

**Big City Blues – Aug.-Sept. 2002**  
**By George Seedorff**

Hats off to Severn for signing this guy and putting out an album as unique as this. But how do you explain to the stranger how this man makes his golden funky blues guitar work spin into orbit? The firestorm of great singers he has collected together pay off like an exceptional day at the track. If you could weld the art of great blues and R&B singing to the guitar, let's say the power of singing greats like Delbert McClinton or Etta James, then you've got a glimpse of how Bruce Conte can lay down his licks on a good day.

With Les Paul goldtop in hand, Conte reflects the kind of gold standard with which he approaches the art of the electric guitar. The singers he has chosen for this album may not be well known yet but the point is that they ought to be. Conte's take on wall-to-wall vocal soul power begins with Christopher Galvin, whose range bridges the gap masterfully between Delbert McClinton and Robert Cray as he shows on "Too Much Cool" (track 1), "Mojo Mambo" (track 5) and "There's Roo At The Top" (track 11).

Soul singer Ellis Hall is infectious with his high registration, reminiscent as it is of Eddy Kendrick also crackles along the edges down low sort of like Sly Stone as evidenced on "Nowhere To Go" (track 2). The trash talking Ed Reddick on "I Met A Girl" (track 3) takes the CD all the way to funky town with vocal phrasing that rival a first rate alto sax player in a funk band.

What Ed Reddick is to the alto sax, Bobby Kimball is to the tenor sax on "Chasin' The Blues" (track 4) and likewise to Tin Scott on "Just Won't Act Right" (track 6). Here and throughout the album Conte's guitar breaks are the continuing motif that unify all these great singers. He is characteristically gleeful with girl singer Windy Barnes for good reason. Her performance earns radio airplay rights with her gospel-tinged take on the blues with "Too Sad To Sing The Blues" (track 7). Barnes brings to mind the vocal prowess long ago shown in different ways by classic songbirds Freda Payne, Betty Wright and Tammy Terrell.

With all the narrative command you'd expect from Curtis Mayfield, Lenny Williams shows just what he can do on "Bullet Proof" (track 9), which also deserves airplay. Conte's own vocal attack ranges from workmanlike with "It's Always Darkest Just Before The Dawn" (track 8) to dead on with "Feel So Bad" (track 10). "Snatch It Back And Hold It" (track 11) is a funky jazz triumph of the first order featuring some of Conte's best licks. Hammond organ master Steve Stephens makes this one an instant groove classic.

Bruce Conte makes this recording a pure funk attack from start to finish. But it is the singers that give Bullet Proof much of its glorious jolt.

**Stone Hut Music (Australia) –**  
**Fall of 2002**  
**By John Bates**

Bruce Conte is the former guitarist from Tower of Power. A veteran who has been playing for thirty-seven years. In the early seventies an opening slot with Tower of Power eventually helped Bruce Conte land the guitarist spot. This association with TOP lasted seven years and resulted in eight recordings. Having spent many years in 1988. During the late nineties, Bruce recorded two Jazz CDs and one Blues release, "Rhythm Meets the Blues".

The self produced "Bullet Proof" was originally released during late 2000 as "Rhythm Meets The Blues". It was recorded using a who's who of L.A. musicians. Some of the vocalists used are Lenny Williams, Gavin Christopher, Windy Barnes, Ed Reddick, Tim Scott and Toto front man Bobby Kimball. The opening track "Too Much Cool" and "It's Always Darkest Before The Dawn" are the only originals.

"**Bullet Proof**" is a great Blues release for Bruce Conte, with him retaining his R&B and funk sound. Some of the tunes are "I Met A Girl", "Too Sad to Sing The Blues" with Windy Barnes singing up a storm, "Mojo Manbo", "Nowhere to Go" and a tasty instrumental version of "Snatch Back And Hold It". Conte takes over the vocal spot on "It's Always Darkest Before The Dawn" and "Feel So Bad". Bruce Conte is currently looking at a second Blues release. Let's hope it's sooner rather than later, because I can't wait.

