

# JJ Swing™

The year was 1999. Swing bands such as "Big Bad Voodoo Daddy," "Cherry Poppin' Daddies," and various other "Daddy" bands were leading a short-lived resurgence in swing music throughout the country. Meanwhile, here in Buffalo an eight-piece band was forming that would take the Buffalo music scene by storm. JJ Swing was born.

It began in the back of a bus. Jim Runfola, while touring with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, began writing horn charts from groups such as Blood, Sweat & Tears, The Blues Brothers, and Chicago with the help of a Casio keyboard and a Walkman. He knew these tunes would form the basis for a great horn band. Charts in hand, he now had to find the right guys to pull it off. His first choice for a front man was Joe Mahfoud. Jim had worked with Joe previously and knew his voice and guitar were the right combination to make the project fly.



First promotional picture of Jim Runfola and Joe Mahfoud for JJ Swing, circa 1999.

Joe brought in bass player Jerry Sampson and drummer Scott Colandra to form the rhythm section. Jim went about finding horn players. Jim played alto sax, Harry Fackelman and Al Monte were brought in on baritone and tenor to fill out the sax section. While many fine players were brought in to fill the trumpet and trombone parts, the right mix was elusive. Finally in late July, Rick Keller was brought

in on trumpet and Jeff Marsha on trombone and the band was complete.

Originally, the band specialized in the swing styles made popular by national acts. JJ Swing was formed around a powerful five-piece horn section backed by a tight three-piece rhythm section. On stage, they performed wearing suits and hats in the style of the swing era.

JJ Swing played a variety of venues that first year, including the Taste of Buffalo and Erie County Fair, as well as local bars. The concept at the time was that it would be a summer event group, so when September came, the band broke for the season. The final mix of band members that summer were: Joe Mahfoud (guitar and lead vocals), Scott Colandra (drums), Jerry Sampson (bass), Rick Keller (trumpet), Jeff Marsha (trombone), Jim Runfola (alto sax), Harry Fackelman (bari sax), and Al Monte (tenor sax).

The group came back the following year. Scott Colandra had left the band and Jim Linsner took over the drumming duties. Al Monte left the group as well. He was not replaced, and JJ Swing was now a seven-piece group.



Band photo from June 200 at Buffalo City Hall. At that time, the band wore suits and hats in the authentic swing style.

The band again found success in local events, playing for the AAA Centennial celebration, the Taste of Buffalo, the Erie County Fair, as well as traveling to Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut. As the summer of

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2000 drew to a close, the group decided to continue through the fall and winter rather than wait until the following summer to play again.

Over the next couple of years, JJ Swing evolved away from the swing genre. They added material from a number of diverse artists such as Stevie Ray Vaughn, Van Morrison, and Chicago. Nationally, the swing movement was in decline, but JJ Swing's diversity allowed them to remain viable. The band moved away from the swing style visually as well, adopting a "snappy casual" dress style on stage.

Late in the winter of 2001, tenor sax and arranger Jim Runfola decided to take a leave of absence from the band to tour with a national act. Aaron Broome was brought in to assume the tenor sax duties. Jim continued to contribute horn arrangements to the group, and JJ Swing's momentum never faltered.

In the summer of 2002, JJ Swing added keyboards to the group as Pat Georger joined the band. This allowed them to add even more



JJ Swing sporting their "snappy casual" look in Spring 2002, shortly after Aaron Broome took over for Jim Runfola.

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diverse material, and Jim Runfola arrangements of songs by Steely Dan and Earth, Wind, & Fire were added to their repertoire. As the fall of '02 rolled along, Jim returned to JJ Swing full time. The band also established the goal of becoming the Buffalo area representative in the International Blues Challenge held in Memphis, Tennessee.

They competed and won the local competition sponsored by the Blues Society of WNY. In January of 2003, JJ Swing performed in The International Blues Festival on Beale St. in Memphis for two nights. During the trip home, the future of the band was discussed, and the conclusion was reached that the word "Swing" had to be dropped for marketing purposes as well as to reflect the new direction the band had taken. News of another possible opportunity was also discussed on the 15 hour drive – that of being the on stage band for Artpark's production of the musical "Swing."

When the opportunity to play the Artpark show was realized, the name change for the band was put off until the completion of the shows run. JJ Swing played that show in August 2003. Besides playing the music, the band was an onstage character, interacting with the cast members on stage. This was highlighted by Jeff's performance in "Cry Me a River," a strolling trombone – vocalist duet. (Also known as "The Greatest Moment in Trombone History!")



JJ Swing performs onstage in "Swing" at Artpark in August 2003. After the success of *Swing*, the band began their fall season performing under their new name – "Groove Medicine." While some new material was added to enhance the "Groove" nature of the band, it was primarily the same band with a new name. As might be

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expected, the new name was a hard sell to those who followed the group.

