



Interview with Don Brewer of Grand Funk Railroad

January 24, 2011. Don Brewer, founding member and drummer for Grand Funk Railroad, called into OFC last week to chat about Grand Funk's touring work ethic; over forty years and still going strong! Don not only tours with Grand Funk but is the drummer for Bob Seger's Silver Bullet Band! In the interview GFR founding member talks about what it's like to do over eighty shows a year for two of the hottest classic rock bands on the planet. Read about the story of sweet, sweet Connie mentioned in the lyrics of "We're An American Band," what it was like touring back in the day for the band that started arena tours, Don's reaction to rock star reality TV and much more in the interview!

Formed in 1969, Grand Funk was born out of the ashes of Terry Knight & The Pack, another band from Flint, Michigan. Currently the group includes original founding members Don Brewer (vocals and drums, writer and singer of the hit, "We're An American Band") and bassist Mel Schacher. Joining Don and Mel are true "ALL-STARS"-- Max Carl (38 Special, Jack Mack and the Heart Attack, Max Carl and Big Dance), lead guitarist Bruce Kulick (12 years with KISS and credits with Michael Bolton, Meatloaf and Billy Squier), and keyboardist Tim Cashion (Bob Seger and Robert Palmer).

Together, Brewer and Schacher have created a dynamic and multi-talented five piece band that will not only carry on the tradition of Grand Funk hits, but also has the potential to create a new chapter in the legacy of Grand Funk Railroad. With Grand Funk reforming in 2000, this new chapter in the band's biography is being written daily. Both seasoned Grand Funk lovers and contemporary rock fans-- discovering the group for the first time on CDs and VH-1-- will be able

to see and hear firsthand that Grand Funk Railroad's train is back on track.

“We're Comin' To Your Town, We'll Help You Party It Down, WE'RE AN AMERICAN BAND!!!!”

[Read the review and check out the set list of Grand Funk Railroad performance at SFF](#)

Interview with Don Brewer took place in Florida on January 18, 2012

OFC: GFR is one of the few bands from the seventies with original members including yourself still together and touring.

Don: We started in 1969 and we had a hiatus in late eighties and going into the nineties and we got the band back together in '96 and been touring ever since. It's been a great run, we've had great times out there seeing the fans and playing for people – it's been great!

I understand the band morphed into a “all-star dream-band” with some newer members.

We've got Max Carl from 38 Special who sang and wrote 38's “Second Chance” and known for being in the great soul band Jack Mack and the Heart Attacks. Max is our lead singer and a terrific entertainer – one of the last blue-eyed soul singers on the planet. Also we have Bruce Kulick who played lead guitar with KISS for twelve years when they took their makeup off and tried to be good rock and roll band. Bruce has been with us for twelve years. And Tim Cashion from Bob Seger and Robert Palmer band. It's just a great band. Myself and Mel Schacher are founding members and it's a terrific band.

Have you recorded new music recently?

We have some new stuff we do in the show. We haven't gotten around to recording it yet. We've actually been thinking about a live DVD to include the new material. We do have three or four things we've been rotating in and out of the show for several years.

Don, I understand in addition to touring with GFR, you are the drummer for Bob Seger's band.

We did a total of fifty shows last year with Bob as drummer for the Silver Bullet Band. We did about twenty-six in April/May, I went on the road with Grand Funk over the summer and we just finished doing another twenty some shows in November-December in 2011. Total of fifty shows with Bob and somewhere between thirty and thirty-five with Grand Funk.

According to Rolling Stone early last year, GFR tour schedule was in such demand it was bumping up against Bob Seger's. How did you accommodate both tours?

We worked it out. They've been very cooperative as far as trying to work with our schedule. Grand Funk generally tours in the summer, that's when our busy season is. June, July, August, Sept when all the fair and festivals are. Bob's time, he usually likes to go out in the winter. It kind of works out pretty good for us. When there are conflicts, we always work them out. I'm on the road a lot (laugh) absolutely!

How long have you been with Seger and do you have plans to continue with both bands as drummer.

The Seger stuff comes and goes. Generally, Bob Seger wasn't one to tour every couple of years. He would go on tour and then he wouldn't tour for ten years. This was kind of unusual for him. We went out and toured in 2006 and 2007 with Bob and he came back this year in 2011. I don't know if he wants to continue next year or not. That's up to him.

How did you hook up with Bob Seger?

We all came up in the same area in Michigan. We all knew each other and so when people start coming and going in bands, they always look for people they know and worked with before. When I first started playing with Bob it was back in the eighties. I played with the Seger band since the eighties off and on, not continually, but off and on. I wasn't performing with Grand

Funk at the time, and they called me and wanted to know if I'd be interested in playing with them. So I did two tours in the eighties with the Silver Bullet Band and that's really where the connection came from for me to continue on now.

“We’re An American Band” is one of the most recognizable songs of GFR. Is there a story behind “sweet, sweet Connie” mentioned in the lyrics you can share with fans?
(Laugh) She was a very well known groupie back in the days of early seventies. She was known by all of the bands. We were introduced to her through a promoter that we were going through in Arkansas. We we’re introduced to her as somebody that came in backstage. She knows Elvis and she knows the governor and then, of course, the governor at that time was Bill Clinton. And that's how we were introduced to Connie. That's the story. She had the whole show and that's a natural fact. And it's a story about groupies (laugh!)

