

Here is the full transcript of the interview with Graham Brown:

- **[00:09]** Hi folks, welcome to another episode of Tinnitist TV. Today I am talking to Graham Brown, he is a man who does not waste time. This veteran Vancouver roots rock singer-songwriter records most of his albums—including his latest release, *Outside Within*—live in the studio in a single afternoon.
- **[00:25]** Sometimes those albums include songs he wrote on the way to the session and taught to his bandmates minutes before they were put down on tape. And if they don't like one of his songs, he just throws it away and writes a new one.
- **[00:46]** That no-nonsense approach has served him well for decades, from his beginnings with Edmonton's Junior Gone Wild to his major label days with Brilliant Orange and his time with Happy Man.
- **[00:54]** With *Outside Within* available now and Brown already looking forward to his next album, he zoomed in from the band's rehearsal space to talk about playing for Bob Dylan, getting career advice from Barbra Streisand, sneaking into Neil Young's studio, wowing them at the Cavern Club, and plenty more. Enjoy!
- **[01:19] Interviewer:** Well, it's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Brown.
- **[01:21] Graham Brown:** Yeah, thanks, you too, Darrell, thank you.
- **[01:24] Interviewer:** So, how are you doing today?
- **[01:26] Graham Brown:** Good, I'm just in our rehearsal studio place, just working on songs, writing them—like 20 all today. I'm working on about 25, 27 new songs for the next record, actually.
- **[01:34] Interviewer:** Wow, you just don't stop, do you?
- **[01:42] Graham Brown:** No, I don't. You know what, it's funny because I kind of remember the last record's songs, so it's—I just go with that, you know? I mean, when it comes, it comes.
- **[01:55] Graham Brown:** I was thinking about it today; somebody else asked me, like, "When you write a lot of songs, do you sit down and go, 'I'm going to write a song today?'" Like, I tried that once, maybe when I was a teenager or something, but I write songs when I get inspired. I never sit down and go, "I'm going to write a song," because for me, it doesn't work.
- **[02:20] Graham Brown:** It has to come in on the antenna, yes. It's got to come and land: "Oh, there it is, thank you."
- **[02:29] Interviewer:** But it seems like they come and land pretty good for you. If you were efficient, you'd never go hungry.

- **[02:35] Graham Brown:** Yes, I'm very fortunate that way. I've never had writer's block, you know, not yet.
- **[02:39] Interviewer:** Excellent. Well, before you get too far ahead of this album already, let's talk a bit about your new one, *Outside Within*. It's either—I can't quite figure it out, because I think your press release says it's your 14th, but then when I looked on your website, it looks like it's your 13th, and then I saw something else that made it seem like it was your 15th. Do you even know which number it is in the catalog at this point?
- **[03:02] Graham Brown:** Well, actually, it is 15.
- **[03:06] Interviewer:** 15, okay.
- **[03:09] Graham Brown:** But the ones on the webpage—the ones I own the rights to... I did a couple of major album releases that I don't own the publishing to, so those songs are gone for me.
- **[03:16] Interviewer:** But still, 15 albums, even 13 albums, that's a body of work, that's a legacy, that's a catalog, you know?
- **[03:26] Graham Brown:** It's shocking to me, actually. I can't believe it myself.
- **[03:28] Interviewer:** I was going to ask, when you were first starting out, did you think, "Well, someday I'll be making my 15th album"?
- **[03:40] Graham Brown:** No, no, we all thought you'd be dead by 30, didn't we? But I just—my parents were both musicians, you know? We had a house full of music—my brother, my sister, everybody—so music was just around everywhere, you know?
- **[03:55] Graham Brown:** When I finally told my parents, "You know, I'm going to do this music thing"—and everybody else in the family did as well, but they all sort of gave up and got real jobs and stuff, and I was the only one of us who wasn't smart enough.
- **[04:10] Interviewer:** Were your parents professional musicians, or just musicians around the house kind of thing?
- **[04:13] Graham Brown:** They were professionals until the kids came along back in Scotland, in Glasgow.
- **[04:21] Interviewer:** Oh, so they must have been. Were they encouraging when you said this is what you wanted to do, or did they go, "No, no, no"?
- **[04:25] Graham Brown:** No, they were very encouraging. They just said, "It's hard. It's hard, there's lots of ups and downs and heartbreak and all the usual stuff parents would say about anything." And it's like, "Yeah, you know," I was a very together teenager, like, "Yeah, okay, whatever, I'm still swinging, so yeah."

