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Why America Thinks Touring Soon Is 'Not Realistic' (Though They'd Love To)

5/20/2020 by [Gary Graff](#)



Henry Diltz America

America is celebrating its 50th anniversary in a number of ways this year -- including going all the way back to the beginning, at least in the recording studio, for the upcoming *Half Century* box set.

The eight-disc affair kicks off with the unreleased "Children" -- premiering below -- one of the first songs Dewey Bunnell reckons he ever wrote and part of a 1970 session in London for famed British song publisher Dick James. "I started 'Children' and 'Riverside' around the same time," Bunnell tells Billboard. "('Children') was the song that really locked into my brain how good our vocal harmonies were at that point. We really worked on those, and I give full credit to Gerry (Beckley) as a great arranger. The song itself

had a little bit of that era, that '60s 'come on children, get your heads together,' but what stands out is really our (vocal) blend and how unique that was."

"Children" provides the kickoff for *Half Century's* cornucopia of unreleased studio and live recordings, including demos, alternate mixes, rehearsals, interviews and video footage from a variety of sources ranging from 1970-89. Due out June 28, much of it spotlights the '70s and the original trio of Bunnell, Beckley and the late Dan Peek, who left the band in 1977. There's also one brand new track, aptly titled "Remembering." "Y'know, it feels like anywhere between 50 minutes and 500 years," Bunnell notes with a chuckle. "It's an odd feeling -- like it was yesterday we were these teenagers in England knocking around and writing our own music. I have a crystal-clear memory of that. But then there's big chunks of this career that are like, 'Where did that all go?!' But I feel grateful it's gone as well as it has."

"Well" is, of course an understatement. After its first single, "A Horse With No Name," hit No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1972, the group won the best new artist Grammy, scored seven top 10 hits on the Hot 100 and five top 10 albums on the Billboard 200. "Obviously there's nothing wrong with having hits out of the chute like we did," Beckley notes, "but I think we've kind of justified that early (success). A career is a career, and (50 years) references a long amount of time -- years and years and years. There's obviously going to be ups and downs, but I think we've done a really good job over all that time."

Half Century is the latest project celebrating America's golden anniversary. Last year the group released a pair of hits compilations as well as *Live at the Palladium*. Also coming is *America, the Band: An Authorized Biography* by Jude Warne, with a foreword by Billy Bob Thornton. "We're really pleased with it," Bunnell says of the tome. "Her proposal was straight ahead -- 'I want to write your history, from the first to the last, and use the songs to express who you are and what you did,' and it made a lot of sense. It's not all about, 'Oh, and then we got all loaded...' It's not, like, a tell-all. There is a lot of that and there's a lot of history about each of us. She interviewed a lot of people, not just us, and I think she really captured the story."

America's anniversary celebration is, of course, being done from quarantine at the moment. Live shows have been suspended, while Beckley spent a couple of weeks quarantined in Australia, where his wife is from. After shutting down in mid-March, Bunnell notes that it's the longest the group has spent off the road, possibly ever, and the duo is, like everyone else, itching to get back at it.

"We can't wait to play," Bunnell says, "but we're really the last business to potentially go back to normal, besides sports and theater and places that require people to cram into venues, shoulder to shoulder. It's not realistic to think we're going to do that soon, but we're just hanging on for the miracle, as everybody would hope for, grasping at straws. Whenever it happens, we know we might be looking at an audience wearing masks. That'll be...different." The impasse, however, may give Bunnell and Beckley some creative time, possibly to make the first new America music since 2007's *Here & Now* album (not counting the 2015 outtake set *Lost & Found*).

"I would like to think so," Beckley -- who released a solo album, *Five Mile Road*, during 2019 -- says of the prospect. "There's no particular hurry at this point, but I think with the right guidance there could easily be another one or two America projects in the future."