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## America brings hits to outdoor concert

### Co-founder Bunnell grateful for long, successful career

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel  
Thursday, July 18, 2013 - 12:01 am

Dewey Bunnell of the pop/rock group America, which will perform Saturday at Foellinger Outdoor Theatre, had no sense the group's signature song "A Horse with No Name," which he wrote, would become a No. 1 hit — let alone one of the classic singer/songwriter staples on radio airwaves for over 40 years.

"We were just excited to have a record deal," Bunnell said in a telephone interview. "We were 18, 19, 20 years old. We had written a handful of songs.

"It was really all about let the universe decide, we just write these songs," he said. "We had no idea. Of course, you hope for success. You hope people will like what you do.

"I don't think we had any clear direction or clear idea about a career or making a living out of it or anything in those days," Bunnell added. "It was a different time."

#### Getting started

Ironically for a group called America, the three friends who made up the group — Bunnell, Gerry Beckley and Dan Peek — met each other while living in England in the late 1960s.

Their fathers were U.S. Air Force servicemen stationed in Britain, and they met at an air base school and eventually formed a group, which they called America.

Success came swiftly for the group in 1972 after releasing the song "A Horse with No Name," which hit No. 1 on the U.S. Billboard magazine Hot 100 songs chart. It was soon followed by their first album, entitled simply "America," which also topped the Billboard album charts.

A Grammy Award for Best New Artist of 1972 also came the group's way, along with a 10-year string of hits, including "I Need You," "Ventura Highway," "Tin Man," "Lonely People," "Sister Golden Hair" (also a No. 1 hit) and "You Can Do Magic," a Top 10 hit from 1982.

Peek, who died in 2011, left the group in 1977 to pursue a career in Christian contemporary music, but the group continued on as a duo recording and touring regularly.

#### Shifting focus

After the initial years of chart success and with the changes in the nature of the music industry today, America's emphasis has gradually shifted from recording to live performances.

While the group still enjoys recording, Bunnell said they put a lot of attention into their live shows, which has become a larger part of their careers.

"Every year, we try to kind of sweep out the cobwebs a little on song orders and the (set) list," Bunnell said of their live show. "I'd say maybe 15 percent of the show or so is different annually, whereby we either insert songs that are part of a new project or we recycle some album cuts.

"It's pretty much we've got a locked-in, set 90 minutes," he added. "The nucleus of it is our hits from the '70s and the music that's most familiar to people.

"We've got a little video presentation that's part of the set these last couple of years — that's the biggest feature of the live show," Bunnell added. "It's kind of fun. It's imagery behind certain songs that relates to the lyric or specific title and so on."

Bunnell is also very proud of the music America has created over the years and says he's very protective of it and is very involved in how it's repackaged and presented.

"I have a very sort of maternal feeling about our catalog of songs because they've carried us so far into our lives from our teen years to here — we are in our 60s now," Bunnell said. "They're important to me.

"I got very involved in (putting together) the box set ('Highway: 30 Years of America') because they needed some old memorabilia, some old paperwork and backstage passes, photos and stuff. ... Of course, we were involved in song selection, too."



#### More Information

##### AUDIO INTERVIEW WITH AMERICA'S DEWEY BUNNELL

The News-Sentinel

Audio interview...

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15:12

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#### IN CONCERT

**What:** The rock group America performs live in concert.  
**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday  
**Where:** Foellinger Outdoor Theatre, 3411 Sherman Blvd. in Franke Park  
**Cost:** \$25 and \$35. Tickets are available at the gate the night of the show or in advance by calling 427-6000; calling the Foellinger Theatre box office at 427-6715 after 4 p.m. the day of the show; and at the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department main office, 705 E. State Blvd., 8 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.

Another aspect of America's career that Bunnell also is very fond of is working with George Martin, legendary producer of the Beatles. Martin produced seven of America's albums, including their most successful, "History: America's Greatest Hits," which has been certified as a multiplatinum seller.

"George came aboard on the fourth album," Bunnell said. "By then, we had come back to the U.S. and established ourselves in Los Angeles. The career had a full head of steam. We'd been at it now for four years. ... That resulted in the fourth album, called 'Holiday,' and a couple of hit singles, 'Tin Man' and 'Lonely People.' And we went on to have a successful relationship, and still do with George."

Looking back at his over 40 years in the music business, Bunnell is very grateful America's career seems to be open-ended.

"I've been very pleased with how long we've been doing it," he said. "I love performing. ... It's been a really, really special career that I don't take for granted. I'm very grateful for the whole thing."