

## **Ryan Shupe and the RubberBand**

RubberBand is a perfect name for Ryan Shupe and his band of amazing musicians. The group is known for its ability to stretch out musically in all directions, ping-pong back and forth with a joyful spontaneity most bands could barely imagine, let alone achieve. Each member possesses years of experience on his respective instrument and when the band comes together on tunes like the bouncy “Don’t Leave Me Lonely,” or the frenetically fun title track, “Last Man Standing,” their collective talent is explosive and undeniable.

The five man band, hailing from the Salt Lake City, Utah, is a breath of fresh air in an age where much of the music is over-produced, “practically to death,” and their organic approach to performing has built them quite a following, not only through the West but around the rest of the country as well. Lead singer Ryan Shupe originally formed the band as an outlet for his songwriting but it soon took on a life all its own, becoming bigger than anything he could have originally imagined.

A descendent from a long line of fiddle players, (he’s the fifth generation to play,) Shupe has been playing violin nearly as long as he could walk. His father assembled a group of young children, to play and tour professionally, and called them the PeeWee Pickers. This was when Ryan was still under the age of 10. He continued to play in bands all through school. In college, weary of starting bands only to have someone drop out, he ingeniously decided to form a loose outfit of musicians known as the RubberBand, where members could drop in and out at will and he would have a rotating group from which to pull when he needed them. However, one by one, the musicians began to stick and their cohesiveness fueled their musical fires until they became regional favorites. Most of the members had known each other from the area circuit before they joined Shupe in the RubberBand.

Banjoist Craig Miner first started playing music on a ukelele he bought at a garage sale, and from there added banjo, guitar, mandolin, and bouzouki. Performing with groups like Fire On The Mountain and Salt Licks, he had known Ryan for years before joining the RubberBand. Drummer Bart Olson grew up playing with his family’s band, the Olson Family Fiddlers, and at 12 picked up the drums. Focusing on jazz percussion, his interests soon broadened to include country, rock, funk, latin, ska, and blues and he played in various bands and with blues player Matt Harding before joining Ryan. Guitarist Roger Archibald has been playing guitar since he was 11, and actually played in a band that Ryan’s dad organized, String Fever, when he was growing up. (Ryan’s brother and sister also played in that band.) He worked as a regional musician in the same circles as Ryan for years before joining the band. Ryan Tilby also played in String Fever with Archibald before joining the RubberBand for the first time on banjo. After leaving the band, he attended Utah State University, where he studied jazz guitar. He obviously could not stay away for too long though, as he returned to the band in 2006 as the bassist.

After building a solid regional following, the group elected to try their hand at a bigger dream. Their highly polished skills and string-based sound piqued the interest of quite a few record labels. Signing initially with Capitol Records, they made the well-received album, Dream Big, released in 2005 and produced by Jason Deere. That album produced the hit single “Dream Big” which was used as the theme song for NBC’s prime-time show, “Three Wishes”, hosted by Amy

Grant. They later parted ways with the label, but continued to tour steadily and work on new material, some of which was heard by new label Montage Music Group, who immediately signed the group. Their new CD, "Last Man Standing," is a progression from their previous albums.

"I think the album is more rocking this time around," explains Shupe. "If you heard the last album, you would notice a progression, but it's pretty much in line with what our fans have come to love about us. Nobody's going to hear it and go 'that doesn't sound like them, but it's a different direction than the last album. You're going to want to turn it up a little bit more in your car!"

The band produced the new CD and reunited with Deere, who co-produced three of the tracks. Known for their live show and spontaneous, creative jams, the group wanted to balance that unbridled energy out a bit with some radio-friendly songs that were fine-tuned in the studio.

With songs like the catchy "Don't Leave Me Lonely," and the optimistically ambitious title track, there's no question that the band hasn't changed their essence or core, but merely expanded into bigger territory musically. Tunes like the swayingly beautiful "All I Need," (a love song penned by Ryan for his wife,) and the inspiring "10,000 Lakes," with its encouraging wisdom, ("Give me eyes to see, to perceive, to believe, to imagine the possibilities) show a more serene side of the band, though they soon crank things back up to a fever pitch and return to their glorious picking on songs like the feisty rocker "My Life," and the sunny "Be The One." And the album's closer, the hilariously retro ode to everyone's favorite junk food, "Corn Dogs," feels like a trip to the county fair and reveals Ryan and his brood haven't lost their sense of humor amidst all that serious musical talent.

The CD offers something for everyone, which is just what the band has in mind when it steps into the studio to capture their own particular brand of magic on tape. And Shupe feels it should please both ends of their broad spectrum of fans, from those who just like to tap their toes to some great picking and fiddling, to those who appreciate the more sophisticated elements to the group's musical endeavors.

"I think it does both, really," says Shupe. "It's a musician's music, but it's also for people who want a good tune. That's kind of the beauty of our band, I think. If you're a musician you like it, because it has complex arrangements and things that are different than what's out there, because we're pushing the boundaries a little bit, and doing a rock country hybrid with banjo and fiddle and stuff. But you're still getting the songs that you'd like to hear played on the radio. I think we are able to be a great band live, yet also have solid songs people can relate to and enjoy. I want us to have songs that are great and mean something to people. We think it is the best sounding album we have to date."