

# ROLLIN' ALONG

Canadian rock legends Randy Bachman and Fred Turner have been rocking the socks off people for decades with the Bachman Turner Overdrive, who gave us a timeless classic like 'You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet', along with rock staples 'Roll On Down The Highway', 'Takin' Care Of Business'... the list goes on and on. When Bachman departed the group, Turner continued without him, under the simple moniker of BTO, but after a while that ran its course and he disbanded the group and retired. However, in this era of great comebacks, Randy and Fred have decided to reunite for a new record and live dates, simply under their names Bachman and Turner. Fireworks had the chance to see them live at the Garage in London for an intimate warm up show before their festival dates, so James Gaden was in attendance. The next morning he sat down with bassist/vocalist Fred Turner (right) to find out about the unlikely reunion, why Corvettes are cool and what it's like to be heckled by Homer Simpson.



Hi Fred - I've got to say, I really enjoyed the gig last night.

Yeah, me too!

I was blown away by the energy and power of it. I believe I'm right in saying that this whole reunion came about from what was due to be a Randy Bachman solo album?

Yeah - he called me up and we had lunch together. He said he'd been working on a CD and he said that he'd written a song and he'd like to use my voice on it. I'd been retired for a while so I thought it'd be fun to do it and see if the old pipes still work. So I went in to my studio, laid it down, sent it back to him and he was knocked out by it! He said "I think I'll put my solo CD on the shelf - do you have any songs that you could bring in?" I told him I had a few, so we started talking about maybe doing something together.

I think it's fantastic - I noticed when I read the biography on the new Bachman Turner website, Randy described the new record as like a "lost B.T.O. Greatest Hits album" and when I got the promo, I dug out my old B.T.O. Greatest Hits to get in the mood and then put the new record on after it and it did - I thought it sounded like an extra twelve tracks. Considering how long you guys have spent apart and the various changes that B.T.O. went through, I think it's fantastic that you managed to recapture the essence of the old sound. Did you strive to get that sound back, or was it a result of what came naturally?

I think that's what Randy was searching for. My part of it came from the fact that before I retired, I was basically just doing the classic rock thing with the other guys from BTO - I was still kind of caught in that era, y'know? When I was going into my basement, grabbing my guitar and just writing a few things... I've been doing this for fifty years, so even though I wasn't really thinking about doing anything, something pulls you down there to play! (laughs) So I'd go in the basement, I'd play around with a guitar, write some things - just keep doing it.

When you retired, you wanted to concentrate more on cars didn't you? Do you have a car collection, are you an enthusiast?

Yeah - I've got a small collection of Corvettes. When I was a young boy I got stuck on them - a guy on the next street had bought one and I fell in love with it. I thought by this time in my life that interest would have been long gone, but I'm still caught by it! (laughs) But all that is on the back burner now, because Randy has got me so excited about this new stuff!

There was a comment you made that was featured on the website, saying that it was because of the new stuff you were interested in going back out, you weren't interested in just going out and playing the old stuff like several bands do nowadays, which I think is great.

Yeah - and I really hope this album is accepted and we can move on with more new stuff.

I thought the way the new stuff slotted into the setlist last night was seamless and they seemed really well received - especially as I've only had the promo two days so most people in there won't have heard any of the new material. I thought 'Slave To the Rhythm' was an inspired choice for the single to give people a taste of the new album... I think it's got all the hallmarks of Bachman and Turner along with a great chorus and I thought it sounded superb last night. Did you and Randy push for that to be used as the lead off, or was that more the record label?

The record company picked it - Randy and I sat down and thought "What do we do?" We decided rather than push what we liked, we'd like the record guys make the call, we figured they were more in touch than we are.

I think they got it spot on. There's two or three contenders that would set the stall out, but I think with that one, if you haven't heard anything from you guys for a while, there's enough there to trigger "Oh, those guys!" and it's got that chorus that's easy to remember and sing to. But with the album as a whole, I thought it sounded very fresh

and vibrant - it sounded like you cut it pretty much live in the studio. Was that the case?

