

The Doobie Brothers rock New Mexico

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Classic rock band still going strong after 40 years

Rock n' roll spans eras and genres, connecting fans through the years. The history of rock was on full display at the recent Doobie Brothers concert held at Route 66 Casino in Albuquerque April 14. With fists raised high in the air, a sea of gray and white hair dominating the crowd, fans gathered to see one of America's classic acts.

Originally from San Jose, The Doobie Brothers formed in 1970 with lead vocalist Tom Johnston

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and guitarist Patrick Simmons. The band has continued to rock audiences over the past five decades, selling more than 40 million albums worldwide. Their hit singles include “Black Water,” from 1974, and “What a Fool Believes,” 1979, along with “Listen to the Music,” and “China Grove,” to name just a few. The *Sun* had the privilege of meeting up with the band and speaking with Johnston.

Sun: Tom, thank you for doing this, it's an honor to talk with you.

Johnston: Well, thank you I'm glad to do it man.

Sun: You guys have been doing this for so long and are still going strong. Your sound is very unique. Would you say that's a part of the longevity of your guys' success?

Johnston: I think that, and the fact that we tour regularly and try to put out an album at least every 10 years if not earlier. In fact, that is what we are working on right now. We haven't recorded it yet but just writing the songs for now. Otherwise, we just like to have a good time doing what we're doing. We love playing and we enjoy touring, although, we've trimmed it down to a reasonable schedule as compared to the early days. The people are great, they're always up, having a great time singing the songs with us, and dancing. It's a good thing to interact with the people like that while we're out on the stage, that's what makes it worthwhile.

Sun: Now let's talk stats. You guys have sold over 40 million albums and the list continues to go on and on. That's just amazing. Do you ever get to the point where you ask yourselves how you guys are still doing this?

Johnston: I do sit back and occasionally think to myself, “Has it really been that long?” (Laughing). It's kind of like a mind-blowing feeling, trying to wrap your head around it that it's been that long. Especially when you're up on that stage like nothing's really changed, we're still doing what we've always done—even though I know it has changed.

Sun: Now in the band it's Pat Simmons, John McFee, and yourself, have there been any changes when you're touring or do you pretty much stay the same?

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Johnston: We've kept the band the same. We really have a great bunch of guys. Really great players, singers, and at this point we really don't change it out now, we leave it as is. When it works you don't want to mess with it.

Sun: That's some sound advice. Now when you were growing up, who were your influences?

Johnston: Basically, whoever was playing on the radio. I did a lot of listening to Bo Diddley, Little Richard, B.B. King, some British Invasion when I was in high school. I had my share of blues bands as well.

Sun: What's your take on today's music?

Johnston: First off, it's a completely different musical landscape. Nobody buys albums anymore, downloading is getting passé, streaming is now the source of how people are getting their music. From a songwriter's point of view, it's a whole different paradigm. Now there's a whole lot of people trying to get into the business, you add in all those factors and it's a totally different business today.

Sun: I'm glad you guys are still rocking and a lot of these bands could learn a lot from you guys, because it shows in your songs.

Johnston: We're very grateful for that, in fact, any band that can write a song that lasts a long time, it's primarily because those songs people can associate with it.

Sun: True. Well Tom I want to thank you again for taking out the time to do this, all the best to you and the rest of the guys.

Johnston: Absolutely my pleasure.

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After Johnston's leaving, the *Sun* had the pleasure of speaking to another Doobie Brothers member, guitarist John McFee.

Sun: Hey John thanks for doing this man. I can't believe I'm here with you.

McFee: John McFee, Doobie Brother, guilty of being a Doobie Brother.

Sun: How are you doing and how's the tour so far?

McFee: It's going great, you know we're doing some new material that we haven't played in a while. The audience seems to like it. So, knock on wood (hits himself on the head), all is well (laughing).

Sun: I was talking with Tom earlier regarding the music, how it has carried you guys for so long.

McFee: I'm still the new guy. I've been in the band for 40 years, Pat and Tom started it so I would give them the credit for it. Really developing what people associated with the Doobie Brothers sounds, the harmony, the acoustic and electric, and a lot of roots music incorporated in it. We feel very fortunate that people still want to hear it.

Sun: Anything different you guys working into the tour?

McFee: We're incorporating some of our older songs that we've never really played live into the shows before, we're also adding different songs that people really haven't heard in a long time as well.

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Sun: You guys also will be touring with Steely Dan, right?

McFee: Right, we are going to be doing quite a bit with Steely Dan. We got a couple months worth of shows with them.

Sun: Wow, so when do you take a break?

McFee: We never take a break. We'll be taking a break before we start off with Steely Dan. That'll be a longer run, we've got to pace ourselves in our age bracket (laughing). We have to, we'll be busy doing a lot of shows. We're also doing some with the Eagles as well later in the year.

Sun: Wow that's all cool. John thank you for taking out the time to chat.

McFee: You're very welcome, thank you. We love coming down here whenever we can, we like this part of the country.

For more information on The Doobie Brothers, visit their website at www.thedoobiebrothers.com

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