

SLN Sits Down With Local Novato Band *The Happys*

By Lauren MacDonald



From left to right: Alex Sanchez, Brett Brazil, Ryan Donahu, Nick Petty

The band consists of lead vocalist Nick Petty on guitar, Alex Sanchez on vocals and guitar, Brett Brazil on vocals and bass, and Ryan Donahue on drums.

According to your website, you describe your band as dysfunctional surf, pop-punk, garage? Can you elaborate on what that means and who your influences are?

Brett: We kind of have a broad sound, we couldn't really choose one or two little terms. Dysfunctional is kind of...

Nick: We're kind of over it. I think that personally I'd call us alternative-rock.

Ryan: Influences are surf...

Nick: 90's music.

Brett: Yeah, we'd say Nirvana and Sublime are the two main bands that kind of describe us.

Alex: Yeah, we just don't like to be pigeon-holed. Which is really hard, right? Like, there's a lot of variety in the genre. Alternative-rock pretty much sums it up.

Nick: 90's pop-punk too. To me, a lot of 90's stuff is coming back, especially in this area. A lot of really cool bands are bringing back grungy, punky stuff.

Brett: It's definitely turning around and people are interested in the live show again.

Nick: Around here, it's more 80's influence because it's an older generation. But once we start playing, we pretty much have people [of all ages] under our thumb.

Alex: There's a lot of cool bands putting out a similar vibe. Grunge, punk. Especially in Fairfax, like Sam Hunter and Live Axis. All those guys are sort of playing that rock-pop-punk thing and I think it's because the kids that listened to all that are growing into their 20's and they're the ones now producing the music. That was their influences back in the day, so now it's having a resurgence.

Can you describe the origin of your band? How did you guys get together, and how long have you guys been together?

Nick: I don't know, I like entertaining. I started playing in like 2011 or so and was getting out of jail. At that time, I had a little bit of an issue with medication. The whole opioid crisis, I kind of got swept into that. Then, when I cleaned up, I still had a lot of adrenaline and I wanted to play music. I met Brett. I met Alex at our album release in 2016. And then, there were a couple players on the way, but everyone around here [currently in the band] has been playing for the last year and a half. Except Brett, he's been in the band maybe four or five years. Quite a while.

Brett: Yeah, so Nick started it like seven years ago or so. And previous bands that I was in would play shows with [The Happys](#) when Nick had a different lineup. Then, in 2014 me and Nick and our first drummer Dana started [The Happys](#) [as it is] now and we recorded our first album *Trippin'*. I brought in a buddy to play lead guitar and from there we kind of switched up the lineup for a few years. We've been with the lineup now for over a year and a half. And yeah, this has definitely been the best, most solid lineup. We're all putting in the work and having a good time.

Nick: Everybody knows where they want to be in this lineup and that was not how the other ones [previous band members] were. To me that's like an unbelievably good indication. People [previous band members] wouldn't tour. This band is down to tour and do what it takes to become a successful band. And even more than that, everyone in this band is cool and has

more of a family vibe. We go through a lot of stress together and we're able to kind of vent and be ourselves, kinda like a family. It's not perfect all the time, but at the end of the day, we know the importance of what we're doing, because it's big. To me, it's bigger than us and something that people need more than I even knew they needed it. Like, when you really pour your heart out, people really reciprocate that in a lot of ways.

After reading your bio and watching the music video for [Birdy](#), I found some correlations, is this video meant to tell the story of your band?

Brett: Yeah, that was an attempted quick, little time lapse of the band, but obviously some things are exaggerated. And that was with Dana, who was our original drummer and then he became our guitarist. Then Joe was our drummer at the time.

Nick: He [Dana] was just kind of hired on.

Brett: He was an awesome drummer.

Speaking of your music videos, I read that you work with local film company [Will Rushton Films](#). What does the making of a music video look like? The songs and videos seem very close to your own story, do you have a lot of say in the writing and direction of the videos?