Not long into the fall season, Joe Mahfoud announced his intention to leave the group by the end of the year. His final



**GROOVE  
MEDICINE**

Formerly JJ SWING

[www.groovemedicine.com](http://www.groovemedicine.com)

Promotional photo from the short-lived "Groove Medicine" days of Fall 2003.

performance with the band was at Evolution Nightclub in December 2003. The search was on for a new voice to lead the group into the future.

Groove Medicine went on hiatus until a new voice could be found and worked in. The decision was also made to "return to their roots" by going back to the name JJ Swing as well as moving the sound of the band back to a horn-oriented sound rather than the guitar emphasis that had been emerging.

The search for a new lead vocal/guitar was extensive. The band sifted through hundreds of audition tapes, and were personally accosted by hopefuls in shopping malls, beaches, restaurant drive thru's, massage parlors, Betty Ford clinics, etc.

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Finally, one night at a local bar well after closing, they found, huddled semi-conscious in a corner, a man. That man was playing air guitar and slurring the words to dozens of hit songs, all combined into one monster piece of alcohol-induced musical cacophony. That man was Joe Mombrea. The search was over. The band had their newest, bestest buddy and lead singer.

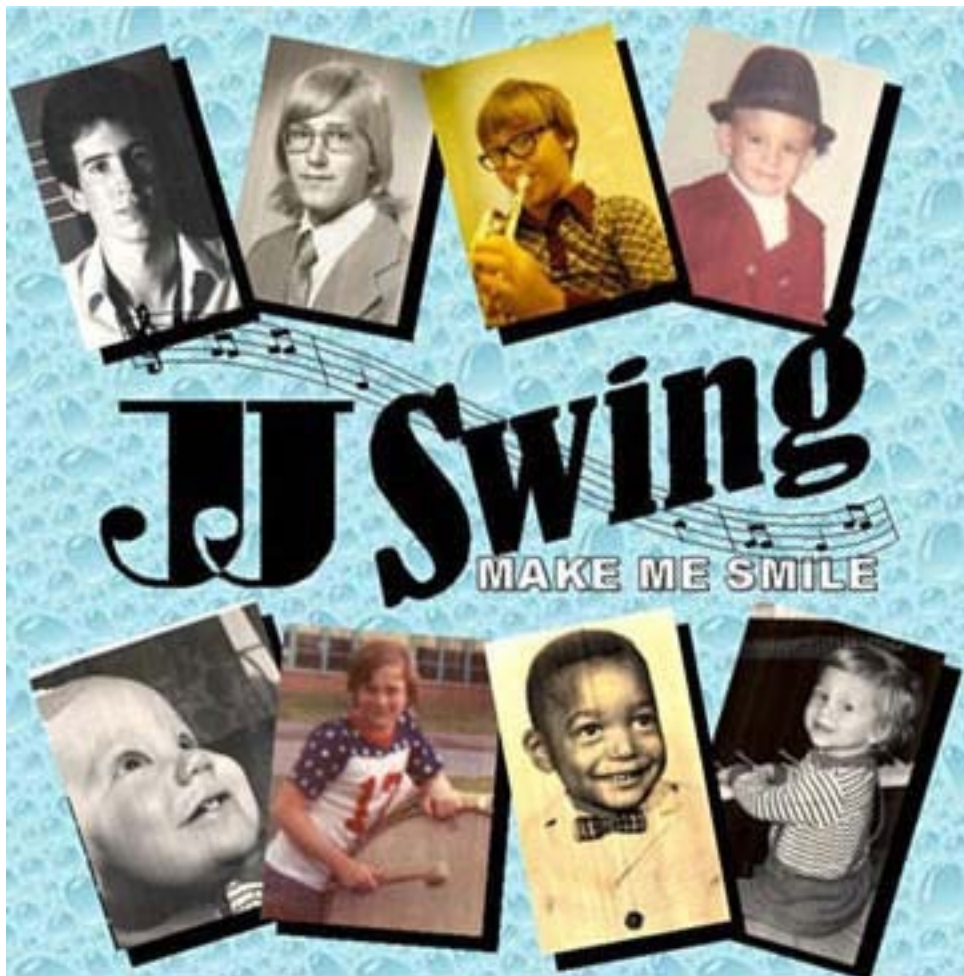


First promotional picture of Joe Mombrea for JJ Swing, taken in Jim Runfolo's basement.

The work to integrate Joe into the band began shortly after he sobered up. It was January 2004, and there was a date booked in February at Alternative Brews. It was close, but Joe wasn't quite ready to be introduced as JJ Swing's new voice. They began their new era with guest singer/guitar player Doug Yeomans. The band rocked Alternative Brews. Many of the folks who normally came out to see the group were back and commented that there seemed to be a renewal of spirit within the band.

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Joe Mombrea was formally introduced as JJ Swing's lead singer and guitar player in March 2004. With the time off, the band had a bit of work to get back to their previous performance schedule, but in due time they were working at their normal pace. That pace proved to be taxing to keyboardist Pat Georger, who is also the president of Hamburg Music Center. To ease the schedule burden on Pat, the band brought in Mike Rieman, keyboard extraordinaire. Mike and Pat share the performance duties and each one gives the band a different sound, adding to the diversity and appeal of the group.



