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Behind The Song: America's "Tin Man" by Dewey Bunnell

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Today is the 46th anniversary of the July 7, 1974 release of "Tin Man." America, "Tin Man," from *Holiday*. Written by Dewey Bunnell, produced by George Martin, engineered by Geoff Emerick.

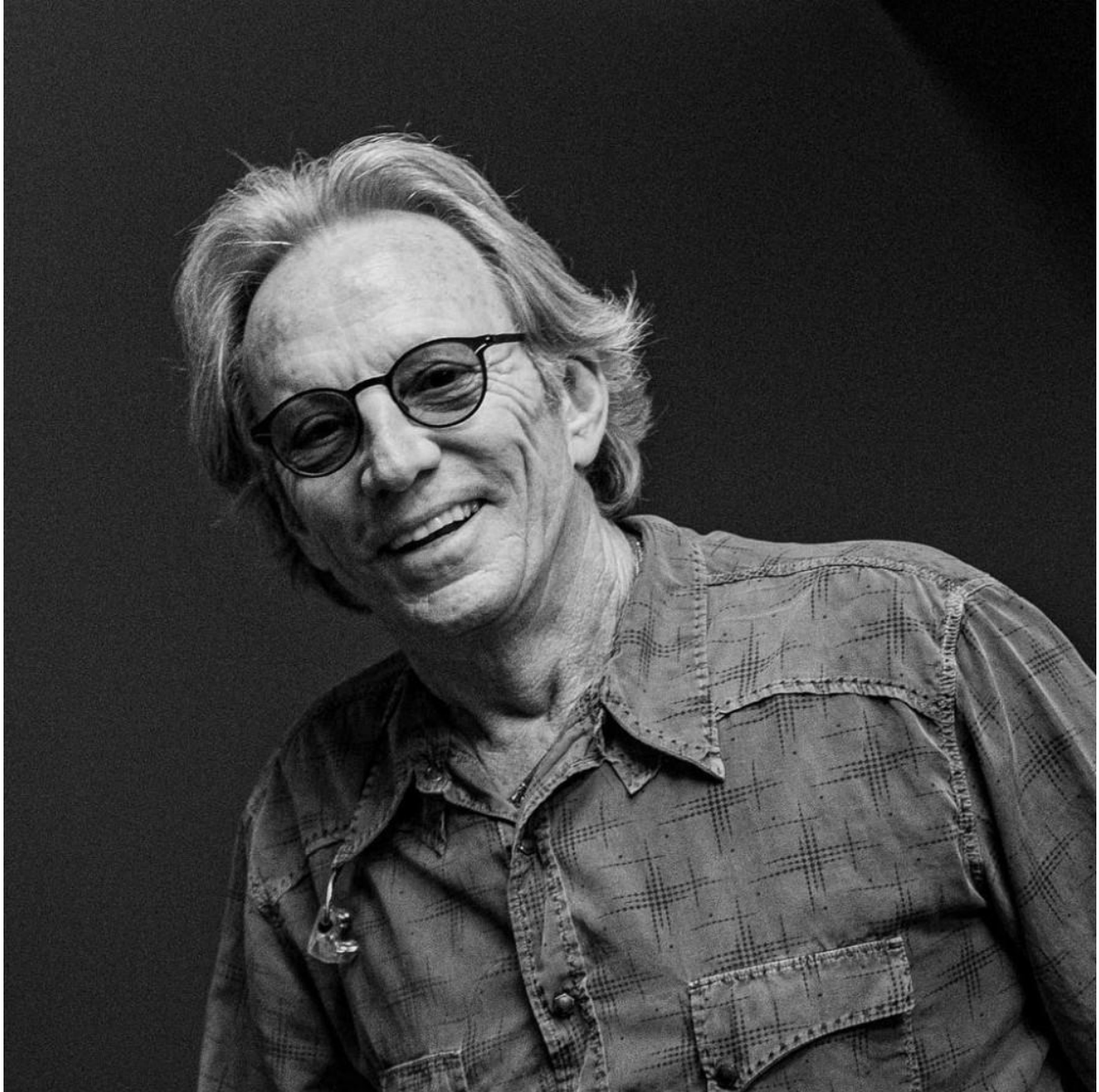
This is the third installation of our Behind The Song series with the legendary Dewey Bunnell of America, who generously shared his memories this time around of writing "Tin Man."

Previously, he related the origins of two other classic hit songs he wrote, performed and recorded with America, "[Horse With No Name](#)" and "[Ventura Highway](#)."