Brett: We all definitely come up with ideas for videos. Will's awesome, he's been Nick's friend for a long time.

Nick: Will's a Novato kid. He went to school with me growing up. We just filmed a lot of skateboarding, stuff like that. Then both of us got into music, to say the least. The rest is history.

Brett: Yeah, he pursues video like we pursue music. So he'll tour with bands and do recap videos of the tours and all that. But as far as our videos, yeah we come up with an idea. A lot of it ends up being really spur of the moment, but we'll have a little bit of a plot.

Nick: We'll have, I don't know, three or four main ideas that we'll come up with. Like, *hey we should film something at the headlands or we should film some of the [Old Town] Novato Fountain*. In the moment, we just try to turn up, have fun, see what we can get into.

Brett: We really make it a full day, it's super fun. It's always a little stressful. We're grinding for sure. We'll make an events page, invite people out if we need people for certain shots. It'll be a thing where we get together at around 9am or 10am, we drive around four or five different spots and we're out til like 10pm. We do it all in one day for the most part, except for like one or two of them. And then, Will is amazing, sends us an edit like four days later and we're like, *yeah this is perfect*.

Alex: So, with the [Cut the Rope](#) music video for instance, we filmed this whole music video in the skate park. We invited people out, hula-hooping, everything, really really fun and we ended up not going with that video edit and reshooting the entire thing back here [at the [Music Never Dies Studio](#)], in the back of the studio where it's all dark, to give it that darker feel.

Nick: One of the things was not happy at all.

Ryan: Really dark twist to it, it was almost controversial.

Nick: It was a realistically depressing twist where one of us was hanging by a rope, depressed and then they cut it off at the end. However, for theatrics, of actually making a real impact... entertainment is not always supposed to be super safe. If you want to make an impact you gotta have confidence and have videos that are a little bit crazy. People's attention span is like *snap *snap. They don't care. Nobody really cares deep down and I thought the video was pretty good, but there was skepticism of what it might lead into if people got the wrong idea. I felt like paranoia kinda ran with some people involved and then we ended up cutting it. But to this day, I think it would have done better.

Alex: We made the decision because of the political climate right now, to switch it. We thought it would cause too much controversy.

Ryan: It was edgy.

What are some of your favorite local venues to play in Novato?

Alex: [Hopmonk](#). [Novato's premier music venue, bar and restaurant, located in [Vintage Oaks Shopping Center](#)].

Nick: [Hopmonk](#) is chill, for sure. I will say we love [Hopmonk](#) and all the people putting together the events. [Finnegan's](#) [Marin Restaurant and Bar on Grant Avenue] is a chill place to play. We often set up pop up shows at bars all around town to get a more exciting, catch-off-guard thing. People love shows like that.

Ryan: We've done [Browns](#) [[Brown's Binyerd](#) is a fun, local pub off Grant Ave. and 1st St., with pool tables, dart boards and a jukebox].

Alex: This place is gonna be a cool new venue right here, [Jerry's Delicatessen](#) [The new sandwich joint off Redwood Blvd., where [Perry's Delicastessen](#) used to be].

What happened to Perry's?

Alex: [Perrys](#) actually moved downtown.

Nick: They're gonna be right by [Marin Scope](#) [an award-winning community publisher] and [Rustic Bakery Cafe](#) [a local organic bakery and cafe].

So, you record right behind Jerry's. What is this place?

Nick: This studio here is called [Music Never Dies Studios](#). And this is gonna be a venue, [Jerrys](#) where [Perrys](#) used to be.

The Happys, Music Never Dies Studios and Jerry's Deli are teaming up to manage events

Nick: We get contacted by a lot of bands, hitting us up to give them shows here [at [Jerry's Deli](#)]. Pretty sure that this venue, will have an influx of music coming in. I'm very excited. Especially for downtown, because we haven't had much downtown since the Novato Theater shut down. Literally feeling the vibe of that theater being gone [[The Novato Theatre Board](#) is currently working on the re-opening of the theatre. There is no set date yet].

