

# GRAND FUNK RAILROAD

We're comin' to your town,  
We'll help you party down,

**WE'RE AN AMERICAN BAND!**



By Helen Marketti  
Photo Courtesy of: Anne Leighton Media

Beginning their career in Flint, Michigan, Grand Funk Railroad has been on a journey that has kept the spirit of their music alive for more than 40 years. Don Brewer (original founding member and drummer) of Grand Funk Railroad shares his passion for music that still rocks audiences to this day.

“As a kid I remember watching the trains go by in Flint, Michigan and seeing all of the box cars that said, Grand Trunk & Western Railroad,” said Don. “When we formed our band, funk music was becoming popular so we made a play on words and called ourselves, Grand Funk Railroad. At that time, it was a bit risqué to use that word funk, it was almost scandalous and it sounded similar to the *other* word. Now, no one even thinks twice about it.”

Being a drummer was not the first instrument of choice for Don. “My first choice was playing the guitar. When I transferred from elementary school to junior high, my mom wanted me to be in the school band so I learned how to play the clarinet. I

went from first chair to last chair. (laughs) I hated playing the clarinet,” Don recalls. “One day the band director asked for guy volunteers to go in the back and play with the drum section. They needed someone to play the bass drum. It was all girls at the time so I gladly volunteered and that’s how it started.”

He continues, “My dad was a drummer with swing bands during the Depression. He got a kit for me to play in the basement. We would play records and listen to the drumming.”

Don certainly had other role models that he thought were great in the drumming world. “I admired Buddy Rich. I loved the energy of the guy. I also liked the work of Dino Danelli of The Rascals, Mitch Mitchell who was with Jimi Hendrix and Ginger Baker of Cream. The 60s and 70s were an explosive time for music. It was a great time to be a musician.”

Speaking of great musicians, Grand Funk Railroad will be part of the Moondog Coronation Ball this year at Quicken Loans

Arena. (March 27) Other acts on the bill include Paul Revere & The Raiders, The Turtles, and Little Anthony & The Imperials.

Grand Funk Railroad does have Cleveland connections that many fans may not be aware of. “We recorded a lot of our music at a studio in Cleveland. Even though the studio in Detroit was closer to where we lived, the recording engineers were more R & B knowledgeable than with rock. We started working with Ken Hammond in Cleveland to get the rock sound we wanted. When I hear the songs then and now, I think there is an honesty to our music. Recordings were simple and done in a few days. The fans have always received the honesty. We were from Flint, Michigan and we never pretended to be anything else.”

Don is the singer and songwriter for, *We're An American Band*. He and Mel Schacher are still original members of Grand Funk Railroad. Don still feels excited when doing shows even though the lineup has changed with its members. “It feels the same to me when I do shows now. I feel the same way I did then. It captures the same spirit as Grand Funk Railroad did in the early days. We play the hits that people expect us to play and some new stuff to keep it fun for us.”

Don feels that music has changed over the years and not necessarily for the better.

“I’m not a big fan of where music has gone. I think it has lost its way. I’m not hearing a lot coming from the heart and soul. It seems to be more “pop” and disposable. I remember buying records, reading the liner notes and feeling like you were part of the experience. You could live on an album for weeks. Now with all of the downloads, you can add and delete anytime. I think music is more processed now. I’m not hearing music that will be around or remembered in 30 or 40 years. It seems to be used and then discarded. The pendulum may swing back some day. Radio has changed so much, too. They won’t even play new material by classic artists. The bean counters have come in and took over radio. It didn’t matter what the DJ wanted to play for the listening audience because it stopped being about that. So when we create new material now, we use it for our shows because we know it will not be played on the radio.”

For anyone planning to attend the Moondog Coronation Ball and catch Grand Funk Railroad, Don sums it up, “Be ready to smile and sweat when you see Grand Funk Railroad. Cleveland rocks!”

For more information about Grand Funk Railroad: [www.grandfunkrailroad.com](http://www.grandfunkrailroad.com)

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