Now comes Dewey's "Tin Man," which was released exactly 46 years ago today this day, July 10 in 1974. "Tin Man" would easily be the winner of "The Most Enigmatic Song Ever Done by America," if not for Dewey's "Horse With No Name," which also remains a serious contender.

Still, the fusion of Dewey's breezily joyous melody, built around the jazzy, pretty sound of consecutive major-seventh chords, and his soulful, laid-back delivery on lyrics such as "And Oz never did give nothing to the Tin Man that he didn't already have..." all created the ideal vessel for obsessive, herb-inspired speculation.

Though none of his songs were calculated to seem like cosmic messages rendered in secret code in need of translation, they did lend themselves to that function. This tendency was bolstered also because these songs were all major radio hits; their ubiquity kept reminding us someone had better solve this puzzle already.



It was the first single released from *Holiday* in the autumn of 1974,, and became a hit, the band's fourth Top Ten hit in America, staying at number four on the Hot 100 list for months. In October it went to number one on the Easy Listening chart.

Released only as a B-side to their song "Mad Dog" in the UK, it did not become a UK hit.

The late Dan Peek, who along with Dewey and Gerry Beckley founded America, said that "Tin Man" was "quintessential Dewey, easy stream of consciousness with a major-seventh acoustic bed."

He also said that Dewey "begged us not to record the song. Knowing Dewey, it was

probably reverse psychology; if it was, Gerry and I fell for it, insisting it was perfect for the album.”

Here now is Dewey, in his own words, on the origins of his song “Tin Man.”

DEWEY BUNNELL: “Tin Man” was manufactured from the chunks of thoughts and themes that I was putting together into a kind of mosaic. It wasn’t a common thread.

“Horse With No Name” was a dialogue; it’s a story from the first day to the last day and what it was.

“Ventura Highway” has certainly got a thread, a chain. But with “Tin Man,” I think you have to break it up into chunks that were going through my mind at the time to understand it.

I originally wanted to write a cohesive dialogue about *The Wizard of Oz*, which I loved. It was my favorite movie as a kid and it’s still one of my Top Ten. I probably even would go so far that if someone said “What’s your favorite movie of all time?” I might go there.

The song is like surrealism, which was a genre of art that was always mesmerizing for me. There’s the whole psychedelic thing, coming out of the Sixties, the Woodstock generation, opening your eyes, expanding your mind and looking at things differently. We really did, we were a straight culture out of the Fifties. It was all black and white.

“Sometimes late when things are real and people share the gift of gab between themselves/ Some take the bait and catch a perfect prize that waits among the shells.”

That was about just sitting around, when things are real and people share the gift of gab. We did a lot of sitting around talking about things and listening to albums.

Some are quick to take the bait when you come up with a subject to expand on it and catch the perfect prize that waits among the shells.

So even when you grab onto a subject, you grab it and you take the bait and you run with it; you talk about it and you figure it out. Like we all try to figure out the fate of the world. That would be the perfect prize. The reason that I say that I’m on the shells, is because that relates to catching the fish that waits among the shells. It’s pretty abstract, I agree.

Of course, all roads lead back to sex. People insist “among the shells” is sex.

Nope. That wasn’t it.

Also, it’s got nothing to do with *The Wizard of Oz*. Then I jump to the line, Oz never did give nothing to somebody they didn’t already have. That was what I was *trying* to say.

That was bad grammar again too.

The Tin Man was the heart; that's why people think it was sex because the Tin Man was looking for his heart. And we all think of heart and love.

For me, I jumped to that because there was the reason for the evening, or the Tropic of Sir Galahad. Sir Galahad is another love element. Sir Galahad is this dashing guy, charming. It's very abstract, but I did have a theme in mind and it all just poured out like that, in one fell swoop.

It was mixing the worlds, and as I said about "Horse with No Name," never forget that a writer, in this case me, is trying to rhyme things. I was trying to stay in that thought process of the Tin Man looking for a heart. He always had the heart, and he always was a loving guy and compassionate.

Sir Galahad was the same thing. "Cause never was the reason for the evening." That's the same line that I was trying to just say that there's no reason for the evening. There is a cause, obviously, because the earth spins around and the sun goes down.

I was trying to allude to the evening, also, as being a time when I just can't really define my words on that. It was a time when you are talking about from the heart.

By the time I was writing this, which was for the fourth album, I was working harder on the lyrics, I was trying. It became more of "Hey, I'm a *songsmith* now. I'm supposed to be writing."

