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# On The Verge: Clay Street Unit

Mike Greenhaus on April 17, 2026



“There’s a lot of attention to detail and trying to be as intentional as possible,” Clay Street Unit frontman Sam Walker says while describing his Colorado-bred band’s debut, *Sin & Squalor*, which recently dropped on Leo33. “But it’s a living, breathing organism. Sometimes it takes a left turn when you thought it was gonna take a right turn.”

Formed in 2021, the roots-leaning, string-laced sextet laid down *Sin & Squalor* near their Denver homebase with producer/Infamous Stringdusters banjoist Chris Pandolfi, who had previously helmed material for bassist Jack Kotarba and mandolin player Scottie Bolin’s jamgrass outfit Morsel. “He didn’t try to sell himself too much,” he says. “He wanted to help us bring our vision to life on our terms and helped amplify the sound.”

Walker and former member Jack Cline formed Clay Street Unit after meeting at Denver's Zuni Street Brewing Company through mutual friends. After hearing that Cline played banjo, Walker, a guitarist, took the party back to his house for a jam session. From there, the group's original lineup started to coalesce through local connections; Walker notes that they asked Kotarba and Morsel to play a private backyard party before they actually met in person. "We all shook hands, played a gig for three or four hours and then caught up after," he says. "We've been stuck together ever since."

Growing up in Alabama, Walker was "a really big choir boy" early on but naturally broadened his palette and played in a "Widespread Panic/Phish/jam/Southern-rock/cover band" in college. Eventually, he relocated to the Centennial State for a change of pace. "I had a couple of friends who moved out to Denver and loved how much of a melting pot of people from all over the country it was," he says.

In 2022, Clay Street Unit—whose current lineup, following Cline's late-2025 departure, also includes pedal-steel player Brad Larrison, drummer Brendan Lamb and fiddler Dan Andree— released a four-song EP, *A Mighty Fine Evening*. It helped push the nascent group beyond the traditional bluegrass tunes, Grateful Dead material and fun pop that populated their early setlists.

"It's just about life experiences—growing up, moving out to Colorado, especially '1200 Miles,'" he says. "I said, 'We're a band, right? Let's play some of our own music.' We recorded that first EP in about four hours on a Wednesday night with a case of beer."

He notes that meeting Bolin after they made their EP changed the songwriting game. "We're such a yin and yang. I'm all over the place, a little manic when writing, and Scotty's really grounded, deliberate and process-oriented. It works well because I'm just throwing paint all over the walls and he's figuring out which colors look good together."

The musicians actually cut *Sin & Squalor,* which features an appearance by Lindsay Lou, in late 2023 and signed to Monument, but they were thrown a curveball when Sony closed that branch of the label. In the meantime, the group's fanbase continued to grow. Last summer, they supported Leftover Salmon and the Kitchen Dwellers at Morrison, Colo.'s Red Rocks and toured with Trampled by Turtles. And while they plan to showcase the new record on the road this spring, they are also eager to see how the tunes change night after night.

"We play the core of the song, but we don't really try to keep the guardrails on too much," Walker says. "The magic of the music scene we're in is being different than the night before."