**Suncoast Blues Society –  
July/August 2002  
By MER**

So who's this Bruce Conte anyway? I turn the CD over in my hands. A picture shows a guy with high priest's collar and small bowler hat holding a lovely blonde (maple?) Gibson "Les Paul". His 'straight ahead' gaze reflects the music to come. He plays that pretty guitar spare, lean, clean. No bad boy histrionics here. In a previous life Bruce was guitarist for Tower of Power. My first thought, there's a lot of vocals and horns here-not my favorite things. Then I listened and these people are GOOD!

There's lots of featured L.A. artists, virtually a different vocalist on every cut. On Mojo Mambo, A rocky, Louisiana-reminiscent number, there's eight musicians. Just Won't Act Right has a much sparser line-up. Mr. Conte adds pretty licks and emphasis to Tim Scott's rough, happy voice. Julie Molina on bass and Steve Stephens on drums provide a flexible, professional rhythm section. Larry Williams' keyboards is quality clean stuff. On Too Sad to Sing The Blues, Windy Barnes gives a raucous 'up' feeling to the vocals.

It's Always Darkest Before the Dawn is one of two cuts Bruce wrote. He croons an almost 'torchy' ballad and manages to throw in some warm, honeyed licks as well. When he and that Les Paul solo, they've got my attention! The longer I listen the more they own me. Bullet Proof starts out with a jazzy, urban bar feel. Lenny Williams' vocals cut in to reinforce the Superfly sensation. Michael Acosta on sax and John Fumo on trumpet supply a relaxed yet alert edge. Bruce has the guitar talking about some suspicious stuff.

Feel So Bad is a sparse, funky treatment of a sad situation. Bruce's voice and guitar work are plaintive while Tom McMorran's keyboards and Herman Matthews' drums are more out front than the previous purveyor's of these instruments. There's Room At the Top is a horn-y comment on movin' up, like someone walking fast with a purpose.

I started out under impressed, but now I'm sold. Catch an audio glimpse of this pretty baby when you get a chance

**Journal de Montreal**

by Christophe Rodriguez

Review date: April 29 2002

### **Bruce Conte "Bullet Proof" (Severn CD 649436-0015)**

While not yet well known by blues fans, singer/guitarist, Bruce Conte, should be found noticeable on the rise with his first album. Despite the harsh title, "Bulletproof," the 12 (songs) do not really smell the gun powder. In addition to this group of four, some impressive guests help the blues band explore a diverse range of music, delving into soul, funk and gospel. In all, great work. All should be entertained.