- **[04:47] Interviewer:** Well, no kidding. I mean, for you to rebel, you would have had to become like an accountant or something.
- **[04:54] Graham Brown:** Oh god, yeah. That'd be—I don't know how people... I'm glad people do it, I don't know how people can sit and work in an office. I've moved my office out to the van, or something, get a camper, drive around on tour.
- **[05:07] Interviewer:** In your office, yeah.
- **[05:08] Graham Brown:** Yeah, I can't. It's not for me.
- **[05:15] Interviewer:** But still, so 15 albums. Do you remember all the songs on your 15 albums? If I woke you up out of a sound sleep and threw a title at you, would you be able to, you know, pick up your Telecaster and play it, or is a lot of it a blur?
- **[05:28] Graham Brown:** No, you remember it. It's funny because a friend of mine that lives in LA now called me; he wanted to come up here and do some shows—old Brilliant Orange band, like from 1984 or something like that, 83-84. And I'm like, "No, let's do a little reunion." I'm like, "What do I want to do that for? I'm going that way, I'm not looking back."
- **[05:52] Graham Brown:** He goes, "Well, do you want to come up and rent a space and we'll have a jam and have a couple of beers and have a good laugh and let's see how it goes from there?" You know, I'm not sure if these other guys are still playing or not that were in the band.
- **[06:09] Graham Brown:** But I thought about those songs. I thought about them in my head. I went, "I remember—I remember all the chord progressions well, I wrote 99% of them, and I remember all the words." Wow, bizarre! It's just like, as long as you get the first line, it just kind of falls out.
- **[06:29] Interviewer:** Are you—is your memory that good for everything else in your life?
- **[06:33] Graham Brown:** Yeah, my memory is pretty good. I can remember phone numbers from, you know, 60 years ago.
- **[06:40] Interviewer:** Wow, okay, I'll give you points. No senior moments yet, good for you. You know, bank account numbers, PIN numbers. You know nowadays, so many passwords and everything, like, I got it.
- **[06:57] Interviewer:** And in keeping with the guy who's doing this, I would suspect that if I asked you which is your favorite of all your albums, you would say this one.
- **[07:07] Graham Brown:** Honestly, honestly, honestly, I'm already on the next one, right? I know this record just came out and I'm very proud of it; I think there are some really good songs on there and the band played really well. My band is wonderful, you know,

the guys in the band are—we've been friends for a long, long time and played together a long time. I can just raise an eyebrow and they know what that means.

- **[07:36] Interviewer:** And one of the things that struck me about this album is that you recorded it—if this is not a slightly tall tale—it says that you recorded most of it in a single afternoon.
- **[07:51] Graham Brown:** Yeah, that's how we do all our records.
- **[07:55] Interviewer:** That to me is just remarkable, I guess. So what do people tell me?
- **[07:59] Graham Brown:** I just like, you know, the Beatles, all those guys, they used to go in and do like two records in a week or something. So no, I'm an old-school guy. I go in, we're prepared. When we go in there, we're prepared. We've been in our little studio here, we've tracked everything, I ran through the songs, I know all the parts.
- **[08:20] Graham Brown:** Even when I write these songs, I hear the whole arrangement in my head: where the drums come in, I hear where the harmony parts are, I hear everything, the arrangements. So I bring the songs to the band, the arrangement is done, and the guys just—I don't even tell them, "Hey, here's a new song." I just start playing and they're like, "Oh." And then we run through it.
- **[08:41] Graham Brown:** My first question is, "Do you guys want to pursue this song?" So maybe they don't like it, and they're always like, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah," or it doesn't work for me, and I'm like, "Great, forget about that one, here's another one."
- **[08:55] Interviewer:** So you are not precious about any part of this process, it seems.
- **[09:02] Graham Brown:** Well, I put my heart and soul into it, definitely, I'm precious that way. But art is an art form that should have rubber edges to it, that's how I look at it. I mean, you know, I know I kind of fall into that roots rock thing, but if you listen to all my albums, there's lots of different stuff on there that's not necessarily that kind of thing.
- **[09:29] Graham Brown:** The solo stuff I put out was the same thing—they're all kind of folky songs that the band didn't really want to do, so I just went, "Okay, well, don't worry about it, I'll do my own thing," which is fine.
- **[09:40] Interviewer:** So, I mean, when you say you recorded it all in a day, does that include vocals and solos and everything?
- **[09:47] Graham Brown:** The setup, yeah. So basically, we went into—the last 10, 12 albums have been this way. We've grown into a large room; everything goes in—10:00 in the morning or so, everything's miked up, you know? And maybe by 2:00 in the afternoon we're starting to actually track, we've got the sounds.
- **[10:10] Graham Brown:** So we lay down bass, drums, bass guitar, electric rhythm guitar, a lead vocal, and either another rhythm guitar or piano, or organ, whatever it is. Lay it all down.

