

# Fillmore South

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*An Abiding Love for the Allmans – and Each Other – Keeps the Applebutter Express Rambling and Doing the Best They Can*

by Stephen Pitalo (feature photo by Dale Foster Photo)

With songs like “Handguns and Hammocks,” “Just Add Water” and “Riley,” one learns to expect the unexpected from Florida duo The Applebutter Express. Their allegiance to 70s Allman Brothers-type instrumentalism never overpowers their sound but feels more like an Americana progression than a freshly painted bandwagon.

When Kyle Biss met his future wife Shannon while working at a record store in Bradenton, Florida in 2004, it was fate. Still a focused bass player, Kyle picked up a ukulele in 2010 and began to write songs, with the idea of singing with Shannon (his then-girlfriend) for fun on the couch. Pretty soon the duo began making a name for themselves among the open mic community; in no time, the eclectic, tuneful duo – now known as The Applebutter Express – were the talk of Tampa, Fl. Kyle and Shannon married in 2011, and in 2012 added Joe Trivette (fiddle) and Zach Rogers (bass) to the band.

Florida native Shannon Biss fronts the Tampa-based Applebutter, where her vocal harmonies are paired with that of her ukulele-playing husband, Kyle Biss. She grew up in a musical family, singing in middle and high school choirs, but didn't start performing with a band until many years later. Despite graduating from Johnson and Wales University with a degree in baking and pastry arts, she decided to pursue music instead. After about a year of performing with their former band, she and Kyle split off to form a duo, just ukulele, and

vocals, soon dubbing themselves The Applebutter Express. Now a 4-piece outfit, Shannon and the boys continue to spread their unique brand of feel-good music across the country and soon the world.

Hailing from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Kyle Biss began playing drums at age 9, and soon formed his first band.

in the 7th grade. After realizing the lack of string players in the area (and abundance of drummers) Kyle began exploring stringed instruments and soon the bass guitar became his instrument of choice. Kyle graduated from the University of South Florida with a bachelor's degree in communications, and around that time he discovered the ukulele. The ukulele is traditionally a Hawaiian and Portuguese instrument but having learned to play the uke on his own, Kyle's interpretation is anything but traditional. This is how he and his wife came to form The Applebutter Express: their unique blend of bluegrass, funk, and classic rock, teamed with the vocal harmonies created between him and his wife have, make the act difficult to categorize as anything but delightfully unique.

When asked which bands have influenced The Applebutter Express music, Kyle namedrops the Allman Brothers Band, Grateful Dead, Parliament/Funkadelic, Ben Folds Five, and even Weezer.

*"I believe The Allman Brothers shouldn't be lumped in with all the other southern rockers because they got a little more jazzy and technical," Kyle said. "Shannon used to be in chorus, and we would sing on the couch, but she wanted nothing to do with getting on stage," Kyle said. "She was 17 and I was 18. She wanted nothing to do with being a singer and couldn't wrap her head around the idea. When she turned 21, she was able to get a little liquid courage."*



“Yeah, I had a beer first,” Shannon said.

*“She simply was tired of watching the band,” Kyle confirmed. “So, she’d sit in and would sing back-up. Finally, somebody said, Kyle, you need to stop singing and let her sing.”*

Fiddler Joe Trivette met Kyle and Shannon at a party while the duo was recording their debut album, and the next day was in the studio with them, recording fiddle tracks. When not on the road with Applebutter, Joe is a private fiddle instructor; he also works as a luthier

under Ken Bailey in Plant City, Florida.

You know your band is the real thing when you’re asked to open for Steve Martin and Martin Short. That was the case with the

Applebutter Express when they opened for the comedy-music duo at the Mahaffey Theater. As for work on the road, they've been seen onstage from Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival to Hulaween to Suwannee Springfest. Soon they'll be joining Tire Fire, Hannah Harber and the Lionhearts, Free Range Strange, Mountain Holler & Friends, and Ashley Smith & The Random Occurrence on the bluegrass stage at Orange Blossom Jamboree in at 11th annual Orange Blossom Jamboree at Sertoma Youth Ranch in Brooksville, Florida, on the weekend of May 14, 2021.

<https://youtu.be/FKiYqnlCHCc>