Bruce Conte Bullet Proof Severn CD 0015 Review date: June 2002

Originally recorded in 2000 under the name *Rhythm Meets The Blues*, former Tower of Power guitarist **Bruce Conte** uses the material for his elegant Severn debut, *Bullet Proof*. Conte, a West Coast native, honed his skills playing the local San Francisco clubs. In the early 70s, his band landed the opener for hometown heroes, Tower of Power. Soon after, he was recruited by TOP and stayed for seven years. During that time, he released eight albums with the band. His signature licks can be found on TOP hits like "What Is Hip." After an '80s stint in Las Vegas and a brief jazz retreat in the '90s, Bruce is back on familiar ground, flexing his soul and funk-drenched skills. For this 12-song, 55-minute disc, Conte assembled an all star cast of L.A. musicians. Guest vocalists include Bobby Kimball (Toto), former TOP band mate Lenny Williams, and Windy Barnes, whose singing is spectacular. Gavin Christopher (Rufus) and his Stevie Wonder-sounding voice (circa *Songs In The Key Of Life*) get chilling on "Too Much Cool." On the track, Conte lays out an emotionally-felt solo. It sets the mood for the song deeper than the tune's lyrics! "Nowhere To Go" is R&B driven primarily due to the adult contemporary keyboarding of Larry Williams. Super fun vocals are provided by Ellis Hall on this disco-era flashback track. Don't let the title of "Chasin' The Blues" fool you. The song is smooth jazz and features the big city nightclub sounding sax of Andre Roberson. Here, Conte's guitar more than hints at jazz fusion. Listeners will be anything but motionless during "Just Won't Act Right." Bruce plays relentlessly while Tim Scott sings feverishly on this bluesy boogie. "It's Always Darkest Before The Dawn" is a real bluestime of tender slower persuasion, where Conte exercises his vocal chops. The instrumental "Snatch It Back and Hold It" is nothing like the original version. However, Hans Zermuelhen's keys are fascinating. I Reddick proves he is as gifted an entertainer as singer on "I Met A Girl." He elicits Conte to be fulfilling and sexy. The song has a blues pattern and welcomed pumping/driving horns of Michael Acosta/John Fumo. On the title track, the horns are forceful. Here, Fumo drives his trumpet with the impact of a speeding bullet. "There's Room at The Top" is further loaded with driving force and brazen brass. It's as close to sounding like ToP as the CD gets. This self-produced disc is a nice, tasty break from the sometimes monotonous 12 bar blues. However, the production was evasive in capturing a full, rich sound and the pop-funk tunes will not make you emotive like traditional blues does. The songs are average yet they bump, grind, and sure are hip. Although understated, Bruce Conte shows he is a disciplined and professional guitar player. His solos are slick and polished. Fans of electric guitar will crave more. Even though it is his CD, you will admit the fact that he does not showboat. It is obvious this disc was a group effort. For CDs, bookin

and information, contact: Severn Records Inc., PO Box 1450, Millersville, MD 21108 websi  
[www.severnrecords.com](http://www.severnrecords.com),



# BLUES

*on stage*

## CD Review

Bruce Conte

### **Bullet Proof**

(2002 Severn Records - CD-0015)

by Craig Ruskey

Review date: April 2002

Bruce Conte's name should be recognized well outside the blues idiom, coming from a tenure of seven years and eight recordings with Tower Of Power, but there's little question that his efforts work seamlessly with a blues-roux as the main ingredient. Originally worked up in 2000, this previously unreleased, self-produced offering has everything necessary to garner a wide audience

"Too Much Cool" leads off with a funky groove and the rasping vocals of Gavin Christopher while Conte steps up with some solid blues chops on guitar, and Ellis Hall exercises his gripping voice for "Nowhere To Go," with a back-and-forth feel that settles into an

R&B workout. "I Met A Girl" features Ed Reddick (formerly of Rufus) at the microphone on a stop time blues with fine horn charts and more excellent guitar from Conte's battered Les Paul, and Bobby Kimball (Toto) puts out some hefty singing on "Chasin' The Blues," which also features Andre Roberson's simmering sax work. Christopher has the spotlight on the New Orleans-flavore "Mojo Mambo" and "Just Won't Act Right," a sizzling shuffle, shows Tim Scott to be a potent singer, while Windy Barnes opens the furnace door for "Too Sad To Sing The Blues," her vocals a standout. Conte takes his first of two spots singing on the slow and gripping original, "It's Always Darkest Before The Dawn," and there's little doubt his voice has the ability to be as spellbinding as his guitar, while Lenny Williams, former Tower Of Power band mate, takes the point for the title track offering striking, soulful vocals. The Chuck Willis gem, "Feel So Bad," finds Conte behind the microphone once again, and makes one wonder why his voice only shows up twice, he's simply that good. There's a definite Tower Of Power feel on "There's Room At The Top" with Gavin Christopher handling the lead spot for his third track, and closing out with Junior Wells' classic, "Snatch It Back And Hold It," nearly vocal-less, gives Conte more room to stretch out.