- **[10:30] Graham Brown:** And then, we used to—I used to play my solos at the same time, just like a live performance, right? But I found lately it's like, "You know what, let me just get the rhythm, we're going to nail it," unless there's like a really ripping sort of in-your-face, wah-wah screaming shit happening, I want to be moving with the band and we all have eye contact and we're all within 10 feet of each other.
- **[10:57] Graham Brown:** And I got a little—I don't like being in a booth to sing, and all the engineers hate that, but I don't really give a shit. I don't want that. I put a little screen—a little clear screen in front of me—and you can hear some bleed from the drums and stuff into my vocal track. That's rock and roll, but yeah.
- **[11:14] Graham Brown:** And once everything's on, you don't really notice it. A lot of this record, and a lot of the records, the lead vocal track is the live track. Even the one before that, we did in Edmonton in a five-hour afternoon, we laid down everything—like I said, everything—and then I came back later, or Rob and my other guitar player, him and I came back and added harmonies later because it was just too small a room.
- **[12:04] Interviewer:** But what if you took like, oh I don't know, some crazy amount of time, like three days to make a record? What could you do with that? You could have like a double concept album or something.
- **[12:16] Graham Brown:** Well, *Highwatt* is a double album, there's 18 or 20 songs on there, and I actually recorded 27 for that record. And that's all in a day? Yeah, all the beds in a day. And then I came back—usually what, like in this record, we did all the beds in a day and the lead vocal tracks, and I came in on the Sunday just added some acoustic guitar on some songs and some shakers, and I redid a couple of guitar solos.
- **[12:53] Interviewer:** And is this just because of the fact that, like you said, you have it all in your head, so there's no need to screw around or experiment or jam or do anything else but get it out of your head and onto the tape or into the box?
- **[13:06] Graham Brown:** Partly. We've done experimentation and stuff at our own little home studio where I'm at right now, and I love to sit in there for weeks, because I get really turned on being in there. I mean, every record, at least two songs on the album—usually ones I wrote while I'm sitting in there recording down the tracks.
- **[13:32] Graham Brown:** On this record, I kind of drove across some railway tracks on the way to the studio and I started thinking about how we used to hop on the trains, yeah. I grew up in St. Albert, Alberta; I'd hop on the trains from the West End drive and take them into the west end of the city of Edmonton, pop off. And I started thinking about that—it was fun, jumping off the trestle onto the train tracks—and this whole song just came in my head.
- **[14:03] Graham Brown:** And I was like, "Pick my guitar, figure it out, say, 'Okay, it goes like this,'" showed it to the guys, and get two takes, and the second take is on the record.

- **[14:14] Interviewer:** That is—I mean, that is where having this band that you've got really comes in handy. It's crucial, I would think, to be able to do that.
- **[14:20] Graham Brown:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I've jammed with lots of people through the years, and lots of people, you know, are absolutely fantastic, but I don't want to have to tell somebody what to play. You know, unless I have a really particular bassline, I want to hear something like—rarely, because John is such a fluid and great bass player, like, I don't have to tell him anything. All I tell all the guys in the band is what not to play. Just like a little less of that.
- **[14:57] Interviewer:** I love that.
- **[14:58] Graham Brown:** Just a little less. Even me, we all overplay, sure, and still do it, and I'm still smacking myself later and going, "Ah, I should just let that chord ring, why'd I hit it again? I shouldn't have."
- **[15:07] Interviewer:** And you've kind of—you say you've kind of always recorded this way, like right from the first album?
- **[15:13] Graham Brown:** Uh yeah, pretty much.
- **[15:15] Interviewer:** I mean, that's really a unique approach to it. I mean, because, you know, again, not to say that you should be Axl Rose and sitting in there for six months trying to perfect a bass drum sound or something, but your sort of ultra-paired-down, minimalist, fast, go-in, have-it-already, get-it-done—it's not really the way most people work. Where do you think that comes from in your makeup?
- **[15:43] Graham Brown:** A couple of reasons for that, Darrell. I mean, it's partly because I can't afford to go in there for a week or two weeks at a time, I can't afford it. And I suppose that I've already experimented, like I said earlier—trying to write the jazz chords over top of whatever, just think, "Can I take it over here?"
- **[16:03] Graham Brown:** It's like, you know what, the song is the king, song is the boss. The song is taking me right down that road, so that's where I have to go. And if it means my guitar track sucks or doesn't work, get rid of it. There's no guitar track in this? Let the other guy play the guitar. Whatever's best for the song.
- **[16:21] Graham Brown:** I mean, there's things on this record even—we lay stuff down like, "Yep, pull the drums out here, we're not going to have any drums here. Yeah, bring them back in over here." You've got to have a flow, and, you know, arrangement is everything, and that's what I really enjoy.
- **[16:37] Graham Brown:** Actually, I would love to sit down and record, produce other artists, that'd be wonderful. I've tried, I've asked a few people, "Hey man, I'll come produce your record, sounds great," I go, "What, yeah, I got some connections if you can make a decent record for not a lot of money," but it's never happened yet, so it's okay, I'll just keep doing my own, that's right, keeps me busy.

