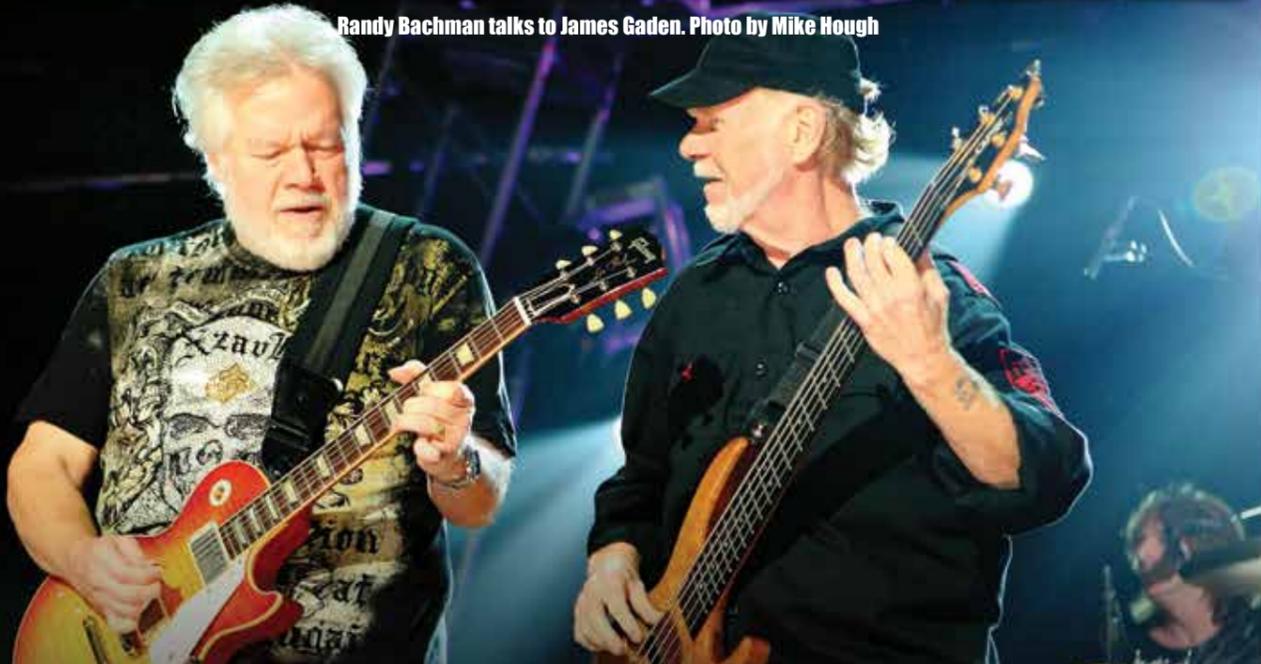


BACHMAN & TURNER

Randy Bachman talks to James Gaden. Photo by Mike Hough



Back in Fireworks #4! Bachman & Turner graced our pages, as I sat down with Fred Turner to discuss the reunion of the driving force behind the legendary Bachman Turner Overdrive. The previous night I had witnessed a superb performance as the duo, with their current band, tore through classic after classic, as well as new songs from their self titled CD. I was really hoping they would tour and record a performance and my prayers were answered, as 'Live At The Roseland Ballroom' has finally been released, giving you the opportunity to sample twenty glorious songs, live! As I had already interviewed Fred, I was given chance to speak to Randy this time around. Sometimes you have to ice-break an interview to get started, but the whirlwind that is Randy Bachman simply answered the phone with "You're right on time, let's roll!" And roll we did!

I've not actually seen the DVD yet, but I was absolutely delighted to hear you had filmed one. You played a warm up show at The Garage in London, 2009. I was there for that and I was blown away by that gig, I loved it. I really hoped you would record something from these shows. Was it something you had, long-term, in the back of your mind to do, or was it simply because the shows like Sweden Rock, High Voltage and the like went down so well you thought you should document how you were sounding?