Tower Of Power was one of the more impressive bands from a number of years ago to make the charts while using blues for its foundation, and Bruce Conte's work then was no more stellar than here, on "Bullet Proof." His guitar abilities seem endless, yet there's no grandstanding, and as a producer, he has managed to bring the absolute best out of the wide and varied cast on this CD. Carrying a band of at least a dozen people, to handle the excellent variety on this offering,

probably won't happen on the festival or spotlight club circuit, but with Conte's soul-drenched pipes, he could strip back the fat and still be a showstopper with half that number. Contact [www.severnrecords.com](http://www.severnrecords.com) or <http://bruceconte.com> for necessary details.



**Bruce Conte will 'mix it up' in Tacoma shows**  
**By Rick Nelson**

If you like good guitar work, Saturday's show at the Swiss and a benefit at Jillian's on Sunday look like good places to get an earful. Bruce Conte, who was with Tower of Power for seven years is bringing bassist Julian Molina to sit in with drummer Michael Kinder and Ric Ulski on piano and organ.

Conte called Tuesday after a rehearsal and said he liked the quartet's sound. "Ulski plays with Chuck Berry," Conte said, "and Kinder is a good drummer."

Tacomans already know about Kinder, who performs regularly at the Swiss and the Harmon, but it's been awhile since Conte made his reputation during Tower of Power's heyday of '72 to '79.

"I came in on the third album, "Tower of Power," Conte said. "I wrote at least one song on every album I was on, seven of them."

The Tower scored with songs such as "Down to the Nightclub," "Bump City," "Still a Young Man" and "What is Hip?" and Conte's ballads provided balance for the funky hits. Among the tunes he wrote were "Just Another Day," "Love's Been Gone So long" and "It Can Never Be the Same."

What was it like playing in a band so strongly associated with its horn section? Did playing with the horns put any special demands on him as a guitarist?

"Yes and no," Conte said. "The rhythm section in that band played a real different 16th-note style of play. It was kind of busy, but the band pulled it off. A lot of times the guitar is playing a kind of rhythm around the horn parts or doubling the horn parts. But it's not that different for the guitarist. If you're playing in a quartet, a lot of times the keyboard player is playing parts that a horn player would play if there was a horn section."

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After leaving the Tower, Conte played with El Chicano for eight years and worked as a session player in Los Angeles. "You free-lance in that town," he said, "because there is so much different stuff to do."

Conte is touring to promote his new album, "Right From My Heart." It is highly melodic and carefully crafted to fit the "smooth-jazz" radio format.

"I like melodic music anyway, but I choose the smooth-jazz route because I wanted to get my records on the radio. In order to get airplay these days, you have to be consistent in whatever format you go for.

"But in my show I like to mix it up. We'll do blues, R&B and smooth jazz. We're going to do the Tower tunes "Don't change Horses (In the Middle of a Stream)" and "What is Hip?" "Don't Changes Horses" is off the "Back to Oakland" album, which was recorded in Seattle. It's an old Johnny "Guitar" Watson song.

"And from my album, we'll do 'Right from My Heart,' 'Never,' 'Rocky's Cruise' and the instrumental 'Coo's Bay.' 'Never' is a pretty one."

Radio trends come and go, but Conte is a pro. Whatever style he chooses will be used to produce high-quality music. "

### Right From The Heart

"I'm honored to be among the first to hear Bruce's first solo CD project, and I was immediately impressed by the elegance of the interplay between the acoustic and electric guitars. Bruce is an extremely tasteful guitarist, playing a creative mixture of melodic and R & B funk material. I've always enjoyed his unique style."

**CHESTER THOMPSON** Keyboardist for Santana and Tower of Power

"RIGHT FROM THE HEART", Bruce's first solo CD shows a ton more versatility than I've ever heard from Bruce. the title track is definitely my kind of groove. His "funk" playing has always been unparalleled but on this outing he opens up, digs in and tells it like it is. Smooth Jazz should welcome this venture with open arms. More guitarists should take note of this project as it should also serve as a great lesson in not only the "Funk" but Bruce's sensitivity on the ballad: leaves no stones unturned.