I put a lot more time into the work. It wasn't these big things dropping out on paper magically, like they seemed to do on the first couple albums. There was a little more time and effort put into that one.

The "spinning round round round" section came from the melody. When I write songs, I always find some chord progression that I like and hum a melody around it.

I had come up with that melody. (Sings tune without words). Yeah. "Soap suds green light bubbles." (And not "green *like* bubbles" as is sometimes printed incorrectly).

Yes, we smoked some weed then. Now it's legal and it's everywhere. It's fine. I think we all go down our paths and go wherever that takes us. I don't do much of anything anymore. I like life as much as I ever did.

"Please, believe in me when I say I'm spinning round, round, round."

George Martin, who produced this album, came up with the arrangement for that part on the piano. That is him playing it on the track.

We met George Martin out here in L.A. and we made an agreement that we'd do an

album together. George went back to England. He was finishing up the Paul McCartney *Live and Let Die* sessions for the James Bond film. That's why he was in L.A..

When he went back, we said to ourselves "We've got George Martin committed. We have got to get these songs in shape. We've got to get a bunch of songs."

We rehearsed them as much as we'd ever rehearsed anything, other than the first album which we were rehearsing because we didn't have a record deal. We played those songs every day for anybody we could play them for. Now we had to get these well-rehearsed because we did not want to waste George Martin's time. We wanted to make sure this project went smoothly.

We played him the songs in the studio. He wanted to work while sitting around in a circle, with him on a piano and Gerry, Dan and I on chairs with our guitars. And walk through each song and discuss the lyric and how we wanted to approach them.

George was great with harmonies, and liked to work on those. I remember that we walked through the chorus for that. George added the high parts to it. He did on every song. He'd sit around the piano while we sang, and ask, "Are you singing *this* part?" Then he'd sing that line.

I'd say, "Yeah. That's the part I'm singing."

And he says, "Well, why don't you sing *this* part, and change that note to that note."

That would go on. That was a general process with every song. We didn't have it locked in exactly because that's the whole point of a producer. We were producing ourselves up until then and we were making the decisions, but now we wanted to allow George to put in his two cents. In many cases he did, and, of course, he put in string arrangements and the things that were all his writing.

We made the whole album with him in something like 16 or 17 days. That was another thing about the George Martin project; he said, "I don't have two to three months, lads."

He really ran a tight ship. We started sessions a lot earlier than we would have in L.A. We ended those sessions in a timely fashion also, like going to the office with designated breaks and tea time and lunch. It wasn't just hippies in the studio jamming, if you know what I mean. There was a structure there.

We recorded at Air Studios in Oxford Circus in London. That was the studio that George was working out of at that point. A lot of people say "You didn't go to Abbey Road with George Martin on that?"

No. It was 1974, the Beatles had only been broken up for a year or so, and Abbey

Road was still totally functioning. But he preferred Air at that time, which was his studio. He was working with Paul McCartney and also the Jeff Beck album *Blow by Blow*. I remember that The Clash were recording in there. Though I didn't know them from Adam.

We ultimately made five studio albums with George and Geoff. And then the live album, he engineered that out here in California.

Then George remixed the hits from the first three albums for the Greatest Hits album.

Geoff [Emerick] was a very integrated kind of guy. He was quiet. He did his job and he was really good at what he did. He did all those Beatles records going back to "Paperback Writer." They ran the studio system at Abbey Road where they it was very traditional, and Geoff and all engineers there actually used to wear white lab coats. When Geoff came in, he was an apprentice tape operator and second engineer, and then worked his way up to becoming an engineer.

Geoff wrote a book, *Here, There and Everywhere: My Life Recording the Music of the Beatles*. It's a great book, but it's a bit controversial. Geoff wrote that George Martin would get more credit than deserved.

They seemed to get along real well, They had a communication that started before our time. They knew each other's habits, and they knew that George was at the helm, he was the captain of the ship. What George said and directed, Geoff had to do. He did bring a lot of innovations and things in his time with mic placement on drums.



America

"Tin Man"

Words & Music by Dewey Bunnell

Sometimes late when things are real
And people share the gift of gab between themselves
Some are quick to take the bait and catch the perfect prize
That waits among the shells

Chorus:

*But Oz never did give nothing to the Tin Man
That he didn't, didn't already have
And Cause never was the reason for the evening
Or the Tropic of Sir Galahad
So please believe in me*

When I say I'm spinning round, round, round, round
Smoke glass stain bright color
Image going down, down, down, down
Soap suds green light bubbles

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