

The Tubes

The Tubes started as a collection of high school friends from [Phoenix](#) and [Scottsdale, Arizona](#). Two Phoenix bands, the Beans and The Red, White and Blues Band, both relocated to San Francisco in 1969 and eventually merged. The new band's core membership remained largely intact for more than a decade: [Fee Waybill](#) (real name John Waldo Waybill) (vocals), [Bill "Sputnik" Spooner](#) (guitar, vocals), Roger Steen (guitar), [Prairie Prince](#) (real name Charles L. Prince) (drums), Michael Cotten (synthesizer), [Vince Welnick](#) (piano), and Rick Anderson (bass). Singer Re Styles (born Shirley Marie MacLeod) (vocals) and ex-[Santana](#) percussionist Mingo Lewis were also fixtures for much of the band's early history.^[1]

[Showbiz](#) excess was a common theme of the band's early work, with Waybill sometimes assuming the onstage persona of "Quay Lewd" (a pun on [Quaalude](#)), a drunk, drugged out, barely coherent lead singer, decked out with flashing glasses and impossibly tall platform shoes.

The Tubes' first, self-titled album was produced by [Al Kooper](#). The track "White Punks on Dope" was an "absurd anthem of wretched excess" and a tribute to their rich, white teenage [fan base](#) in San Francisco.^[citation needed] "White Punks on Dope" has been [covered](#) by [Mötley Crüe](#). The German rock musician [Nina Hagen](#) took the tune and set new lyrics to it (not a translation of the original lyrics), titled her work *TV-Glotzer* ("[Couch Potato](#)"), and used this song as the opening track of her own debut album [Nina Hagen Band](#), released 1978 on CBS/Germany records.

The Tubes' second album, *Young and Rich* on [A&M Records](#), was [produced](#) by [Ken Scott](#). It featured the hit "Don't Touch Me There" ([arranged](#) by [Jack Nitzsche](#)), and featured Laramy Smith, who with [Larry Lee](#) arranged and performed the backing vocals. The Tubes' third album gave way to thematic experimentation with *Now* and after the live record *What Do You Want from Live*, (recorded during their record breaking run at the [Hammersmith Odeon](#), London, England) their fourth for A&M *Remote Control* was a [concept album](#) produced by [Todd Rundgren](#) about a television-addicted idiot savant. The cover of *Remote Control* shows a baby watching *Hollywood Squares* in a specially made "Vidi-Trainer".

One critic opined that with their media savvy and theatrical skills, The Tubes were born to create rock video, but arrived several years too early.^[2] Instead, they put their creativity and art skills into their live performances, in which songs could be full fledged production numbers, from a beach movie [parody](#) for "Sushi Girl", to leather clad [S&M](#) hijinks in "Mondo Bondage", to the [game show](#) antics of "What Do You Want From Life?" At their peak, their live act featured dozens of other performers, including [tap dancers](#) and [acrobats](#). The Tubes' stage productions were choreographed by [Kenny Ortega](#) and featured cast members [Jane Dornacker](#), LeRoy Jones, Michael Holman, Michael Springer, Edwin Heaven, Cindi Osborn, Heline Gouax and Mary Niland from 1975-1977. From 1978-1979, the cast included Sharon Collins, Caty Bevan and Loryanna Catalano. The *Completion Backward* tour featured Shelly Pang, Cheryl Hangland, and [Cynthia Rhodes](#). From 1983-1985, Michelle Gray (who later married Rundgren) and Cheryl Hangland were principal dancers. Several crew members — including Tour Manager Steve "Chopper" Borges, Lee Collins and Gail Lowe — made frequent appearances on stage in various roles as well.^[citation needed]

The Tubes' live shows in the late 1970s and early 1980s were rife with allusions to mainstream film (*Dr. Strangelove*, *Rollerball*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Grease*), then-forgotten B-movies (*Wild Women of Wongo*, *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*), music (Tom Jones, punk rock, a medley of Nelson Riddle television themes), contemporary pop culture (Patty Hearst, the Viking program), television (*Let's Make a Deal*, *Fernwood 2Nite*, the anime *Raideen*), and literature (Nelson Algren's *A Walk on the Wild Side*), presaging the subcultural reverence and over-the-top theatricality of later groups like [The World/Inferno Friendship Society](#).^[citation needed]

These shows were expensive to produce, however, and while they earned the band a reputation for being one of the most entertaining live acts of all time, by the early 1980s, they found themselves short of money. Their proposed fifth album, the self produced *Suffer for Sound*, was rejected by [A&M Records](#), who dumped the band instead, finishing out its contract with the oddities collection *T.R.A.S.H. (Tubes Rarities and Smash Hits)*.^[3]

The band then signed to [Capitol Records](#), scaling back the live shows and redesigning itself as a strait laced rock band, teaming with producer [David Foster](#). *The Completion Backward Principle*, another concept album, featuring the classic rock staple "Talk to Ya Later", presented itself as a motivational business document, complete with shocking pictures of the band members cleaned up and wearing suits.^[citation needed] The band also had their first [Top 40](#) hit in the United States in 1981 with a serious ballad, "Don't Want to Wait Anymore" (recorded almost entirely by Spooner, without Waybill's participation). Also in 1981, they had a song, "Gonna Get It Next Time", in the movie *Modern Problems* (starring [Chevy Chase](#)); this song was not released on an album. *Outside Inside* followed a few years later and yielded a few hits, including the number 10 U.S. hit and number 1 Mainstream Rock Tracks hit "She's a Beauty".