**PHIL UPCHURCH** Guitarist for George Benson, Whitney Houston, Quincy Jones, Jimmy Smith

"Bruce's new solo CD shows a really good blend of smooth jazz and vintage "Bruce Conte style" funk. He is one of the masters, and one of my favorites. The title says it all - he plays "RIGHT FROM THE HEART", with soul and passion. Bruce and I are currently rehearsing for some gigs together to promote the new CD, and I am really looking forward to it."

**AL McKAY** Guitarist for Earth Wind and Fire

"I think Bruce Conte is one of the best guitarists in the business. (Bullet Proof) fits the current Blues style while retaining the Funk and R&B sound Bruce is famous for. I enjoy his new CD

immensely."

**Steve Perry**, Journey

"I've listened to Bruce Conte several times, very tasty stuff."

**Larry Lisk**, WMNF, Tampa/St. Petersburg FL

## **The Fresno Bee – December 15, 2000**

By Don Mayhew

It's a homecoming weekend for Bruce Conte-in more ways that one.

The former guitarist for Tower of Power, who was born in Sanger and grew up in Fresno, is celebrating the release of his new compact disc with a show at Club Fred at 9:30 tonight.

The disc, "Rhythm Meets the Blues," is a return to a funky, boisterous sound that Conte downplayed while recording a couple of soft jazz albums during the last '90s.

"What I got from other producers is, you either do smooth jazz or an R&B-blues venue," Conte says. "I don't like to do just one thing. But when you make a record, that's what they want."

Conte gets help on "Rhythm Meets the Blues" from several singers with whom he's worked over the years. Gavin Christopher (Rufus), Bobby Kimball (Toto), Ellis Hall and Lenny Williams (both Tower of Power) make guest appearances.

It was the first time Conte has worked with more than one singer on one of his CDs. Because of their busy schedules, the toughest part was getting them into the studio. Once that happened, Conte says, it was a cakewalk.

**L.A. Jazz Scene – December 1999**

By Jim Santella

Alongside Bruce Conte's lyrical guitar rests an arsenal of programmed electronic sounds. Nothing natural comes of it, but the rhythmic back beat and surrounding effects offer a toe-tapping session suited for a smooth jazz radio format. His guitar plays melodies that swing; however, the format does not allow for stretching out. Instead, the various ensembles follow Conte's repeated melodies and smooth out all the rough edges.

Fills from Larry Williams' tenor saxophone and John Furmo's tightly muted trumpet add a touch of variety to the pro-gram. A guest appearance from guitarist Chris Standing on "Rumor Has It" and support from keyboardist David Garfield on three tracks adds a further dimension. Conte attacks "Something Special" and "D-Funct" with fiery melodic lines, echoing a rock influence and unbridled enthusiasm. "Up Till Now" stands out as the hottest track in jazz/rock vein, as keyboardist Tom McMorran catches fire and John Fumo's open trumpet provides added smoke. Moon Calhoun sings "Queen of L.A.," a reference to Hollywood's bright neon lights and glamour. Conte sings "Fools Rush In" overdubbed with rich harmony like that of The Four Freshmen as well as a lovely heartfelt ballad "If I Had Half a Change (I'd Fall in Love With You)." Conte was with Tower of Power from 1972 to 1979 and has worked "in the shadows" of several L.A. contemporary jazz leaders. This, his second solo album, finds Conte right at the heart of smooth jazz and standing tall on his own. ♦

"They just came in and, in one or two takes, they have it," Conte says.

Conte's smooth jazz was recorded with a lot of studio wizardry and computers. He was happy to get back to an organic approach.

"All the soloing is done live, so there's interplay between the band members," Conte says. "You capture the emotion in the music. To me, it's faster when you work that way, too."

Admission tonight costs \$7. Details: 233-3733. ♦

## The Fresno Bee – October 28, 1977

By David Hale

Everybody knows Tower of Power is from Oakland, but there will still be a strong flavor of a homecoming about the big band's appearance Sunday night in the Fresno Sheraton In.

It isn't just that the group has been a dependable box office attraction here since the very first album, "East Bay Grease" several years ago.

