grounded in MIWRC that by communities, by serving lasting change emphasized Creator, her family, tribe, to incorporate approach to our

Award The Center provides several years, we The Award for The Empowerment Award from the The 2005 Strengthening



**Here is Eric making a Martin sing. Note that the versatile Alex is in the background sitting in on the drums in Bob's absence.**



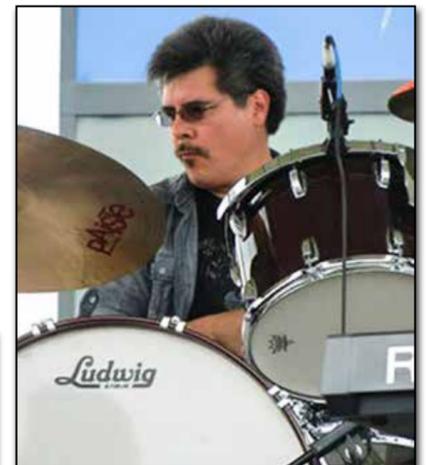
**Closeup of Alex. She's working not only on percussion but the guitar.**



**Tom's main job is to pound the rhythm into the song with the bass guitar. Here is a five-string he plays a lot.**



**Only wasicu in the band, but Tom Suess is definitely one of the Bluedog family. Here is wailing on the Blues harp.**



**Bob Simons was not present for practice while we were there, but he is the main percussion man wherever Bluedog plays. And we saw him perform with the band at the Ominicye Festival in Minneapolis last month. Everybody was in great form, and we captured the music on video. Check it out on our website.**

has brought the band's music into to a new dimension.

Bob's drumming is the heartbeat of the Blues for Bluedog. Surely he too is part of that chemistry and carries the rhythm and energy beneath the flow of instruments and vocals.

It's a privilege getting to know these musicians personally.

Shot video of their set during the Owamni Falling Water Festival August 2nd, Fr. Hennepin Bluffs Park, Minneapolis. Music videos are coming from that event, so watch for links on our website, Facebook, and on our YouTube channel Earthskyweb as well as on the band's website <http://www.bluedognativeblues.com/>.

In her "other, day job" Joni serves as Director of Operations of the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center. Advocacy and outreach is a driving force for Joni.

Here is a brief look at MIWRC:

Mission Statement: "To empower American Indian women and families to exercise their cultural values and integrity, and to achieve sustainable life ways, while advocating for justice and equity."

The Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (MIWRC) is a non-profit social and educational services organization committed to the holistic growth and development of American Indian women and their families. Founded in 1984, MIWRC provides a broad range of programs designed to educate and empower American Indian women and their families, and to inform and assist those who work providing services to the community.

MIWRC is located in the Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis, which has the third largest urban American Indian population in the United States. MIWRC is the only

organization addressing the gender specific needs of our community. are developed to reflect the needs of and are tailored to address issues that affect their well-being; such as child advocacy, child care services, affordable housing, parenting skills, dependency, mental health care, resilience, historical trauma and many community issues.

Culturally Sensitive Approach: founders established an organization community. For the past 30 years, has adhered to the philosophy impacting families, neighborhoods, society and public policy – not merely individual women – positive and can happen. The founders of MIWRC a woman's relationship with her children and partner, her extended community and culture. We continue this holistic, culturally sensitive work.

Winning Services: Minnesota Indian Women's Resource award winning services. Over the past have been honored by the following: 2009 Ann Bancroft Dreammakers Organizational Excellence. 2008 American Indian Families Project Organizational Excellence Grotto Foundation. UNCA/Annie E. Casey Family Award for Best Practices in American Indian families.