Well, the shows were definitely going well - the show you saw at The Garage was only the second one we had done, after being apart for twenty years! That was more about getting some glue for the band, for us to play together and for Fred, to get him more accustomed to being back on stage - he had been retired for four or five years. I had been playing all the time, and I didn't want Fred to walk on stage to 40,000 people at Sweden Rock and suddenly be a deer in the highlights, right? It was a confidence building thing, when you do a 300 seater club you're bound to pretty much fill it. It was to build our confidence because from there it was right on to Sweden Rock. We walked on stage to all those people, no sound check, no amp check, no monitor check, nothing. We just walked out, plugged in... and everything sounded wrong! Fred gave me this look and I said 'Let's rock.' We just went out and we did the greatest show - we taped that one too, we've got that, the energy we had was incredible.

Then we came back and did High Voltage, we went to the States and played a lot... We got an offer from PBS, one of the big public broadcasters in television in the States. They're going 3D in 2013, but there's no existing programming in 3D, right? So they said they wanted to shoot us with 18 cameras, put us in Roseland Ballroom, New York City - this is a famous ballroom, it's been in every mafia movie... It's all palm trees and carpets and drapes hanging there, a beautiful stage, balcony, round tables like you see in the movies. It's also used to double the Copacabana in New York which isn't there anymore. It holds a fair amount of people and they wanted to document us in there, use it as a fundraiser and they'd

give us all the footage, they only wanted sixty minutes worth for TV. So we'd have a 3D DVD. We're releasing it in 2D because nobody really has 3D yet, but next year they will roll it out and we'll be one of the first 3D things they broadcast. We'll be on good rotation because early on they won't have that much 3D programming to show.

Also, we played so good, we had recorded every show sound wise on this new thing from England called The Black Box. It's just fantastic, you plug in and it saves your live recordings to a drive inside and you can go home and listen back to them. You don't need a computer anymore, just this wonderful UK invention. We took it to every gig and recorded them all. When we got the chance to shoot in the Roseland Ballroom, we took that chance. Paul Shaffer, a good old friend of mine, he's like our equivalent of your Jools Holland, he leads David Letterman's band. I know him from Thunder Bay, I lived in Winnipeg. We'd play Thunder Bay with BTO and Paul would come and see us. He was a bit younger than us and was this geeky, Jewish piano playing kid who was really fun to know. He came to all our shows and would talk to us afterwards. Since then, he's had me on David Letterman and stuff... My first hit with the Guess Who was 'Shaking All Over' and we wanted some piano for 'Taking Care Of Business', so I invited Paul to join us for the encore. He came on and we did 'Roll On Down The Highway', 'Shaking All Over' and 'Taking Care Of Business'. He went crazy at the end, his piano stand fell down, I ran over to him and yelled 'We're The Who!' and he starts smashing his keyboard, I pretend to hit it with my guitar... we had this really great moment with no tension, we were just guys goofing around on stage. I haven't seen the thing in 3D yet, nobody has, but we had the most amazing set built for us, with great big iron girders like on the Bachman-Turner album cover, it really suggested 'heavy rock'. That's what we are. It turned out fantastically and I'm really thrilled to put it out. It's already double-gold in Canada and on it's way to platinum. And with DVD's - CD's, people can just put it in iTunes and everything is stolen. Most bands I know, Steve Miller, Rush, all these guys who are friends of mine from the seventies, you put out a DVD and make it worthwhile for people to buy it, it's easier to buy it and watch it, than to get hold of

all the software to pirate the stuff off the disk onto a drive in a movie clip or whatever.

I saw some clips of the stage set you mentioned there, which does look fantastic. You have always struck me as somebody who is very hands on with the product, from writing to playing to producing - did you have a hand in the stage design too?