No, it was actually done in pieces - and I'm really surprised as well at how it sounds. Randy is a guy who goes at 200 miles an hour with all the windows down, so it's hard to tie him down to do things. He's busy working on things, so while he was doing stuff I was working on things - I live in a cool place in Winnipeg, but I can't take the cold anymore, so I'm ready to be heading for Florida, right? But of course, with the internet now, Pro Tools, all that stuff, you can just ship it across online from wherever you are! In fact, some of the vocals I actually cut in a lot of a mall when I did finally get to go to Florida!

Wow - it sounds for all the world like you were all stood together. Some albums that are done this way with files sent via the net and put together sound good, but sometimes a little sterile, but not this. Did Randy handle the production for it?

Yeah, he did. He did a great job!

With you mentioning you used to go down to your basement to write, did you have a stockpile of songs that you could bring in, or did you decide, once you and Randy agreed to move forward, to write fresh stuff?

I had pieces of songs really - I had to put things together, re-write parts, finish them off basically. Stuff from the vault really, which then got a revamp. I'd have odd verses here, bridges there, some lyrics, it gave me something to work from.

I think having you bring stuff like that in though helped regain that classic sound - when you joined Brave Belt, it was your voice and writing contributions that made that group evolve into a more rock orientated band, which ultimately became B.T.O. and you're the only guy who has appeared on every B.T.O. record, so you're obviously integral to the mix.

Thank you!

With that in mind, the fact that Randy left B.T.O. and you carried on for a while without him, did you ever think in the back of your mind that maybe you and Randy would team up again in the future, or had you written that off?

When I retired in 2004 I figured I'd never come back to it. When Randy got together with me and I got in the studio with him, I got that feeling and the excitement again and I realised I'd been missing something that I'd had for a big part of my life. It was almost like coming full circle.

When I watched you all on stage last night, there was a genuine and sincere impression that you were all really enjoying being up there and playing those songs.

I know, I don't think we shouldn't be having so much fun! (laughs)

Was it also beneficial to play a small venue like that to help that feeling of going back to how it was when you started?

It's always fun to do stuff like that, it's more of a comfortable venue, I like being close to people. It's hard to reach into a big festival crowd sometimes. It's neat to have people that close and make contact with them, because of course the thing that makes the show good isn't simply the band, it's the electricity coming from the crowd who are into it.

I liked it because the venue was no frills, just a bar at one end, stage at the other, people in the middle, that's it. Originally I was looking at just coming down to do the interview, but I got talked into seeing the show and I'm really pleased I did.

Thank you man, we're glad you could see it.

The CD I've got literally just has a tracklisting on, so was the line up you played with on stage the one you used to make the record?

Yeah, actually Randy has been working with that band for a few years now. Those guys all have their own things going on as well - they've probably been playing together for about twenty years. And the good part about it is those guys are all great people, so that makes everything work better. We're fortunate to have this fall into our laps

at this time in our lives, to get on so well together, come back to places... I haven't been here since 1978! It's great to come back here, I'm looking forward to getting over to Scandanavia...

Yeah, you're booked at Sweden Rock aren't you?

Yes, I can't wait. It's like coming to life again. I'm looking forward to seeing Gary Moore - he's such a great blues player, I love his stuff.

When I saw the Sweden Rock bill, you've got some great bands like Aerosmith on after you and I thought after what I saw last night, that any group is going to be hard pushed to follow a set with so many great songs and played with such power and enthusiasm. That was the first time I've seen you live - I couldn't believe how powerful your voice was.

Well, y'know it kind of surprises me too! I do absolutely everything a vocal coach would tell you not to do. I figured I would be really lucky to have this work for me through the seventies and maybe the eighties, but it's still there and I'll use it as long as I can! (laughs)

Absolutely - it would be criminal not to! Did you have a specific influence in your vocal style? Certain things you do remind me of certain people, but as a whole, I don't really think you sound like anybody. Some rock singers you can tell are trying to do what Robert Plant does, or Paul Rodgers... but with you, I was curious how your voice came to sound how it does?

I like rhythm and blues guys, some of the black singers from the US who were around when I was starting... Joe Cocker, I love him. I liked the feel of forcing it and getting that power - it gets me going and it became that I just sing that way. And Paul Rodgers - that's another guy I love. Oh, he's such a great singer. I used to sing his sort of stuff too.

Yes, you were in a covers band originally weren't you?

Yeah, that's right.

Was it writing your own stuff that drove you to break away from that scene or were you just looking to play something different?

No, it was a chance to be doing my own thing that really swung it.

