

# They pick up where the Beatles left off

By Regan McMahon  
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

What if the Beatles had gotten off the road and moved to San Francisco and started playing the Fillmore with Quicksilver and the Grateful Dead?

That's the fantasy scenario that Oakland singer-songwriter, guitarist and radio host David Gans comes up with to describe the musical approach of Rubber Souldiers, a Beatles jam band he formed with Marin County folk-rock-pop-bluegrass stalwarts Chris and Lorin Rowan, who with their brother Peter (a member of Jerry Garcia's bluegrass band Old and in the Way) created the '70s pop band the Rowan Brothers.

Another way to look at it, Gans says, is "Beatles vocabulary with a Grateful Dead syntax," where songs can intertwine and expand. "The Beatles wrote all these kick-ass songs and these amazing grooves, and then they quit 'em after three minutes. And so we're stretching them out and stringing them together."

For example, the band will do a psychedelic medley that starts with a spacey jam that goes into "Norwegian Wood," then switches gears into "That Boy," then morphs back into "Norwegian Wood." At the end of "All My Loving," they launch into an instrumental jam that downshifts into a groove that goes back and forth between "Rain" and "Within You and Without You." Their extended version of "Paperback Writer" slides into the chorus of "With a Little Help From My Friends," which evolves into a vocal improv.

The band features the core of Gans and Chris Rowan on guitar, Lorin Rowan on guitar and mandolin, and all three of them on vocals, with various musicians holding down the

drums and bass at different gigs.

"The essence of Rubber Souldiers is the harmony singing, instrumental jamming and the experimental approach," Chris Rowan says. "By expanding on spontaneous things that happen, we're creating our sound."

It's not a Beatles tribute band, Gans says: "It's taking these songs to a new level."

They're not the only ones who have recently opted for what Chris Rowan calls "a fresh approach to hallowed ground." For Cirque du Soleil's "Love," a show set to Beatles music, Beatles producer Sir George Martin and his engineer son, Giles, took the original tapes and remixed some of the songs, taking a groove from one and slapping it onto another. And the 2007 movie "Across the Universe" offered novel arrangements that introduced a new generation of teenagers to the power of Beatles songs.

Rubber Souldiers share a similar spirit of experimentation.

"We've written our pieces around their pieces, our hooks



David Gans (from left), Lorin Rowan and Chris Rowan are the members of Rubber Souldiers, which puts new twists on Beatles songs.

around their hooks. We take some of the more obscure songs and mix them with some of the more familiar ones. We've opened it up so things flow within you and without you — to coin a phrase," Lorin Rowan adds with a chuckle.

"It's not just a bar band," Lorin Rowan says, although during the past few years Rubber Souldiers have played watering holes such as the

Sweetwater in Mill Valley and the Iron Springs Brew Pub in Fairfax. They plan to record.

The band plays next Sunday at the Larkspur Flower and Food Festival.

The origins of the band date to a moment in July 2004, when Gans invited the Rowans to appear on his KPFA radio show, "Dead to the World," to play live songs from their just-released double CD, "Now & Then," on

BOS Music. They came as a quartet, with Dick Bright on fiddle and Doug Harman on cello. When, as a sound check, they did the Beatles' "Baby's in Black," Gans says he couldn't help himself and spontaneously added a third harmony part underneath the Rowans. They liked it so much they asked him to sing it with them live on the air.

"And when we got off the air, we just kept singing more



**"You see what the Beatles took from American music, and now we're taking that and adding everything from our American musical traditions and throwing it back at them. 'I've Just Seen a Face': that's bluegrass. We do an a cappella 'Yesterday' that's almost the Beach Boys meets the Beatles. We're using all the influences we grew up with."**

Lorin Rowan of Rubber Souldiers

Beatles songs," Gans says. "After that, I just got the bug."

A couple of months later, Gans' dear friend and business manager, Goldie Rush, was dying of cancer and inviting friends — many of them longtime Bay Area musicians — to visit her at the house in Stinson Beach where she was staying. Gans invited the Rowans to go out and play Beatles songs all day in her living room, and they brought with them jam-band guitarist and pedal-steel player Barry Sless, who plays with Moon Alice and occasionally with Phil Lesh and Friends.

#### 50 Beatles songs

"We must have played 50 Beatles songs that day," Gans recalls, "and we had the time of our lives."

After that, he kept inviting the Rowans and other musicians to join him onstage to play Beatles songs. Sometimes on bass would be Robin Sylvester, who plays with Bob Weir's band RatDog. He's English and grew up on Beatles music.

"When Lorin and I would get into arguments about chord changes, Robin became the adjudicator of Beatles court," Gans says. "He's an absolute encyclopedia of Beatles music."

