



The Tumbling Tumbleweeds started as a Sons of the Pioneers tribute band.

COURTESY PHOTO

# Rollin' into town

BY JIM MCCONNELL

It seemed as if the Tumbling Tumbleweeds were suddenly caught in a hot desert wind that has lifted them from coffee house cult status to the cusp of the country-western music big leagues.

The Sierra Madre-based quartet may be the area's most accomplished tribute band, paying homage to the legendary Sons of the Pioneers.

But an interesting thing happened along the trail. The Tumbleweeds have developed a fan base that's more familiar with Mister Rogers than Roy Rogers, and have added many of its own tunes to the Bob Nolan songbook, all the while honing its live act into one that doesn't have to travel in anyone's bootprints.

It's added up to two Western Music Association award nominations, one for the group's latest CD, "Blaze Across The West," and one for Entertainers of the Year.

The Tumbling Tumbleweeds will stop in at the Coffee Gallery Backstage in Altadena on Nov. 12. Following that, they're off to the Western Music Association Showcase and Awards Show in Albuquerque.

All the acclaim and awards have been biscuits and gravy for group founder Rob Wolfskill.

Wolfskill, a native of Boyle Heights, caught cowboy fever at an early age.

"My parents are both Native Americans, so I was raised hearing the lore of the Great American West," Wolfskill said. "But I guess the thing that tripped the switch for me was seeing Walt Disney's 'Pecos Bill' and hearing Roy (Rogers) and the Sons of the Pioneers singing around the campfire. That got me dreaming about forming a group that would carry that sound."

The dream came true, in fits and starts.

"We formed the Tumbleweeds in 2005," Wolfskill said. "But getting the Bob Nolan sound was tough. We quickly found out that, other than the records and the Sons' appearances in movies, there wasn't any sheet music and there definitely weren't any of their arrangements out there. So we had to do it the hard way: learn everything by ear.

"I feel very fortunate in that Chris (Acuff) and Cade (Parenti) and R.J. (Mills) are all skilled musicians. Still, it took a lot of work to capture the vocal sound of the Sons."

For the appearance at the Coffee Gallery, the Tumbleweeds will also feature fiddler Jesse Olema, along with bass player Dan Dungan.

"I always wanted a fiddle in the band, but it took a while to find the right guy," Wolfskill said. "Jesse has the heart and soul for traditional American music."

## THE TUMBLING TUMBLEWEEDS

With Joyce Woodson

7 p.m. Nov. 12  
Coffee Gallery Backstage  
2027 N. Lake Ave.  
Altadena  
\$20  
626-798-6236;  
[www.coffeegallery.com](http://www.coffeegallery.com)