

# San Francisco Story: Best of the Bay: Culture

Staff | July 6, 2012

## 1970s Club Makeover

Those who knew and loved Sweetwater when the likes of Jerry Garcia, Bonnie Raitt, and Ry Cooder performed there might not recognize it post-facelift. Now called the Sweetwater Music Hall, it's got a French bistro, an organic-espreso bar, chandeliers, a top-notch Meyer sound system, three times the space, and outdoor seating. But some relics from its previous life pay tribute on the walls, and an eclectic crowd, including Sammy Hagar, Jerry Harrison, and Huey Lewis, circle back to their old jam pad to catch a host of contemporary rock and jazz artists who are helping to usher the club into its new era. 19 Corte Madera ave., Mill Valley, 415-388-1100, [SweetwatermusicHall.Com](http://SweetwatermusicHall.Com) —J.A.S.

## Creative Multitaskers

Imagine a magazine so cool that it could get the famous editor of another magazine to contribute a piece. Radio Silence seems to have hit upon a killer combo, literature and rock 'n' roll, which the New Yorker's David Remnick agreed to explore in a podcast about Bob Dylan. In the print version, you'll get writers like Tobias Wolff and Daniel Handler (with a bit of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edna St. Vincent Millay thrown in), and with the release of each issue, Radio Silence will put on a live event, à la San Francisco's wildly popular Pop-Up Magazine. And wouldn't you know it? The folks there also care about kids: a portion of event ticket sales will go toward buying books and instruments to give to public schools. (Look out, Dave Eggers—you've got competition.) [maintainradiosilence.com](http://maintainradiosilence.com) —N.W.

## Theater Alfresco

The We Players have been turning public spaces into impromptu playhouses for more than a decade (last year was Hamlet on Alcatraz), but in May, the group presented its most audacious performance yet: a five-hour roving rendition of The Odyssey on Angel Island, wherein the audience is conscripted into the story to cavort with mythical monsters against the backdrop of the San Francisco skyline. With a piece of theater that could leave you grass-stained, sunburned, and in the market for a bronze chest plate, We Players didn't just break the fourth wall, it toppled the whole playhouse. Through July 1, [weplayers.org](http://weplayers.org) —B.C.

## Poster Boy for a Revivalist Trend

Midcentury soulful R&B had a big year with the debut album Time's All Gone from breakout star, and former San Franciscan, Nick Waterhouse. The revival rocker's tunes draw inspiration from oldies records like those played at local dance parties, including Teenage Dance Craze at the knockout, Hard

French at El Rio , Lost & Found at the Make-Out Room, and nightbeat at Edinburgh Castle. The next '60s sing-alike to watch out for? Shannon and the Clams, founded by Hunx and His Punx backup singer Shannon Shaw, with surf-rock ditties that would sound at home in any vintage jukebox.

[Nickwaterhouse.com](http://Nickwaterhouse.com) —Whitney Phaneuf

### **Mold-Breaking Musician**

To say it was a breakout year for Merrill Garbus and tune-yards would be an understatement. With the release of their sophomore album, *w h o k i l l*, the Oakland-based singer-musician and her band have earned praise from the New Yorker, Pitchfork, practically every Bay Area media outlet, and even Yoko Ono. One reason we love them is that they're so hard to categorize, starting with Garbus's loop pedal, which she uses to record her own vocals and percussion while playing a wonderfully haunting ukulele ("it has the ability to be creepy," she says). Her vocal dexterity is remarkable—from guttural grunts to wispy croons—and she incorporates everything from jazz and hip-hop to fairy tales and nursery rhymes. She's on tour through August and plans to work on another album after that. Definitely one to watch. [tune-yards.com](http://tune-yards.com) —A.T.

### **Local Theater with Big-League Ambition**

Over the past year or so, Berkeley Rep has quietly launched a series of projects that are transforming it from a regional powerhouse into a dramaturgical incubator with global reach. This month, for instance, the Rep inaugurates the four-week ground Floor Summer Residency Lab: up to 100 playwrights, directors, composers, and other promising talents from around the world creating and confabbing at the company's dazzling new West Berkeley campus. Meanwhile, across town, the company has started renting space to two small local theater ensembles (Ragged Wing and Bay area Children's Theater), betting that the thriving downtown arts district will provide the support they need to take flight. Here's hoping for a quick takeoff. [berkeleyrep.org](http://berkeleyrep.org) —Nina Martin

### **Welcome Wakeup Call**