No, I was so busy with the details... of all my friends getting into the gig! (laughs) That's a big pressure, when you're an artist and you're playing, and you get a text from your grandmother or your aunt saying 'The guard has stopped me at the door, I can't get in!' (laughs) To invite people close to you to your show is a big thrill, so I always have that angst as a performer, making sure all my guests can get in. There were a lot of guests too, there were radio station contests... it wasn't really open to the public, tickets were more via invitation or competitions. We had a select group of really hardcore fans, but I was concerned because we had to put in three or four new songs from the Bachman-Turner CD. It was a great chance to get them heard by more people, but we had only been playing two new songs in the set. I believe that when people come to see you, they want to hear a body of work, and it's the stuff from the past that made you they want to hear, not twelve brand new songs. So we put in just two, and suddenly we had to double that... the two we had in were nice fits, people didn't really notice they were new ones and that's why we put them in. To add another two, I was worried it might be a train wreck because we weren't used to playing them. But then it struck me that if it's a new song and they haven't got the CD, nobody knows it's a train wreck except us! (laughs) They won't spot a wrong word, wrong chord or anything, so we went ahead and they worked really well.

Regarding the set list, I reviewed the album after I had interviewed Fred and of the six songs I liked the best from the Bachman-Turner album, four of them were the four new ones you put in.

Well thank you for that, for your coverage and your viewpoint! We got some good fan reaction to do 'That's

What It Is' and 'Waiting Game'. Because of the internet, it's fantastic now, when we started as Bachman-Turner, our set was totally different. But fans would come on our website and say "Why don't you move 'Roll On Down The Highway' to be the opener" or they would suggest which new songs they thought should be played... they'd let us know if we had received a modicum of airplays anywhere, and if so, which song it was. We didn't expect any airplay, we're not Oasis or Noel Gallagher - whatever project he does, he magically gets airplay all over the world. But we took our fan's input to help shape the set, so I'm glad it fits with what you like.

One of the reasons I really wanted a new live product from you is because you are one of those bands, you're always heavier and more energetic live. You've made some great records, but when you play them live they just go up a gear. Why didn't you do a full live concert recording before? You've done live things in the past but it's usually been eight or ten tracks, never a full twenty track show like this.

I think the market changed. Recently I've been through my archives like a lot of producers do, like Pete Townshend and Jimmy Page... we're all finding tracks we didn't think were good enough way back when, or performances we didn't think were good enough way back when. Now, we have the technology to clean them up, or maybe tweak something - and the fans are so hungry for more, more, more. I'm the same, if I could get a 'new' Beatles track or Zeppelin track, I'd take anything! I don't care how bad it might be, I just wanna hear them play one more thing because I know every song! (laughs) With fan hunger, and my own curiosity, I started looking. Recently I found the tapes for BTO 'Live In Japan', from 1975. That was our world tour and we put out a vinyl record of it. This was before any digital stuff, and the record company didn't want to put out a double or triple vinyl album or the whole show, they put out just one record. Most of our songs then were five or six minutes long each, they had longer solos, you stretched out trying to be Jimi Hendrix or Jeff Beck... I listened to them again and thought 'Wow, we were really playing great!' But it was the end of a 280 date tour, and they recorded the last three dates in Tokyo, of course we're playing great! We're glued together, almost playing in our sleep! So I'm remixing those right now, I also found BTO live at the Oakbrook Forum at the end of a tour we did with Robin Trower, who was brand new at the time. Those tapes are just amazing. So my engineer is transferring everything from tape to Pro-Tools, which is a delicate operation, then I can go back and restore them. A lot of times back then, you broke a string on your guitar, the whole guitar goes flat or sharp... now you can go in and digitally fix that. People want to hear that old great music and now whatever stopped you putting it out originally can usually be resolved.

You sound like somebody who has really embraced the digital age musically, do you get a real kick out of the editing and tools you now have?

I like both - I love the sound of analogue, you can't beat that sound of compression on tape. But I remember the old days, trying to edit a song, having to actually cut your tape with a razor blade, putting a little label on it, hanging it from the ceiling... all these strips saying 'First Verse', 'Second Verse', 'Chorus'... it was like flypaper on the ceiling! Then you hoped when the engineer pieced it together there wouldn't be a little 'bloop' in the song! (laughs) Now, with Pro-Tools, you can cut and paste a section just like a word processing document, move it around, and it helps cross fade the edits so you don't hear a change in the sound. When you run around on stage, trying to be cool, smiling and dancing, you are bound to hit a wrong note somewhere in a two hour set. You might go out of tune, but it can now be fixed. It makes the performance less likely to be criticised - somebody who wasn't at the show and hasn't got the visual, who is just listening to the recording, might say 'Oh, this bit went out of tune'... well fuck that, now it can be fixed.

