



Chris Robinson at the Fillmore for his run of three shows with the Brotherhood in December.

Chris Robinson

The former singer for the Black Crowes finds peace in West Marin.

BY CAROLYN MCCOY
PHOTO BY LENNY GONZALEZ

ROCKER CHRIS ROBINSON, songwriter and singer for the bands Chris Robinson Brotherhood and Green Leaf Rustlers, has found a home amid the soft, rolling hills of Marin. The former lead singer of the Black Crowes moved here five years ago for a change of pace and to raise his daughter outside the chaos of Los Angeles or New York. His time here, when his tour schedule allows, has been peaceful as well as musically prosperous.

Why Marin? When I moved here a few years ago it just seemed like a good change from Los Angeles. I wanted to have the community that I never had. I'm from Atlanta and I didn't have it there. I lived in New York, I lived in Los Angeles and I had great friends but never a community. I love having that in my life. Marin is also nicer too. Just the land itself and the vibration of the North Bay is something that I've been searching for my

whole life. I've been lucky enough to travel around the world, but to finally be in Marin is like, "Oh wow!" I've been looking for this spot for a long time.

What are some of your favorite Marin places to hang out when you're not on tour? I really like being in West Marin. I love going to the Italian restaurant in Point Reyes Station, [Osteria] Stellina. I like going all the way out to the lighthouse. Nick's Cove is cool, too. I like being outdoors and hiking, and having access to all this beautiful nature is something that I really, really, really like. Fairfax is like "going to town" and if anyone needs to find me, I'll probably be at the Good Earth like everyone else. I do love the chicken wings at Iron Springs and if we're gonna be having a fancy night, we'll go to Sushi Ran or something in Sausalito.

Are you finally settling down after spending most of your adult life on the road? You know, my life has been this way since 1989 when I was 22. I definitely feel as I'm getting older, I would like to be in Marin more and start touring a little less. It has been an incredible gift to be able to do what you love, when you have the opportunity to live your life that way. But there's a duality. There's great freedom and great fulfillment, but then it brings up all these other things. It's tough to miss your kids and your things. But, you know, you make it work.

Do you think your ability to grow and change within your music has helped you continue to be successful? I imagine that would be hard to quantify because I am the catalyst of what's going on for myself. For me as an outsider, dyslexic, weirdo and art-driven child of the Deep South, my connection has always been through my writings. Then I found my way into music; I found that I could sing, that I could write songs or arrange music, not just be

the performer. I think where I am in my 50s is probably closer to the person I was when I left Atlanta, just in terms of pure artistic expression; the reality is I'm still close to the creative source, if that makes sense. I hope to learn from my mistakes, but all of them have been based around keeping a purity to what I feel music represents to me. For me, it's not just business, it's not just trappings or the things that people want: fame, money, you know, the things they associate with success. Those are real and I understand them; they're just not the things that motivate me. At the end of the day as the artist, I know what makes me happy and what doesn't, and we don't have enough time on this planet to not attempt to have some joy, you know?

Important to really love what you do. Well, it permeates the rest of your being.

Have you discovered any local musicians or bands that you like? Totally. There are tons of musicians out in San Geronimo Valley and people I didn't know about before. I really like the band San Geronimo, and Darren Nelson and Jeremy D'Antonio from that band. The guys from Soul Ska, as well. I'm not surprised when I am around Marin and see a great band, or it could be just some older dudes playing in the bar and they'll have some great, cool music. You know what I mean? It's amazing.

You have been very outspoken about the positive effects of marijuana. Have you seen any changes in the public mindset with the new laws? Not in California. I mean, at least not for me. I haven't known anyone since I've lived in California for nearly 20 years who ever had a problem with marijuana. If anything, I think that people have spoken. It's obviously not what it used to be, at least in terms of the stigma. Now the average person who wants to have "a nice afternoon" knows they are not going to be stigmatized or go to prison, and that is the big victory.

It seems like both your current bands have such a different feel and vibe from each other. My Marin-based band, the Green Leaf Rustlers, has [Marin guitarist] Barry Sless, who plays with David Nelson, and [bassist]

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Pete Sears is in the band, too; he was in Jefferson Starship; we only play old country songs. Chris Robinson Brotherhood is my vehicle for my own music and my poetry. Every time you play, you're a very different group, and even that group will play a little different within a different place on a different day with different electricity in the air. That's what I like about it. That's why music was perfect for a dyslexic, ADHD child, because it has a lot of dynamics going on. It keeps me interested.

It seems more and more musicians are growing these crazy, bushy beards very much like yours. I'm wondering if you might have any influence on that? I've had a beard since the mid-'90s. I guess musicians are lazy, so we don't want to shave, maybe? Yeah, I'm chalking it up to laziness (laughs). I do like a beard because it represents so many different things. On one hand it represents strength and wisdom and someone of power, and in the exact same spoonful it represents madness and the outsider and something off-kilter — dangerous. So I like the duplicity.

That's a profound way to describe a beard. Most people are probably like, "Oh, I like Mumford & Sons. So I got a beard."

You said you think of yourself as more of a musician than a celebrity. How do you feel like you fit into Marin celebrity culture? I don't think anyone really cares. If people know who I am because they come to the shows and they like my records or whatever, that's just being a successful musician. But even when I was in a different life, when I was married to someone very famous, I never really needed that — [celebrity] wasn't a part of my life. It is what it is and I've never, at any time in my life, never went anywhere thinking anyone should ever know me or care or anything. So, I dunno, I never really even think about it. I'm in the soul biz, not the show biz. 