In 1985, the band teamed up with Rundgren once again for *Love Bomb*, a flop that led Capitol to drop the band just as it was going on tour in support of the album — a tour that would leave the band a half million dollars in debt, forcing them to play low-budget gigs for a year to pay off their debts.^[4] Waybill released an unsuccessful solo album (*Read My Lips*, on Capitol Records) earlier in the year, and soon left the band ("Fee broke up", one band member said).^[citation needed] The band attempted to carry on with a new lead singer but after just a few appearances it split up. During this time, Waybill also enjoyed a fruitful writing partnership with Capitol Records label mate, [Richard Marx](#), their most popular and well known collaboration being "Edge of a Broken Heart", recorded by the female band [Vixen](#).

In 1988, The Tubes reactivated minus Cotten, and took on a longtime friend from Phoenix, Arizona, David Killingsworth as lead vocalist. After their fall tour of 1989, Bill Spooner left the band, followed by Vince Welnick in 1990 who then joined the [Grateful Dead](#) that same year. Later, Gary Cambra joined on keyboards and guitar. In 1993, Waybill rejoined the band. This lineup toured Europe and released two CDs, a compilation and the 1996 *Genius of America*. In 2001, the band released a live CD, *The Tubes World Tour 2001*, and continued to tour. On April 22, 2005 a reunion show took place at the Rio Theater in Santa Cruz, CA, with Waybill, Steen, Anderson, Spooner, Welnick, Cotten and Styles.

Welnick, who long suffered from depression, committed suicide on June 2, 2006.

On September 23, 2007, the remaining members of the Tubes reunited in Phoenix for their induction into the Arizona Music & Entertainment Hall of Fame.

Career highlights



This article is in a list format that may be better presented using [prose](#). You can help by converting this section to prose, if [appropriate](#). [Editing help](#) is available. *(January 2009)*

1972: Tubes appear in [Mitchell brothers](#) film *Resurrection of Eve* as Jesus Bongo and the Millionaires

1973: Opened for the [New York Dolls](#) at the Matrix, [Iggy Pop](#) at Bimbos, and [Led Zeppelin](#) at [Kezar Stadium](#) in San Francisco

1974: Tubes shoot "[video](#) demo" at California Hall which lands a record deal at [A&M Records](#), Cotten/Prince paint "Flying Record" mural on A&M sound stage

1975: Tubes play for two weeks of shows at David Allen's Boarding House in San Francisco, several sell-out dates at [The Roxy](#) in Los Angeles and The [Bottom Line](#) in New York. Dec, 31-Headline and sell out Bill Graham's [Winterland Ballroom](#)^[5]

1976: Held residency at Bimbos in San Francisco for one month, Prairie Prince dubbed "The One, The Only" by columnist [Herb Caen](#). Tubes hold "Talent Hunt" at the Boarding House hosted by [Martin Mull](#); [Robin Williams](#) is contestant but loses

1977: Held residency at the [Palace of Fine Arts](#) in San Francisco for one month, The Whisky a-Go-Go in Los Angeles for two shows a night for one month, and [Hammersmith Odeon](#) in London for a week

1978: Headlined the [Knebworth Festival](#) with [Frank Zappa](#) and [Peter Gabriel](#). On April 3, The Tubes performed live with [Dolly Parton](#) on *Cher... Special*, in the "Musical Battle to Save Cher's Soul Medley". As the title would imply, the performance was a duel between the forces of good and evil to determine where [Cher](#) would spend her eternal destiny. Dolly Parton was dressed in white and, with a team of brightly clad singers, portrayed an angelic host while The Tubes, dressed in black leather and performing "Mondo Bondage", battled to send Cher's soul into eternal damnation.

1979: Tubes play Japan; Cotten/Welnick/Prince/Styles appear on Japanese soap opera. Tubes appear in [Andy Warhol](#)'s *Interview* magazine

1980: Appear in the film *Xanadu* singing the rock portion of the cross-genre song "Dancin'" opposite a [big band](#).

1981: Record [Grammy](#) nominated "The Tubes Video" at [Shepperton Studios](#), one of the first long form [video discs](#)

1981: Sang "Sushi Girl" and "Talk to Ya Later" on the television sketch comedy program [SCTV](#), Episode #86 airing July 24, 1981.

1982: Appeared in a commercial for Activision's video game [Megamania](#)

1983: Opened several dates for [David Bowie](#) on the [Serious Moonlight](#) tour and on this tour, among other highlights, they were the first artists to ever play the newly opened Tacoma Dome in Tacoma, Washington. At the end of the Bowie tour, they played a few shows featuring their classic no-holds-barred theatrics in Portland, Oregon, and other west-coast cities.

1985: Tour with [Todd Rundgren](#)'s Utopia, play [Radio City Music Hall](#).

Discography

Albums

- [The Tubes](#) (1975) #113 U.S.
- [Young and Rich](#) (1976) #46 U.S.
- [Now](#) (1977) #122 U.S.
- [What Do You Want from Live](#) (1978) #82 U.S., #38 [UK](#)
- [Remote Control](#) (1979) #46 U.S., #40 UK
- *T.R.A.S.H. (Tubes Rarities and Smash Hits)* (1981)
- [The Completion Backward Principle](#) (1981) #36 U.S.
- [Outside Inside](#) (1983) #18 U.S., #77 UK
- [Love Bomb](#) (1985) #87 U.S.
- *The Best of the Tubes* (1992)
- [Genius of America](#) (1996)
- *The Tubes World Tour 2001* (2001)
- [Wild In London](#) (2005)