When I reviewed the Bachman-Turner album, that was originally going to be one of your solo records but when you heard what Fred did with the song you sent him, it morphed into Bachman and Turner. Were most of the songs on that album songs you already had with other singers in mind, or once Fred came on board did you start writing

from scratch?

I had a track with Jeff Healey already recorded, I had a track with Neil Young and I'd asked Paul Rodgers to sing and he said yes. I thought "Wow, all these great vocalists on my thing..." So I thought well why not ask Fred Turner? This guy from Sweden Rock had been asking us to get back together for ages, to play Sweden Rock, telling us we were his favourite band from the seventies and he really wanted us back together. So I called Fred up and we discussed doing maybe Sweden Rock. Then I asked him to sing on my solo album. He agreed, sent me my track back with his vocal and I said "this is incredible, I'll change my album, send me some of your songs, see which ones of mine you can sing, we'll do a mish-mash of you and me, me and you, just like BTO was..." His songs which he sang, my songs which I sang and some collaborations, which really gave us three identities. It gave a broader sound for the album, rather than it all being me, me, me. And Fred has a phenomenal rock and roll voice. It's like a gravel truck!

There's one song on there, the gospel one, 'I See The Light'... I was very influenced on that album by the Black Keys and The White Stripes, just distorted guitar and drums. Fred gave me a version that was jazzy, like BTO's 'Blue Collar'. I said "Fred, this won't fit on the album, there's only one odd song on here and that's 'Traffic Jam' which I did." That was my real Mark Knopfler moment, and I didn't want too many deviations on there because we'd confuse people. Fred gave me his track and told me to turn it into a three chord rock and roll song and do what I could with it. So I cut the track with the band and sent it to him, he was in Florida at the time. He said "What have you done to my song? It had eleven great chords in it and you've cut it down to like four chords, I can't get used to it." I told him to play it for a week and sing to it. When you write something, it's locked in your heart and you think it's the greatest thing. A week later, he called me, said he'd played it to his wife Donna, she loved it, thought it was a more upgraded version, more powerful. Then he sent me an amazing email, he wrote "Donna's shopping, I'm in the mall's parking lot, I've got the song on my laptop, I've got my headphones on and I'm singing it right now." I told him to make it into an mp3, send it over and send just the vocal alone as an mp3. So I put it together with the band version of the track, that's what you hear on the album - Fred's vocal was done on his laptop, singing into the little built in microphone on his Mac Powerbook. That's the great thing about the digital age.

That makes sense now! When I interviewed Fred, I commented that I thought the album sounded like you had cut it live and he said it was your production that made it sound like you were all together and not doing it in bits and pieces. He then commented that he recorded some of it in a parking lot of a shopping mall in Florida. It wasn't until I transcribed the interview that I realised what he had said - I thought he meant you guys had set up a mobile studio or something!

One of my talents is the ability to make stuff sound like it's live. The reason is I saved all my studio gear from the seventies. I've got an old EMT250 reverb, and when you put everything through that, it sounds like everything is in the same room. These things are very rare, I combed the world to find one, I met a guy who had two and I bought one from him. The minute I plugged it in, it was wow, the sound of the seventies! Plus, when I play my solos, I do one take, I play it live. I have the track playing real loud in the room through an amplifier, I play through an amplifier, the sounds bleed, then the EMT reverb is applied to everything so it sounds like we share the same room. There's no real individuality between each instrument, they all blur into each other - that's what people want with rock and roll, they don't want it to sound like a bunch of guys in different rooms. When I record a band, I set them up exactly how they rehearse, then put some microphones in and cut the songs. Most bands put a drummer in a booth, the bass player in a room... they get a perfect recording because then they can punch into any note of any track, but they lose the band's sound. I believe the odd little mistake in there is good, there's some on that Bachman Turner album. Some funny notes when you aren't really sure of the song! Leave it there, it's real. You're going for a feel, that's what makes them keepers. When someone like yourself says it sounds live, that's wonderful, that what I was going for.