- **[17:03] Interviewer:** Are—is—are most of these songs fairly new, since you seem to just kind of be able to produce them at a moment's notice?
- **[17:09] Graham Brown:** Yeah, well, it's funny you say it, because in the last four or five live performances, a lot of people around Vancouver, you know, know who we are and come see us quite often, and they were like, "Yeah, Graham, you write a lot of songs, you're probably writing one right now."
- **[17:34] Graham Brown:** And I was just like, "You want me to write a song right now?" And this one, a friend of ours is like, "Yeah, write a song right now." Okay, what key do you want? And they're like—and I'm like, "How about A, for key of A?" So I just started playing this thing and it had a bit of a bird's feel to it, and I just made some—and I said, "Robin, my piano player and I also do an acoustic duo thing," and it was during one of those duo sessions.
- **[18:12] Graham Brown:** And then some put a bridge in there, like, "Okay, okay," so I went to an F-sharp minor to a B-minor to E to a D, turnaround back to the A to the root, and just like—and Rob looks at me like, "That's good." So that is the song now.
- **[18:30] Graham Brown:** And I did the same thing last weekend when I was out playing out in the Okanagan doing a solo acoustic show; I did two one-hour sets just sort of off the top of my head.
- **[18:44] Interviewer:** Has anybody ever tried to sign you to like a publishing contract? Because I would think that you—you know, you said you can't necessarily sit down and say, "I'm going to write a song," but they seem to come to you so fast that it would seem like if you sat in a room for a month and just did nothing but write songs, you would have enough to sell songs to everybody on the planet.
- **[19:10] Graham Brown:** Yeah, but they have to be good, you know?
- **[19:13] Interviewer:** Do you write a lot of bad songs?
- **[19:16] Graham Brown:** No, not really. But I every so often go through my song book of like 500 songs, and I'll go through them and I'll go, "That's a piece of shit," and I'll just—I'll rip it out, it's gone.
- **[19:29] Interviewer:** Just in general, do you think your stuff ages well? I mean, do you ever go back and listen to your early albums with a critical ear and kind of go, "Oh, that's better than I thought it was," or "Oh, I wish I hadn't recorded that"?
- **[19:43] Graham Brown:** Actually, I just rebuilt—well, I have some—actually, I hired someone to rebuild my whole website and put all the albums on there, so I actually went back and listened to all those early albums from the early '80s and stuff, and I just went—I was surprised, like recording-wise, but like, "Oh, that's a pretty good song, there's some good lyrics on that song. Wow, where'd that come from?"

- **[20:04] Graham Brown:** Yeah, I was surprised. So yes, I think they hold—time is not a problem. I think it'll still be a good song. A good song is a good song, whether it's—the Beatles done lately? Not much. Yeah, they held up.
- **[20:23] Interviewer:** So, I mean, do you—is it always just like new material, new material, new material? I mean, are you—if you're playing, you know, if you've got gigs coming up, are you going to be playing songs from *Outside Within*, or is it going to be pretty much all new stuff, or what?
- **[20:41] Graham Brown:** No, that's a new record, so we'll be playing pretty much most songs that—well, we like around here, you know? And when we're on the road, we're doing three sets, three 45s a night kind of deal, so I'll grab songs off just about every record. Oh, okay. And plus the, you know, a bunch of new ones, and some brand new ones that no one's even heard yet, or sometimes the band hasn't even heard yet, and they just follow.
- **[21:12] Interviewer:** So they are patient guys?
- **[21:14] Graham Brown:** Well, yeah. Well, I keep challenging. I'm trying to write a better song every time, and trying to improve my skills, and trying to keep it interesting, so they don't get bored. Nothing's worse than going to see a band and they're playing the same set you saw a week ago, same jokes, same—it's like, oh my god.
- **[21:36] Interviewer:** Do you—when you're up there, like for instance, if you're playing some of the songs off *Outside Within* at a show, are you liable to do like a Dylan and go, "Okay, we're going to do this one, but we're going to do it in F-sharp minor and it's a polka now," you know?
- **[21:52] Graham Brown:** Sure, guys can follow along with anything. But do you throw those kinds of audibles at them? I do in the studio when we're recording, I'll show them a song in G or something, and they're like, "Oh, you got it," they go, "Yeah, good, we're going to do an E-flat." I knew how long I was going to do E-flat, but I show it to him so when they go to E-flat, all they haven't got a chance to get too fancy, they're just hanging by their shorts. So I do that quite often.
- **[22:20] Interviewer:** So it's no accident you're wearing a Dylan shirt then?
- **[22:23] Graham Brown:** Oh yeah, sure, yeah. No, Bobby, I've seen him probably 40 times.
- **[22:29] Interviewer:** Okay, yeah.
- **[22:30] Graham Brown:** He even came to one of our shows down in LA where we were playing with—sadly, with Jeff Healey, great guitar player from Toronto who just passed away.