The reason for a lot of fans in the crowd will be the presence in the band of two familiar faces – Fresno musicians Bruce Conte, lead guitarist, and Victor Conte, bassist.

Members of an old – and large – family of Contes from Sanger, Bruce and Victor are still mistakenly assumed to be brothers, though they are cousins.

The confusion is familiar: The pair began playing in a "family" rhythm and blues band as junior high school students back in the early 1960s. Through high school (Bruce at Roosevelt, Victor at McLane), they dominated the rhythm sections of several local bands. Probably best known were Admiral Strange and Common Ground.

"Basically, what's happened is that we're back together again after about eight years," explained bassist Conte. "Except for one album we did with Freddy Roulette in '74, we've pretty much gone our own way."

How the Contes came to find themselves in one of the country's top pop bands would seem further proof of the old axiom about success: It's who you know, even in the billion dollar business of rock and roll music.

"I moved to San Francisco in 1969," Bruce said. "I was in Loading Zone, one of the better San Francisco bands that never made it. We shared rehearsal halls with Tower of Power, about the time Bill Graham brought them out from being just another club band. Loading Zone was secondbilled to 'em in some concerts. I even sat in with them around town."

It was 1972, Loading Zone had dis-banded and guitarist Conte was discouraged, but suddenly came offers from the Steve Miller Band, Coke and Pete Azevedo's Azteca, and Tower of Power.

Tower of Power's style, which Conte described as "slick, big city funk" was closest to his rhythm and blues base. Conte has been with the group ever since. Victor Conte always wanted to be a musician, but his parents (Mr. And Mrs. Victor Conte, Sr.) discouraged the idea. He was studying accounting at Fresno City College and playing in a band on weekends, but finally music won out.

"I got jobs with bands like the Pure Food and Drug Act and Sugarcane Harris," Conte said. "By the time I was making \$500 to \$600 a week, my parents had accepted it."

Only Victor Conte wasn't really through paying his dues. He found him-self back in Fresno doubling as business head and musician with a quintet called Oasis.

Oasis was a good band, a dance band with a sound – horns and a black, funky style – that some people compared with Tower of Power. In a period of about two years, doing clubs in Fresno and the Bay Area, Oasis acquired a following. They even did a tour as backup band for Lenny Williams, former lead singer of Tower. They thought they were on the way up.

"We were just starting to do real good," Victor said. "We were starting to travel. Some of the other guys saw what it would be like and just decided they didn't want to do it. We disbanded. Jimmy Walker, our drummer, is retired in Casper, Wyo., and Jimmy Waller's teaching school in Santa Barbara."

Victor Conte and another member of Oasis, a talented musician-writer named Coleman Head, joined Bruce Conte in his Bay Area home.

Bassist Conte and Head were playing in a good club band, Baby Fat, when Tower of Power needed a base player. Bruce Conte, who was gradually building Tower's rhythm section, suggested to founder-leader Emilio Castillo, that Victor had a unique bass sound that would fit in with Tower's orchestration.

Victor wanted the job, if for no other reason that to be with the cousin he thought of as a brother. He almost didn't get it because of the relationship.

"They interviewed nine bass players, including a guy from Boz Scaggs. I was the last one. We'd (Oasis) had toured with Tower, so they knew about me. They just didn't think 'Family' was a good idea. But I auditioned with the band, and Emilio, he stopped the band in the middle of the second tune, and said I was hired if I wanted it."

## Reviews

For Victor Conte, to say nothing of Bruce, the scuffling days would appear to be over.

Tower of Power, once with Warner Brothers records, has a fresh contract worth about \$2 million – Bruce’s esti-mate – with Columbia, for five albums and an option for two more. That puts the band born in the streets of Oakland in a league with Earth Wind and Fire.

Bruce and Victor, well they aren’t on the cover of Rolling Stone yet, but they recently signed a tidy contract with a manufacturer to advertise strings – “what a picture of us” – in Guitar Player. And the whole band just signed another one to endorse amplifiers.