When you and Randy decided you were going to give things another go together, was it ever considered about inviting other members of the B.T.O. back in for a reunion, or did you prefer to have a new band to keep things fresh?

Randy wasn't really into the idea of going back out with the other guys, but he was wondering if we could go out with the Bachman Turner Overdrive name. There were a few problems with the other guys - I said to Randy that I'd really rather not use the B.T.O. thing. I've done it for thirty five years and I thought if we were to go forward, I'd rather just use our own two names. It's not that I want to leave it behind, but I would like to see if it would let us move ahead without being totally tied to the Overdrive thing. I did suggest we call ourselves the Bachman Turner Older Guys, but Randy put me down for that one! (laughs)

I think it's probably the right call... If I've got this right, when Randy left, you stopped being called the Bachman Turner Overdrive and just became known as BTO because obviously Bachman is Randy's real name, so he can legally use that...

Yeah - back at that time we had actually split, so I didn't want to be known as Bachman Turner Overdrive with Randy gone. I still wanted to work and if we did reunite, then I wanted it to be called Bachman Turner Overdrive, so everyone would know the full band was back together again. But up until that point, we'd just be known as BTO and keep the gear logo and that's what we'd be without Randy. Then it got to the point it had gone so far down the road, when this cropped up, I felt the best thing to do was just go out as Bachman and Turner.

I think that's the right thing to do - if you called this Bachman Turner Overdrive, you'd get flak because some people would complain that it isn't

the 'Not Fragile' line up so it's not really Bachman Turner Overdrive, some would complain that you were using the name to hang on to past glory... this way you are freed from some of that with a new band, while still keeping a link to your back catalogue of work and retaining a lot of the old sound.

You got it man, yeah, that's what we're hoping for.

Did it take long to write the album, or once the two of you got together did the ideas just come tumbling out?

It didn't take that long because I had some songs together and Randy had some songs together, so after sending demos to each other on the internet, I'd use a program... I don't know if you're familiar with it but it's called Garageband and I used that to change things around, send it back and then Randy would maybe say "I like that, but what about this" and we'd swap ideas like that. Then it was a case of Randy going into the studio and getting a production together, so it came together quite quickly.

I dabble in my own songwriting and I'm a nut about all things Apple, so I love Garageband and use it all the time. I haven't sold as many records as you guys yet, but it's encouraging to know I use the same software! (laughs)

(Laughs) It's great isn't it!

I think it's brilliant that the internet allows things like that to happen. As someone who has been around the music business a long time, do you think the internet is a help or a hinderance to the business?

I think it's a bit of both. I don't really question those things. Randy kis more into that stuff - he is so quick with things, it's hard to question them, he's so far ahead of me!

I often ask artists this, if they've had a career that spans several decades - I'm interested in what they say. Some people really do view it as a tool to reach a wider audience, some people blame it on declining sales due to piracy.

That's fair - personally, the swapping of files from different places is the biggest thing for me. To be able to do that is just great.

With the music business so different to how it was when you started, what would you advise a new act to do these days to make it?

Y'know, with all this new technology that's out there now, I think there's a lot of stuff that has become almost staid because music shouldn't be tied to click tracks or samples and stuff. It loses a lot of it's emotion and spontaneity. What makes music so exciting is the fact you can give it it's own freedom, then reign it back when you want to, put it back in a groove - I think having that boldness is really good. On stage, our drummer has a click track and when he starts a song he starts on the click and we take it from there. Instead of him having the click in his ear, he has it as a flashing light that he can watch - if we get too far out of control, he can use it to reign us in, but we aren't tied to it - we can run with it if we get excited. I like things to be that way and I think technology hinders that in new groups sometimes.

I remember when I interviewed Status Quo, they got a new drummer and when they were rehearsing they found the songs weren't coming alive and they couldn't understand why. It turned out that their new drummer was keeping perfect time, where as their old one didn't stay so rigid and they used to get let off the leash, if you will. Once their new drummer learned not to be so tied to the click, they became a really great live unit.

Yeah, there you go - some albums these days don't even have drummers, it's done with machines and a machine can't do that, it can't be spontaneous.

With this new album, is it going to be one of many, or is it too early to say?