Brett: Yeah, we're really excited about that. Hopefully they'll be a night with open mic and stuff like that, that we're gonna host. That's all in the works.

Alex: So this parking lot right here [between [BeerCraft](#) and [Jerry's Deli](#)] is going to be an outdoor patio with fire pits and a little stage maybe over here.

Nick: Our drive comes from having a lack of resources, whether it's intentional or not. It's gonna serve as a huge catalyst for big events in this spot [[Jerry's](#)]. For all ages too. High school kids are going to be able to play in there.

Alex: To touch on the [BeerCraft](#) point, these guys [[Jerry's Deli](#) and [BeerCraft](#)] are working super close. [Jerry's](#) is not gonna sell craft beer for instance, they're gonna serve the food to [BeerCraft](#). It's really a co-collaborative environment. Which is really great. The guys at [BeerCraft](#) are always super supportive of us, they come to our shows, they get us beer. Yeah, they're just really cool guys.

Nick: I love [BeerCraft](#), they're really great people. I look forward to linking up with them and putting projects together and all sorts of stuff.

Speaking of BeerCraft, you mentioned in an earlier conversation that *The Happys* would be teaming up with BeerCraft for a ton of upcoming events. Can you tell me about your relationship with the taproom?

Alex: What they do, now that these two [[Jerry's Deli](#) and [BeerCraft](#)] are working together, they'll put on events here in this space [the parking lot between [Jerry's Deli](#) and [BeerCraft](#)]. So a couple weeks ago they had hay bails, a little stage over here, tons of people, a rotisserie pig [for BeerCraft's 3rd Anniversary Party].

Nick: Fantastic food [[Creekside Bakery](#) catered BeerCraft's 3rd Anniversary Party].

Alex: Those kind of events are the ones we're talking about working with them with. We're just trying to build the community and the music vibe here in Novato because it's something we don't really have. There's not a lot of venues right now for live music.

Nick: And there's an influx of Millennials because of the cost of living in SF. If you want a two bedroom you better make at least \$61 an hour, so you can imagine quite a lot more people than the last generation are back in Marin, living with family. And they want to go out and do stuff. [Rock the Block](#) was really cool. It's just gonna be a pocket of more alternative-rock, of kids doing their thing, playing music. There's still gonna be that dynamic of the crowd, just like Fairfax with the 80's [music scene]. We'll see what happens, cause if we can execute it good with this venue [[Jerry's Deli](#)] it could be a big change for Novato in the best way. We've kind of been bored a lot of our lives here, so we keep coming up with a lot of creative stuff. We're trying to cure kids boredom, keep them stimulated, keep them having fun.

What are your favorite places to eat in Novato?

Ryan: Think hard because there's a lot of good places. Novato's big.

Alex: I already know, I've been here for too long. [Italian Delite](#) [a popular Italian sub shop]. That one's super good, the family has been around here since the 80's, ya know?

Ryan: My favorite's [La Hacienda](#) on Grant Avenue [a local taqueria with original Mexican recipes]. Vey authentic, awesome food.

Nick: [Mi Pueblo](#) [an authentic Mexican eatery, with an enjoyable outdoor patio] and [Dr. Insomniacs](#) [an award-winning cafe, famous for their delectable coffees and teas].

Alex: Oh, [Dr. Insomniacs](#) is a good one. I'm actually going there after this.

Brett: My favorite food spot in Novato, I'd have to say, yeah, [Dr. Insomniacs](#) is pretty bomb. And [Great Donuts](#) [a delicious local donut spot].

Nick: Shout out to [Great Donuts](#), seriously.

What are some upcoming projects you have in the works for the summer?

Nick: [Jerry's Deli](#) is gonna be like the new mecca, in my opinion. July 13th, we're doing a thing in Fairfax [Check out [VisitNovato.com](#) for more info on upcoming shows from [The Happys](#)].