Gans has many musical irons in the fire at all times. He hosts his nationally syndicated radio show "The Grateful Dead Hour" and is programming consultant to Sirius Radio's Grateful Dead channel and co-hosts its Sunday afternoon talk show, "Tales From the Golden Road." And he's often on the road himself, playing clubs and music festivals, such as Florida's Magnolia Fest, where Rubber Souldiers played in October and were invited back for the Suwannee Springfest in March. Gans' latest self-released solo CD is "The Ones That Look the Weirdest Taste the Best," produced by Tim Carbone of Railroad Earth.

"The more I was out on the

**Rubber Souldiers** play at 2:15 p.m. next Sun. at the Larkspur Flower and Food Festival, Magnolia Avenue between Ward and King streets, Larkspur, (415) 924-3808. For more information, go to [rubbersouldiers.com](http://rubbersouldiers.com).

road playing solo, the more I wanted to break things up by doing things with other musicians," Gans says. "Musicians of a certain age grew up with Beatles music, and it's in our DNA. Anybody I can imagine who's in their 40s, 50s or 60s, without even thinking about it, can find their way into a Beatles song. And, with a little study, we can work them up and do something with them."

At a recent Ashkenaz gig, Bay Area folk favorites Eric and Suzy Thompson sat in.

"They're like old-time bluegrass-zydeco people, and it was a little like fish out of water to have them do Beatles songs with us," Gans says. "But even if your specialty is something else, you know Beatles songs. They got up onstage with us and stayed for the whole night and it was fantastic."

#### Super-fast tempo

Backstage, before they went on that night, Gans suggested they do "All Together Now" from the end of the movie "Yellow Submarine." "Lorin counted it down at this absurd, super-fast tempo, and it turned out to be the perfect hoedown song for Suzy to go wild on the fiddle, Eric on the mandolin," Gans says. "So it turned out to be an accidental masterpiece."

Lorin Rowan sees the genre bending and blending as a natural evolution.

"You see what the Beatles took from American music, and now we're taking that and adding everything from our American musical traditions and throwing it back at them," he says. "I've Just Seen a Face': that's bluegrass. We do an a cappella 'Yesterday' that's

almost the Beach Boys meets the Beatles. We're using all the influences we grew up with."

Chris Rowan has been a die-hard Beatles fan forever and played in a Beatles cover band called Lonely Hearts off and on for 15 years, before it "slid into oblivion" about 10 years ago, he says. In 1969, at age 20, he flew to England to pursue his dream of "getting involved with the Beatles and Apple records." He even tried to meet Paul McCartney at his home in St. John's Wood.

#### At Paul's door

"I had a frame pack on my back with all my clothes in it," he recalls. "I had an acoustic guitar in one hand and an electric guitar in the other. And I went up to the house, where there was an intercom. I rang the bell and his wife, Linda Eastman, answered and said hello. And I said, 'I'm

Chris Rowan and I'm a singer-songwriter from America and I'd like to sing Paul a few songs.' There was dead silence on the other end. Then, finally, she came on and said, 'Paul doesn't want to see anyone right now.' So I left, dejected."

He did connect with someone at Apple Records who liked his demo, but the Beatles' fledgling label was in the process of imploding, so that didn't work out. He scored a publishing deal elsewhere, and an agent, but after two months returned to Boston, where he, Lorin and Peter

Rowan got involved with David Grisman, which led them to California and a record deal as the Rowan Brothers.

"I compare my love of the Beatles to my older brother Peter's love of bluegrass and his mentor, Bill Monroe — having that love and wanting to share that with other people," Chris Rowan says. With Rubber Souldiers, "we're honoring the Beatles' music but also making it our own." ■

Regan McMahon is a freelance writer. E-mail her at [pinkletters@sfchronicle.com](mailto:regan@sfchronicle.com).

**san francisco**  
1330 Fillmore Street  
San Francisco, California 94115

**Yoshi's**  
jazz club and JAPANESE RESTAURANT  
[YOSHIS.COM](http://YOSHIS.COM)

**oakland**  
510 Embarcadero West  
Oakland, California 94607

Top 100 Bay Area Restaurants 2009 and Top 10 New Restaurants of 2008  
—San Francisco Chronicle

**Next Weekend!**  
**May 28-31**  
**AMEL LARRIEUX**

**tonight!** Sun, May 24, 7pm Show  
**RIC ALEXANDER & TWO FOUR ONE**  
featuring Levi Seacer and Derick Hughes

**tomorrow!** Mon, May 25  
Jazz Media Presents  
**"BIRTH OF THE COOL - MILES DAVIS BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE"**  
featuring Marcus Shelby, Mike Olmos, Erik Jakobsen, Joe Cohen, Adam Theis, Adam Shalmon, Jeff Morris, Sheldon Brown and Mike Rata

**this week!** Tues, May 26  
The Inaugural Yoshi's Rising Stars Series:  
**JOSHI MARSHALL QUARTET**  
**MARK RAPP BAND**