Is We’re an American Band on Guitar Hero? We’re you involved in the creative process of guitar hero?

It is, one of the versions of it. It was a licensing deal. I was very familiar with their product and I knew they would do a great job with it. I did not have any problems letting them do whatever they do, that's they're specialty, I just licensed it to them.

Is there a song from your catalog you are most proud of or has special meaning to you (does not have to be a hit)?

There are several songs. I always go back and think about albums we did and think about how hard they were to create or how easy they were to create. And some of my fondest memories were easy to create and we were in the studio and not laboring trying to get the thing recorded.

E PLURIBUS FUNK album we did shaped like a silver coin. It had the song “Footstomping Music” on it as well as several others on it. That was one of my favorite records. “Closer To Home” is always a favorite of mine. I love to see how it affects people. Especially Vietnam veterans have a real relationship with that song. A number of Vietnam vets coming back from Vietnam when the war was ending, played that all the way home on the ship. There's another song called “Pass It Around” that we did with Frank Zappa in 1976 kind of an obscure thing but I love that song too.

What do you think of bands and artists doing reality TV shows – Ozzy, Gene Simmons.

You're married to a high profile radio personality Sunny Quinn, have you ever thought about doing one?

(Laugh) No, I don't think I could open our life up. Number one it's not really very exciting (laugh) and it wouldn't make great television. I think a lot of that stuff is scripted. I think that these guys are very opportunistic people Gene Simmons and Ozzy Osbourne. They know how to milk their audience for all its worth and that's what they do (laugh). Whether it's on stage or now on TV. They know how to put across what they are trying to put across and attract an audience. I wouldn't put myself in that category (laugh).

Obviously the music industry has also morphed with the digital age. But as a veteran band touring, has the overall experience of being on the road and playing shows changed in anyway? Whether it's security or fan experience or logistics of the road with stage special affects, etc?

When we first went out there, we were one of the first bands to play arenas. We were one of the first original arena rock bands. And this is when places were more like 7,000-8,000 people and a lot of them were former rodeo places where they had a dirt floor and they brought in some spot lights and put up a stage and put three super trooper spot lights and that was the lighting system. We would carry our own sound system because there weren't even sound systems back then that were loud enough. Now you can get a sound system any place across the country that is state of the art and you don't have to carry your own sound unless you want to. Bob carries his own sound and stage and lights. Grand Funk, we don't. We just put it in our rider what we need and we carry the people to do that. It's completely different kind of things as far as state of the art equipment availability, it's everywhere now. We don't tour like we used to. We used to do two albums a year and two tours a year to support those albums. From 1969 to 1976. We'd go out and do forty shows in forty days. Now Grand Funk does forty shows over a course of entire year. Most of them are over weekends so we're going home all the time. It's a much more comfortable schedule for touring. We were one of the hot bands back then. Back then we signed a contract to do two tours and two albums a year which is unheard of now. Once rock and roll got into the eighties, bands would take two or three years to make an album and they wouldn't tour in all that time. The whole business model of the music industry changed. I really don't know what the latest greatest stuff is but I hear unbelievable stuff about bands, well not bands acts, touring acts like Lady Gaga who has fifty trucks (laugh). Hauling her stuff across the country, fifty trucks (laugh) unbelievable, unheard of (laugh)!

What do you think of Spotify and Pandora ? Are these apps helping the bands or just another web tool circumventing artists royalties?

I think we are not seeing the kind of royalties anymore that we used to see. There's really no physical product anymore. There's no CDs, no DVDs. Everything is all being downloaded. It's really hard to keep track of people going to sites – are they doing a paid site, are doing a free site, are they exchanging it, are they sharing it with their friends. It's totally impossible to track it

all day. It's really hurt the artist and to be honest I think that hurts the quality of the material and the quality of the music that's put out. There's really not the same incentive anymore for people to create great music. It's more like a pop culture kind of thing where the bands are creating music and giving it away hoping enough people will notice them that they'll come and see them live. So it's not the same thing "gee, if I create great music and I'll get it on the radio and I'll sell X number of copies and I'll be able to control my publishing and I'll have an income stream for years" that whole thing has changed. The whole business model of the music industry, not only touring, but recording wise everything is completely different.

What do you think of bands today who not only cover but use samples of your music and infuse them into completely different songs?

Sometimes it can be cool and sometimes not. I've heard some remakes or remixes of a couple of things like the song "Walk Like A Man" and it was big back in the seventies and it was very cool. And they may use it in a movie or in a soundtrack and that's okay as long as it doesn't completely dimension what the song is about in the first place. A lot of the stuff where they are taking snippets and inserting them into songs, as long as they are paying the writer and publisher, what are you going to do. But I don't really agree with it.

Any big tour plans on the horizon for 2012?

We're going out again this year. We have shows coming up. We have South Florida Fair coming and we've got a few in March. We plan to book over the summer. We'll probably do our thirty-five shows we do every year. That's what we look forward to doing!

Do you have a personal message you would like to impart to your fans?

I'd love to invite everyone out. When we get up on stage, we just have a good time. We like to see people smile and sweat and have a real good time with us. Bring their kids, bring their grandkids and show them what Grand Funk is all about!

interview by Sally Rosen - OFC Contributor