Thanks to the extra push of Columbia, the group’s last album, “Ain’t Nothing Stopping Us Now,” released last Decem-ber had a healthy run on the charts.

Friends from home (Fresno) are still helping out: Coleman Head has con-tributed tunes to an upcoming album, as did Victor. And Gary Smith, once a Fresno promoter and now co-manager of Average White Band, signed Tower for the new tour which will take the band to Phoenix, Portland and San Diego, as well as Fresno. Indeed, it will be a rejuvenated Tower of Power which will give the Halloween eve concert in Fresno.

Partly the reason is the counsel of new producer, Steve Cropper, taking that burden off the shoulders of Emilio Castillo.

Cropper came to Tower of Power with heady credentials – Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Albert King – and he made his presence felt in the work on the new album, due out about Christmas.

“This is probably the most enthused the band’s been in a couple of years,” Bruce said. “We had a streak of about three albums where we seemed to be doing the same type tunes, formula, you know.”

“But the new album is a definite change for us. We’re known as a very tight, rehearsed band, but this one is dif-ferent. It’s simpler, more spontaneous.”

“It’s more straight-ahead, more danceable,” Victor said.

“We didn’t really plan it that way,” Bruce said. “We used to rehearse songs outside, then take them into the studio and cut them that way. For this album, some of them were written together, in the studio. We think it may be our best yet.”

Tower of Power is knows as a “musicians band.” Acts from Heart to Harold Melvin and James Brown have expressed their admiration for the Oakland band.

“And,” says guitarist Conte, “we were in the Houston Astrodome, and BB King was there. I mean, I used to copy his licks. He came by and said I was a terrific guitarist. It blew my mind!”

But when it comes down to it, what pleases the Fresno cousins, both newly married, about Tower of Power is something middleclass and workaday: Security.

“For 10 people in a band, it’s amazing how well we get along,” Bruce said. “Partly it’s because there’s enough money for everybody to be reasonably happy. We have

Manhattan Life, Blue Cross and full dental coverage. I don't know of a band that has all that."

The O'Neill Brothers, a Fresno band, will appear with Tower in the Good Times production Sunday at the Sheraton. Ticks are \$7.50 in Tower Records, J & C House of records and the motel. ♦

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Whether it’s jazz, blues or R&B, Conte ‘just plays’

By Don Mayhew  
The Fresno Bee  
November 02 2001

Bruce Conte has been around the music business long enough to know when to go with the flow.

The guitarist, who grew up in Sanger and played with Tower of Power for many years before striking out on his own, will celebrate his signing to independent label Severn Records with a performance at Club Fred at 9 p.m. today.

Severn specializes in blues and rhythm ‘n’ blues. Conte’s first release for the label will be “Rhythm Meets the Blues,” which he released on his own early this year and will be reissued on Severn in February. The deal calls for two more albums from Conte.

Conte tried his hand at smooth jazz a few years ago but has found a larger demand for good, old-fashioned R&B.

“I’ve always done it in my live show,” Conte says. While contemporary jazz radio is tightening its play lists, “the blues and R&B are wide open.”

Conte has been busy playing Las Vegas casinos lately.

“The bread’s good, but it’s not a good career area,” Conte says. “To push records, it’s tough in the lounge and showrooms. You don’t make noise out into the world too much.”

So during the next year, Conte plans to play blues festivals and tour up and down the West Coast, where he expects to do pretty much what he always has done, no matter

## Reviews

what you call it.

“When I play live, I just play,” Conte says. “People like to hear different stuff. But record companies want you to be specialized. Jazz tunes, funk beats – they don’t have to be real mellow stuff...I’ve gotten away with playing what I wanted for a long time. It’s just in how you put it together.”

Snippets of Conte’s music can be heard on his Web site, [www.bruceconte.com](http://www.bruceconte.com). Admission to Club Fred tonight costs \$7. Details: 233-3733. ♦

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