

NOW WE'RE TALKIN'

by Helen Marketti

A chat with Pat Simmons of The Doobie Brothers

The Doobie Brothers will be doing a show at Blossom Music Center on June 29. Joining them on tour will be Journey and Dave Mason!

Pat Simmons has been an anchor for this classic band since their early beginnings. It is sometimes difficult to imagine that The Doobie Brothers have been around for 50 years! Pat has played guitar for the band and has many fond memories. Songs that will immediately come to mind are *Black Water*, which was written by Pat, *Listen to the Music*, *Jesus Is Just Alright*, *China Grove*, *Takin it to the Streets*, *What a Fool Believes* and many more!

"I had always liked rock and roll but I first started out playing country songs like *Walk the Line* by Johnny Cash. I would listen to that song and try to learn the chords," remembers Pat. "I liked playing contemporary music too, such as Ricky Nelson, or straight ahead rock and roll like Chuck Berry."

"When I started becoming more serious about playing guitar I started listening to The Ventures, Duane Eddy and Chet Atkins. I also listened to coffee house folk music such as Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. Then you had the 60s sounds like The Beatles and The Stones. I was from the Bay area so I really got into Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Country Joe and the Fish. Along with that then came the British Blues like Cream and John Mayall. I loved Doc Watson, B. B. King and Albert King. I would say I fell in love with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. It was great what he could do with a harmonica. I loved the vibe. I loved those guys," recalls Pat.

Pat's long list of music influences carried over during a time when he seemed to be at a fork in the road with career choices. "As far as I was concerned, music was a hobby and getting paid for it was a bonus," he laughs. "I did the usual band gigs in high school but I don't think I imagined playing music as a full time vocation. It was during my later years in college that I started thinking about the future. The scholastic road was good but I needed to step back for a moment and gain some perspective of what I wanted to do with my life. I knew I could play and write songs. I started thinking that maybe I could give the music idea a shot and see where it would lead. I was 21 years old at the time. At first, I looked at it in the short term but it ended up being in the long term such as 50 years later!" (laughs)

He continues, "When I was in college, I was pursuing a degree in Psychology, which I enjoyed. I could see myself in this profession. I was involved with a few encounter groups. I realized one's compassion to do this is stretched to an extreme. You have to be a great listener. I think I would be better at it now by understanding and recognizing behaviors whereas when I was younger I would have just thought someone was crazy, but you realize there are many factors involved."

The guitar has been the instrument of choice. "I liked playing piano but wasn't really drawn to it like I was to the guitar," said Pat. "The guitar has a visceral feel. I like the art and look of a guitar. I can play loud, have feedback and manipulate sound."

The Doobie Brothers classic songs are known worldwide which Pat feels keeps the longevity. "I am sure we have lasted this many years because of our songs. It is what has sustained us and there is always the potential for new songs. When I first met Tom Johnston, I was drawn to his songs. I like interacting with other people. When you first start playing in a band, you think in terms of other people's songs. I loved learning other people's material and fitting it into your own expression. The ultimate feeling for any musician however is having your own song and



expressing it your way. Over the years, everyone who has been in this band has offered material of their own. It is a great experience to share everyone's talent and creativity."

"Inspiration for songs usually comes from a personal element. I think it's the only truthful way of expressing emotion. It has to be something that you have experienced," explains Pat. "I listen to music by other musicians and often become influenced and inspired by what they are writing."

"I am proud of our band and what we have accomplished in 50 years. We have been very fortunate because it is a tough business. We treat it as a job. It's important to keep nurturing and cultivating. It's not easy. We have had personnel changes over the years and different representation, which is another variable," he explains. "In the long run, it has been a career I have enjoyed. I feel blessed to play with a great group of guys, which is the bottom line. We are working on another album. I have plans to work with other artists. I also have been producing songs for my son."

Pat has fond memories of playing in Cleveland. "It's going to be quite a tour. We are looking forward to playing Blossom. We have been playing there since the mid to late 70s. Cleveland is a great city!"

The Doobie Brothers. www.doobiebrothers.com

Blossom Music Center www.clevelandamphitheater.com

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