

Grapevine

I Remember... Bloodrock reunite

Ed Grundy hadn't thought about his music in several years. In fact he had since moved on to a long career as a respiratory therapist and was currently honing his skills in information technology. His past life, more than three decades earlier, was just that — the past. But word had gotten to him that a former bandmate had been diagnosed with leukemia and needed financial assistance. So he began to reconsider picking up his bass and even made a few phone calls to the other former members of his band. "We had since moved on. Everyone was doing their own thing, and I don't look good in Spandex® anymore," he said. "But I knew we had to do something."

On March 12, Grundy, along with singer Jim Rutledge, guitarists Lee Pickens and Nick Taylor, and keyboardist Stevie Hill will re-form their band, Bloodrock, for one more show, in front of a hometown audience in Fort Worth, Texas. The concert will benefit Hill, who was diagnosed with cancer in June 2002 (at press time Taylor's son Chris will play drums in the absence of Rick Cobb, who had not confirmed his participation). The historic concert will mark the first time the five have played together in almost three decades.

Formed in 1969, Bloodrock started out as a local Fort Worth club and frat party favorite called Crowd + 1, but a chance meeting with Grand Funk Railroad manager Terry Knight would change their lives forever — if only briefly.

"Terry discovered them in Dallas on a mission to promote Grand Funk Railroad at the Texas International Pop Festival," said Bloodrock biographer, Barry Stoller. "Crowd + 1 was on daytime standby for the gig, but they also had a local frat gig in the evening." Knight came to the party and decided, on the spot, to sign them to Capitol. Stevie Hill, who was still a minor, had to have his parents co-sign



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Bloodrock, from top left, clockwise: Ed Grundy, Lee Pickens (hat), Steve Hill, Rick Cobb, Jim Rutledge, and Nick Taylor (sunglasses).

the deal. From that moment on the band sensed Knight would be in charge, and the first order of business — the band's current name had to go. "It was Knight who came up with the name Bloodrock," said Taylor. "Moonrock was another one we thought about, after the moon landing of that year." The band quickly embarked on an opening act tour with Grand Funk which lasted more than two years. Things were moving even faster in the recording studio. By April 1970 the band's debut was released, and just two months later they had completed their second album. However, if the band thought the breakneck-speed ride to the top was exhilarating, nothing prepared them for the reaction of their first (and only) Top 40 single, "DOA," and what was to follow afterward.

"When I was 17, I wanted to be an airline pilot," Pickens said. "I had just gotten out of this airplane with a friend of mine, at this little airport, and I watched him take off. He went about 200 feet in the air, rolled and crashed." The band

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decided to write a song around the incident and include it on their second album. "DOA" was released as a single in January 1971. While the haunting tribute to Pickens' friend, complete with descriptive lyrics ("I remember, we were flying along and hit something in the air") and ambulance sirens peaked at #36 on the charts, not everyone appreciated the song topic. "We got banned in certain places. People thought it was a satanic song," said Grundy. "We were accused of being on LSD."

Controversy or not, Capitol seized on the opportunity and wanted to resurrect the song, with a follow-up single. "It's absolutely true," Hill said. "I wrote a song that I felt was like a follow-up, but I didn't write it until about six years later." The song, which he titled "Victims," was never recorded. "It was like a Catch-22 for us," said Grundy. "That song really helped us break out, but it turned out to be like an anvil."

The demand to hear Bloodrock's one hit at concerts and the pressure from their record label to duplicate the success took a toll on the group members, who felt they had much more to offer than "DOA." The song would prove to be an ominous title to their fate.

Rutledge left Bloodrock in April 1972 after it became apparent that the other band members were going in different musical directions, and Pickens was

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packing his bags for an assumed job with Grand Funk. "I placed the blame on Jim for a long time," said Taylor. "He lost interest in the band. Lee thought he had a place with Grand Funk and left us hanging. We started to go into a different Emerson, Lake and Palmer-type direction, and it really wasn't the right thing for Bloodrock," he said. "I admit it; I wanted to do more jazz fusion," said Grundy. The band carried on for three more albums, with Warren Ham on vocals. They officially broke up in 1976.

In spite of Grundy's plans, his own future in music led him down a completely different path after Bloodrock's final days. "I ended up playing country and Big Band just to get a job," he said. "I got tired of being broke, so I got my bachelor's degree and ended up doing respiratory therapy."

Taylor has sold automobiles in the Dallas area for more than 20 years. Pickens sold insurance and now runs a car wash outside of Dallas. Rutledge continued to perform and record but eventually went into the oil business,

owned a restaurant and now owns a video company in Dallas. Rick Cobb, who now goes by the name James Cobb III, (and who was unable to be reached for this story) formed the Quietus Trio and recently performed his music at the 10th Annual Olympia Experimental Music Festival. Stevie Hill worked for his family for several years before forming a short-lived Dallas-Fort Worth performing duo with Rick Sharp, called Sharp And Hill. He has since released two CDs of his own music. The reunion will be the first time the band members have played together in almost three decades. "I'm at peace with my past now," said Grundy. "Everyone is on board with this, and we're doing it for Stevie."

"This is a one-chance thing," said Keith Barker, a fan since he first heard "Gotta Find A Way" on the debut album, as a teenager in 1970. The 50-year-old Folsom, Calif., resident said he hasn't thought twice about traveling all the way to Fort Worth upon hearing the news of the reunion. "The music

endures with me. You don't ever let go of it." The same holds true for Mark Gatzke, 48, of Plant City, Fla. For him, the emotional significance of the benefit for Hill is coupled with the musical impact of the historic reunion. "Everyone wishes the circumstances were different," he said. "I don't have any expectations. Just to see them on stage together again is enough for me." John Fulton's older cousin turned him on to the band when he was 12. "You know, every time I listen to "Breach Of Lease (from *Bloodrock* 3)," it's the 1970s and I'm back in my room in Cleveland, Ohio." The Miami, Fla., attorney had originally made plans to travel to London to see an Arthur Brown show March 12. "I had my tickets and everything, and then I read about the Bloodrock reunion," he said. "Sorry Arthur, I'm going to see Bloodrock."

The Bloodrock reunion concert takes place 8 p.m., March 12, at the Ridglea Theater in Fort Worth. The band will also be auctioning off memorabilia and guitars to help pay for Hill's medical expenses. For more information: (817) 738-9500.

— Lisa Wheeler

Web sites of interest:

Stevie Hill: www.steviehill.com
Barry Stoller's online Bloodrock biography: www.utopia2000.org
Bloodrock Forums: www.bloodrock.net