**this week!** Wed, May 27  
**ORQUESTA BORINQUEN**

**Mon, June 1**  
**JAZ SAWYER PRESENTS**  
**BAY AREA YOUTH ALL-STARS**

**Tues, Wed, Thurs, June 2, 3, 4**  
**HERB ALPERT & LANI HALL**

**Fri, Sat, Sun, June 5, 6, 7**  
Rare Bay Area Appearance  
**ABDULLAH IBRAHIM**  
(Solo Piano)

**Mon, Tues, Wed, June 8, 9, 10**  
**CHARLIE HADEN**  
**BOBBY HUTCHERSON**  
**& GEORGE CABLES**  
"Three Friends"

**Late Night Live!** Every Tuesday  
9:30pm - late, \$3 Cover

**Next Weekend!**  
**May 29-30**  
Open Dance Floor!  
**ARMANDO PERAZA**  
BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION  
with John Santos & Orestes Vilato

**Sun, May 24** **tonight!**  
**STEVE TYRELL**

**Mon, May 25** **tomorrow!**  
Oaktown Jazz Workshops Present  
**MILES DAVIS BIRTHDAY BASH**  
Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of  
"BIRTH OF THE COOL"  
Played by High School musicians from around the Bay Area and directed by Khalil Shabazz

**Tues, May 26** **this week!**  
The New Voice of Portuguese World Music:  
**RAMANA VIEIRA**

**Wed, May 27** **this week!**  
Cape Verdean Chantante  
**MARIA DE BARROS**

**Thurs, May 28** **this week!**  
**LARRY VUCKOVICH'S**  
**EURO TRASH**  
**INTERNATIONAL QUARTET**

**Sun, May 31**  
**JAMIE DAVIS**

**Mon, June 1**  
**JENNIFER LEE**

**Tues, June 2**  
**JULIAN LAGE**

**Wed, June 3**  
**WILLIE JONES III QUARTET**

**Thurs, Fri, Sat, June 4, 5, 6**  
Extremely Rare Club Appearance  
By Legendary Jazz Vocalist  
**NANCY WILSON**

**HAPPY HOUR MONDAY-FRIDAY 5-6PM! FOOD & DRINK SPECIALS!**

Get Tickets at [YOSHIS.COM](http://YOSHIS.COM) / the venue box office / 415-655-5600 / 510-238-9200  
All shows are all ages. All Shows Monday-Saturday 8pm & 10pm, Sunday 2pm & 7pm  
(Unless Otherwise Noted). Open for dinner nightly at both locations. Late Night Menu Available.

**Bimbo's**  
365 Club™

1035 COLUMBIA AT CHESTNUT, SAN FRANCISCO  
(415) 474-0365 / [WWW.BIMBOS365CLUB.COM](http://WWW.BIMBOS365CLUB.COM)

**WED, MAY 27 • DOORS 7 / SHOW 8 • \$16**  
**ST. VINCENT**  
PATTERN IS MOVEMENT

520 HOBEL CAMPBELL & MARK LAMCAN SHOW POSTPONED  
ORIGINAL TO HONORED FOR NEW DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON

**WED, JUNE 3 • DOORS 8 / SHOW 9 • \$25**  
AN EVENING WITH  
**SWING OUT SISTER**

**THURS, JUNE 4 • DOORS 7 / SHOW 8 • \$32**  
**PETER MURPHY**

**FRI, JUNE 12 • DOORS 8 / SHOW 9 • \$25**  
**SHE WANTS REVENGE**  
IO ECHO

**SAT, JUNE 13 • DOORS 8 / SHOW 9 • \$16**  
**AU REVOIR SIMONE**  
ANTLERS • FINDLAY BROWN

**THURS, JUNE 18 • DOORS 7 / SHOW 8 • \$30**  
**ZAP MAMA**

**SAT, JUNE 20 • DOORS 8 / SHOW 9 • \$20**  
**SUPERBOOTY**  
NEVERLAND

**WED, JUNE 24 • DOORS 7 / SHOW 8 • \$35**  
**MARC COHN**  
KATIE HERZIG

**THURS, FRI, & SAT, JUNE 25, 26 & 27**  
**DOORS 8 / SHOW 8 • \$45**  
**BUTCH WHACKS**  
**& THE GLASS PACKS**

FOOD SERVICE AVAILABLE AT ALL SHOWS • 2 DRINK MIN.  
GENERAL ADMISSION, LIMITED SEATING. TICKETS AVAILABLE AT THE CLUB 1P/2PM-4PM • TICKETS ONLINE: [WWW.TICKETS.COM](http://WWW.TICKETS.COM)  
BIMBO'S IS AVAILABLE FOR SPECIAL EVENTS AND PRIVATE PARTIES! 415-474-0365 EXT 15