You said about Fred's song there, where you chopped his chords out into a four chord rocker

because you knew what would work - you've written plenty of great songs while remaining prolific. Is that instinct, or do you have a formula when you write to get that sound?

It's both - I have an instinct to follow a formula! It's knowing that if I wrote a song containing twelve or fifteen fantastic jazz chords, nobody likes it! It has the wrong beat, the wrong grooves, it won't resonate within my fans, the radio, whatever. There's a song on there called 'Can't Go Back To Memphis'. I recorded that in 1990 on a solo album, it was done kinda rockabilly. I knew rockabilly wouldn't fit on the Bachman-Turner album, but I liked the title and I thought it was a great, great song. It's about beating the system, and I thought maybe a late sixties vibe might work. So I started listening to Zeppelin 1 and 2, Cream's 'Disraeli Gears', Hendrix's 'Are You Experienced', trying to get into that mentality. So I take 'Can't Go Back To Memphis' and try to make it into a twelve bars blues Zeppelin style rock song. I played it for people who have actually heard the original, they didn't even recognise it! It's a matter of reinventing yourself and your song to fit a certain style. I could easily take that song and then add in another three or four chords and cut it for a jazz album. I'm working on a new album now which is going to be really off-centre fun, with Buffy Sainte-Marie who is a very dear friend of mine. She always wanted to do a jazz album, she planned to do one with Chet Atkins who passed away. She planned to do one with Les Paul, who passed away. So she came to me, she knew I was a fan of both those guys and she asked if I played that kind of music. I grew up playing it. She said she always wanted to be Julie London, singing 'Cry Me A River', or being Sarah Vaughn or Ella Fitzgerald. I said "Great, I love those songs!" So I'm doing that, and if I want to resurrect a song for that album, I know I have to put more chords in to give it that jazzy feel. I like bouncing around like that. It's a bit like what Neil Young does, he'll do an acoustic tour, then a rock tour. Then he'll do an electronic tour, then an acoustic tour. Then he'll play pedal steel guitar, then go out with Crazy Horse. It's just keeping yourself jumping, you keep your fans interested and stop them getting bored.

I think it's great that you stretch yourself and keep working. Are you planning another album with Fred?

We're talking about it - I have a couple of really good ideas. If you've ever heard Fred sing anything else, other than BTO, it's a real, real treat. It's like when Robert Plant went out and did the thing with Alison Krauss - people realised "Hey, this guy has a really great, versatile voice". I said to Fred that we should do Bachman-Turner, 'Driving Through Detroit'. We'd take 'Papa Was A Rolling Stone' and do it rock and roll, y'know, like The Temptations do it? Put heavy chords and riffs instead of the horns. Fred thought it was a great idea, so he's looking at Detroit Motown songs that we could put our signature sound to. I'm looking for Marvin Gaye kinda songs because my voice is lighter than his, he could sing more like Levi Stubbs from The Four Tops. So yeah, 'Driving Through Detroit' or 'Driving Through Motown'. Do like Michael McDonald did with all those great songs, but where he honoured the original arrangements, we'd take them and rock them up!

That sounds a great idea! I asked Fred where that voice of his came from - with some singers you can tell they were influenced by Steve Perry, or Robert Plant, the influence is obvious. With Fred, I asked him and he said it was mostly black R&B singers, Joe Cocker, people like that. With you having your jazz side, I asked Fred if he were to do a solo album, what area would he branch into, and he said maybe something bluesy and R&B based.

Well, can you imagine Fred singing Wilson Pickett, doing 'In The Midnight Hour'? 'I'm A Soul Man' - but instead of that horn riff, do that on heavy guitars? 'I'm A Rock Man!' (laughs) Yeah, really kick the Stax... Bachman and Turner - 'Driving From Detroit To Memphis!' That way, we can do Stax and Motown. See, you've just given me a great idea!

Excellent - well, I'll let you go then Randy, so you can get on with it!

(Laughs) All right man, I appreciate it, thanks for your coverage and thanks for being a fan. I hope you enjoy the DVD when you get it and we hope to see you all soon.