Alex: If you want to have fun in Marin, the music scene is definitely happening in Fairfax. If you want something to do on a Friday or Saturday night go to Fairfax, you'll have a blast. Live music every day of the weekend. Good vibes, good people.

Nick: Tell her about how we may have little acoustic shows at your house.

Alex: Are you familiar with [Sofar Sounds](#)?

No. What is that?

Alex: [Sofar Sounds](#) is this company where people crowdsource venues. They'll do it at a house, a parking lot or something like that. The [Sofar Sounds](#) folks send a photographer in and they put pillows down on the ground and they film this live set. It's like this really cool, intimate set. There's only like twenty tickets you can buy. Everyone sits down on the ground, in front of the band and they do like, an acoustic iteration of songs. It's very intimate, it's very cool. So at my house, I live in Bel Marin Keys, me and my roommates are gonna set up a [Sofar Sounds](#) there with [The Happys](#) and whoever else wants to sign up.

Nick: A little house party.

Alex: Yeah, little house party type thing. So, that's gonna be a cool little venue cause our backyard is water, it's on the lagoon. It's the perfect vibe.

Nick: [Stafford Lake](#) has great events. Growing up he [pointing to Alex] opened for Journey and Sammy Hagar for a school thing. There's the Sunset festival [[Sunset Sound System](#)], which is a huge rave that they have every year for free at [Stafford Lake](#) and it's awesome. There's a couple thousand people. We're looking to build something more like that. Something all ages from young to old, which is cool. That's how it should be, everyone should get together and put aside their differences.

Ryan: Community.

Nick: Right, community is the key to solving everything, in my opinion.

Alex: They used to have Blues By The Lake. They would set up a massive arena stage right on the water. It was a couple thousand people. I don't even know why they stopped it.

Nick: Bob Weir played there too, Grateful Dead. The last bands through here were Steve Miller Band, they wrote Fly Like An Eagle and all that in Novato and Indian Valley in the 70's. Journey, Grateful Dead, Metallica. The Grateful Dead were the main ones in this pocket. We're probably the closest thing to a band like that, in my opinion.

With over 6,000 downloads on Spotify, nearly 20,000 views on YouTube, two albums, features on the radio, it looks like your band is taking off, what's in store for the future? Do you have any long term goals for the band?

Brett: This summer, we're gonna be recording a new album, which we're really excited about. We have all the songs figured out, so it'll be a full length, which is really exciting. We're busy this summer with shows, so [the album release] might be late summer, fall, winter. But this summer we will be recording.

Alex: We're also touring SoCal at the end of July. We're hitting San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, San Diego. We're playing with some really cool bands, like Band of Gringos. We're also going up to Oregon and Washington in August. We're touring up there and working on the album.

Ryan: We're trying to make it big. Trying to go national, eventually. International, even.

Alex: We want to go to Australia for like a month and just send it there and see if we can get a following there.

Nick: Basically just doing the same thing and doing it better. Selling way more records and linking up with some bigger artists. And there are a lot. There's a couple I don't even want to put out there yet, a couple really fat artists for opening slots. I see a national tour next summer, I bet east coast. We'll start planning it. Tennessee, at least.

Brett: We definitely want to tour regularly. If we could just constantly be on the road, we're fine with that. We can fit all of our gear in here and just sleep all of us in here [Brett's van].

Nick: At least a couple months out of the year.

Alex: This is Brett's baby [pointing to Brett's van] but he's so kind and lets us use it. Anywhere we go to a show, we can all load in our gear here and ride together. It's really a blessing.

Ryan: If we can all just get rid of our side jobs and just make it big, I think that's the goal.

Nick: That's what we're gonna do. The idea of it is, we are trying to make Novato almost like a music oriented place like Memphis. It can't be like Los Angeles, but it can be a musical mecca and we do have friends who are that inspired. If we play everything precisely and on the dot, we can align enough bands to make a statement. From all of the world, it can be a spot. That's what we're gonna do.