We're just going to play it by ear. I still have lots of pieces of music at home, I like to push myself, see if I can still keep coming up with lyrics, keeping my mind going. I really hope we'll go on to do a lot more.



**I think that would be great.**

Actually, I know Randy, for sure, will do more stuff on his own and with other guys because he's writing all the time, sometimes with other people, all over the world. I'm hoping I'll get a chance to kind of break away and maybe do some of my own stuff as well, down the road. But for now, we're really busy getting this together and the adrenaline is starting to flow and it's in the blood again. I really hope it's going to go further.

**Randy has a pop and jazz side to his style - if you were to do a solo thing, would it be in the classic driving rock vein, or do you have another side or genre you want to explore?**

I kind of go towards more bluesy things. I always tended to be that way - in fact Randy pulled me more into the rock genre than I was to start with. That's where the original sound came from, but like you mentioned, with Randy's jazz thing, when a little of that creeps in it stops us from getting boring. We have that thing where we don't go straight down the line, churning out one song that sounds like the next one.

**That's true, I remember when I first heard 'Looking Out For Number One', I thought "What the hell?" It was such a departure from the other stuff I'd heard from you guys but it was still a cool song and it works. It was interesting that you said Randy brought the rock to you - I always envisaged that with your vocal style and your writing, that's what you brought to start with. Without you there, I'd have thought Randy would be injecting more of the pop or jazz stuff. I know that the last album your guys did before Randy quit, you weren't happy because he'd written and sung eight of the ten songs and you had your picture for the album taken side on, because you said you felt like "a sideman".**

Yeah, that's true, but it was Randy pulled me more into the rock thing. Randy does have that pop, jazz... he can really write for the market, whereas I write by feel. That's why Randy writes all the hits! (laughs) I do the album tracks! He's a thinking writer, I'm a feel writer.

**What do you do when you're composing - are you someone who strums an acoustic guitar?**

Sometimes - I like to sit at a keyboard because I can put chords together there, I like to do that. Sometimes I'll work on a guitar, sometimes I'll work a song out on the bass. Playing a five string bass like I do, I don't have a low B on my five string, I have a high C, so I can play chords. So sometimes I'll write with the bass using chords, but I don't tie myself to it.

**With regard to Randy being a thinking writer, I do remember hearing that he wanted to trash 'You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet' because he thought it was a throwaway.**

Yeah! When we recorded that, he hid the tapes!

(laughs) He took the actual master and put them in the back somewhere. The engineer called the record company and said 'Hey, you should check out this song, Randy is trying to hide it but I think it's a hit!' (laughs) It was surprising, that's for sure.

**I remember Pete Townshend saying that he thought 'Pinball Wizard' was a throwaway, but that worked out okay for The Who! It's weird that writers like him and Randy, who can do such great things, can't spot a hit like that.**

Yeah! (laughs) I think the thing is that you hear all of your own flaws... you maybe don't notice other people's as much as your own when you're like that. Maybe that's what keeps guys like that writing, trying to get past that. Randy didn't like the vocal on 'You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet' - he tried re-doing it, but we ended up using the original because he never got it to sound how he wanted it and it was a hit.

**I think after the concert I saw last night, along with what the new album sounds like, it's fantastic that the two of you are working together again.**

We do too. We're happy and I'm really pleased just to get back out and do the travelling again - I've seen old friends, I saw a guy at the Garage last night who I last met twelve years ago. It's great to get to run into these people again.

**I know - I was told you had some people from Denmark in. There was even a guy who was inexplicably wearing a jacket emblazoned with the Rice Crispies logo and he had come all the way from Siberia to see the show!**

Of course, he only came to the show because he doesn't want to be in Siberia! (laughs)

**I'll wrap this up now Fred, by saying it's been great to talk to you and you have the distinction of being the only guy I've interviewed who has been in The Simpsons! In the episode 'Saddlesore Galactica' Homer saw you in concert and heckled you and Randy!**

(Laughs) That's right! Actually, when we did that, I couldn't believe how they treated us. I may as well have been Mel Gibson or something! They opened up all the doors for us, they were just fantastic.

**It's a big deal as well, you're a serious name if you get to guest in The Simpsons, they don't have just anybody on there.**

What a wonderful bunch of people they are too, they're great. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

**And I have this one Fred, it's been a joy speaking with you.**

You too man, I had fun. I enjoyed talking to you!