"Make Me Smile" was released by JJ Swing in early 2005. The cover art is childhood photos of the band members. The adult pictures of the guys on the back show them in the same order as on the front.

JJ Swing had been in existence since 1999. Even though bootleg recordings of various performances have surfaced from time to time, there had never been a real attempt to produce a publicly available recording of the band. That changed in November 2004 when they entered the recording studio to create "Make Me Smile." The CD was

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released in January 2005, and went manganese in the first week. To date, the CD has earned the band thousands of cents as sales have reached the tungsten level.

Presently, the band's success has grown and they are playing more frequently now than at any time in the past. One of the secrets to the ability of an eight piece band to maintain such a busy schedule lies in the availability of highly talented substitutes to take the place of a regular member when schedules conflict. JJ Swing owes no small measure of thanks to those who have filled in for missing members of the band.

What happens next? Stay tuned for the next chapter in JJ history.....

25 or 6 to 4	Chicago
Ain't No Sunshine	Bill Withers
And When I Die	Blood Sweat & Tears
Anything You Want	Popa Chubby
At Last	Etta James
Attitude Dance	Tower of Power
Beginnings	Chicago
Brickhouse	Commodores
Brown Eyed Girl	Van Morrison
Cissy Strut	The Meteors
Cold Shot	Stevie Ray Vaughn
Color My World	Chicago
Credit	Tower of Power
Crossfire	Stevie Ray Vaughn
Deacon Blues	Steely Dan
Do I Do	Stevie Wonder
Does Anyone Really Know What Time it Is	Chicago
Domino	Van Morrison
Feelin Stronger Every Day	Chicago
FM	Steely Dan
Frankenstein	Edgar Winter
Free Bird	Lynyrd Synyrd
Free	Chicago
Getaway	Earth Wind & Fire
Go Down Gamblin	Blood Sweat & Tears
God Bless The Child	Blood Sweat & Tears
Got To Get You Into My Life	Earth Wind & Fire

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Grassin in the Grass  
Happy  
Hard To Handle  
Have I Told You Lately  
Hey Bartender  
Higher Ground  
Home At Last  
I Feel Good  
I Like Your Style  
I Shot The Sherriff  
I Wish  
Isn't She Lovely  
Josie  
Jump Jive & Wail  
Just The Two of Us  
Just You And Me  
Kashmir  
Keep Coming Back  
Kid Charlemagne  
Late In The Evening  
Let's Groove  
Long Train Runnin  
Lowdown  
Lucretia MacEvil  
Make Me Smile  
Mustang Sally  
My Old School  
Peg  
Pick Up The Pieces  
Play The Funky Music  
Real Mutha For Ya  
Redhouse  
Saturday In The Park  
September  
Shake Your Booty  
Shakey Ground  
Singasong  
Sir Duke  
Smoke From A Distant Fire  
Smooth  
So What  
Soul Man

Boney James  
Pharrell  
Black Crowes  
Rod Stewart  
The Blues Brothers  
Stevie Wonder  
Steely Dan  
James Brown  
Tower of Power  
Eric Clapton  
Stevie Wonder  
Stevie Wonder  
Steely Dan  
Brian Setzer  
Grover Washington Jr.  
Chicago  
Led Zeppelin  
Marc Broussard  
Steely Dan  
Paul Simon  
Earth Wind & Fire  
Doobie Brothers  
Boz Scaggs  
Blood Sweat & Tears  
Chicago  
Wilson Pickett  
Steely Dan  
Steely Dan  
Average White Band  
Wild Cherry  
Johnny Guitar Watson  
Jimi Hendrix  
Chicago  
Earth Wind & Fire  
KC & The Sunshine Band  
Etta James  
Earth Wind & Fire  
Stevie Wonder  
Sanford Townsend Band  
Santana  
Miles Davis  
The Blues Brothers

Soul With A Capital S  
Spinning Wheel  
Stray Cat Strut  
Superman Lover  
Superstition  
Sweet Home Chicago  
Takin It To The Streets  
That's The Way I Like It  
The Letter  
Tightrope  
Treasure  
Turn Your Love Around  
Uptown Funk  
Use Me  
Vehicle  
What Is Hip  
What You Won't Do For Love  
Wild Nights  
You've Made Me So Very Happy  
Zoot Suit Riot

Tower of Power  
Blood Sweat & Tears  
Stray Cats  
Johnny Guitar Watson  
Stevie Wonder  
The Blues Brothers  
Doobie Brothers  
KC & The Sunshine Band  
Joe Cocker  
Stevie Ray Vaughn  
Bruno Mars  
George Bensen  
Bruno Mars  
Bill Withers  
Ides of March  
Tower of Power  
Bobby Caldwell  
Van Morrison  
Blood Sweat & Tears  
Cherry Poppin Daddies