

Dawn Silva

Tim Kinley/Groove Maneuvers
Archives

A veteran of Sly and the Family Stone, Dawn is now 50 percent of the Brides of Funkenstein (Lynn Mabry is the other half), who back up Parliament, Funkadelic and do a wild show of their own that is also available on Atlantic Records.



Charlie Frick

How did you get started with Funkadelic?

I think it was destined to happen. But the actual thing happened when I was singing with Sly Stone about three years ago. In fact, Bootsie came on first, and then we came on, and then Parliament came on. And George Clinton really liked us—he said he loved the harmonies. He loved the background. He loved how we blended. He really just got

off on our voices. So he asked us to start doing background work on a lot of the albums that were coming out. And then came the live album, which we did. And live at the show—George asked us to come to the show, and we were singing on a back mike. And I guess our voices were just so powerful, we just kind of over-sang everybody.

Sly got really upset. He told us if we continued to work with George, he was going to fire us. And we said, "Okay, fire us." So George offered us a gig and a contract. Sly wasn't really doing anything. He worked when he felt like working on tours—he really didn't have to. He's been everywhere. I mean, after ten years of being on the road, you kind of get tired. And when you get to that level, you get to your peak, and there's really nowhere else you can go but back down to get back to the top.

How long have you been on the road?

Oh, around five years.

How do you like it?

Sometimes it can be rather fun, and there are times when it can really be hectic, when you're so exhausted you just don't think you can make it. I think my biggest problem comes from when we

do like six one-nighters. We open up as the Brides. Then we come back on with Funkadelic. Then we have another set change, and we come back on with Parliament.

That's a lot of work.

Yes indeed. You can believe it is. It's a lot of fun, though, 'cause it's so free. It doesn't get repetitious, every night isn't the same. It's always like a big surprise. You never know what George is going to do. He keeps it pretty exciting. Every place is different. So if it wasn't for that, I think we'd go cuckoo.

What were you doing before Sly?

Local things. I'm from Sacramento, California. I did radio commercials for Kinney shoes, and jeans at The Gap, those type things. Old English beer commercials. You know, just sessions. I was singing in an old Irish club with these two girls. All they had was a piano bar. That's how I started singing with Sly. The trumpet player, Cynthia, was with Sly and she started singing—so I helped with backups.

How do you feel about traveling and living this kind of life as opposed to staying home?

It's a pretty big challenge. I've done both. I stayed home and did the domestic gig for a while and really got pretty bored. You get bored staying home. After being in this life for a while, then you go home. Eventually, everything seems to be such a slow pace, you know. And in this life, everything is so much faster and

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things are constantly happening all the time. I don't believe I could ever go back and do anything else but this business. I love it. I love it out here. It's a challenge because you don't see too many women in rock groups. And they put an image on you, sometimes an image that you don't really like. It's like a soap opera. It's like you're playing a great big part—you go to the show, you do your whole thing and then you come back to yourself again. I have like two personalities. Onstage and off-stage.

Any special image that you want to project?

At one time I really wanted to get off into a Labelle-type thing. I really don't want to be a carbon copy of anybody. I really want to establish our own-type thing, which is more or less a sophisticated-type funk, if there is such a thing. And that's where I want to go, in that direction. A mixture between the Supremes and Rod Stewart. That's really crazy, but I think it might go over.

Do you write at all?

George writes—you know, there are so many mastermind writers around this group, it's kind of hard to get your material in.

But you do write.

We do write, both of us, myself and Lynn Mabry. And George is open for ideas.

What kind of stuff do you write?

Oh, mushy love ballads and things like that. But basically I'm a moody writer. I write whatever mood I'm in. If I'm in a very happy mood, I'm just elated about something, I can write a really happy, real sweet tune. If I'm depressed or something's bothering me, I can write a song of that type. Mostly I write just about the environment, the mood, the people I work with.

Do you find it hard to have boyfriends because of your travel?

It can be very difficult. In fact, I'm going with a guitar player that's in the group. It's kind of hard to really get into men on the road, because most of the men are after you for some kind of freaky sexual thing, just to say that they've been with a Bride—"I've been with her"—or "I've been with the chick in Parliament"—or it's because they figure you've got a lot of money. Just

(continued on page 95)

Women in Rock

(continued from page 58)

a little prestige-image thing. And it's hard to trust a man unless you've known him before you even got into the business. I have never met a man on the road, 'cause I'm really careful about who I get involved with. Like my old man now, we've been together for four years. And we've had our ups and downs.

Some of the other women I've spoken with feel like you, but some feel being with someone in the band is dangerous, too close.

If that's where your head is. If you really loved somebody, it wouldn't matter if you were around 5 people or 5,000, if you were going to be with that person. Me, I'm old-fashioned anyway. I like them one at a time. If I find somebody I care about, I generally don't stray. In his case, it might be different at times. There's just so many women out there. When they're offering so many, it's kind of hard sometimes to turn it down. And maybe sometimes we have our problems that way, and sometimes we'll go through that a bit. We overcome that. We manage to keep our heads above water most of the time.

When you're onstage, do you feel any pressure as being a sex symbol like the olden days?

Oh yeah. When we started off, we were trying to keep the show like maybe 15 percent sex and 85 percent just funky groove, you know. Hard to do. Especially with all the hoots and the whistles from the guys. And basically Parliament has a male audience. They come to the shows—all the women are backstage, they're not out front. We never had any trouble—in fact, I kind of like it. I get off on that, I really like it.

Are there any special singers that you look up to?

Yeah. I could say Patti Labelle. When that group broke up, it really hurt me. I never thought any group would bother me that much if they broke up. I also like Nancy Wilson, Todd Rundgren, Chaka Khan. I like George Benson, that type. I'm jazz-oriented. I like all types of music, but I get off more on male groups than I do the female.

What do you ultimately want to work on with your music?

I'd like to have a couple of gold records, of course. That's the main thing. Another thing is to deliver a message, to let the people know what we're about.

And that is?

The message is love, to love each other. I would like to love them and want them to love me. Isn't that exactly what it's all about, just to have a good feeling inside? If you listen, whenever groovy music comes on the radio, whenever you hear a tune, you'll know that it's us and it will make you feel good inside. You'll feel kind of lighthearted and whimsical inside. ☐