- **[22:45] Graham Brown:** We were opening for Jeff Healey at the Lingerie Club on Santa Monica Boulevard. And Dylan came because Jeff, their first album, they were covering a Dylan song, "Angel Eyes." So Dylan was there to check out the guitar whiz, and there's some opening band before us, and we're in the middle.
- **[23:05] Graham Brown:** And some guy's like, "Hey, I'm" —they weren't my cup of tea—he goes, "Hey, I'm the drummer from the opening band, nice to meet you. I'm Johnny Toronto." And I'm like, "Okay, nice to meet Johnny Toronto." And so Dylan's in the corner by himself, he's got a hoodie on and he's waiting. So he's seen our set, which is really cool, and I heard word later, I got a little note from our management was like, "Dylan loved your songs." I was like, that's really wow.
- **[23:35] Graham Brown:** But so this guy from John Toronto goes over and starts harassing Dylan, and I'm like, "Leave him alone, hero." But I don't know what to say to the guy, what do you say to Bob Dylan?
- **[23:45] Interviewer:** Yeah, nothing.
- **[23:46] Graham Brown:** So I say, "Just leave him alone, he wants to be left alone." The guy goes over there and blah blah, puts out his hand, and Dylan just got his hands crossed. He comes back and I go, "What'd he say? What'd you say to him?" He goes, "Well, I told him I'm Johnny Toronto, I was the opening band." And Dylan basically said, "That's good, why don't you fuck off now?" And he told—and then the kid's all mad, and I'm like, "What do you want him to say? He said Bob, for fuck's sake." So then he left, he didn't even get a chance to see Jeff Healey. It's all Johnny Toronto's fault!
- **[24:20] Interviewer:** Yeah, it was. So did you know Dylan was out there when you were playing?
- **[24:25] Graham Brown:** No, I didn't. I came off and I looked, and being a Dylan aficionado, like, holy Christ! I really—I wanted to go over and say something, but it's like, sure, what are you going to say? "Hey, I really like your music, man"? Like what? Yeah, no, there's nothing you can say to him that he hasn't heard from a thousand times. I don't want to bother the guy.
- **[24:47] Graham Brown:** I mean, even we're rehearsing in A&M Studios in Hollywood, and Neil Young was one door down, and I was trying to get in there. I'm thinking, "What if I just walk in there, pick up the guitar, and start playing? Either we can jam or he'll throw me out." But I couldn't get—like, I got nervous, I got in and then—security grabbed me before I could get any farther.
- **[25:12] Interviewer:** Like, I was really looking forward to it. Well, at least you tried.
- **[25:13] Graham Brown:** Yeah, I don't know, I think it'd be pretty intimidating to play in front of Bob Dylan if you knew, obviously you didn't know, but had you known?

- **[25:22] Graham Brown:** Uh yeah, no, you know what, that wouldn't have bothered me at all. No, I would have—I would have been jazzed about that. You know, give me—we did a couple of outdoor concerts here with like 10,000 people, it's like the more the merrier, let's let's—the other guitar player was too scared, it's like, "I can't sing," I'm like, "I'll take care of it, don't worry about it." Yeah, exactly, don't worry about it.
- **[25:51] Interviewer:** So is Dylan kind of your gold standard as a songwriter?
- **[25:56] Graham Brown:** Absolutely, yeah. Yeah, and Neil and Tom Petty. You know, Steve Earle is another really great songwriter. There's so many good songwriters out there. I'm just trying to write the best song I can, girl. And I try to deliver it in a way—I like to get, you know, the emotion across, or you know, so I want to—it's not like, "Oh, I'm going to put my emotion today," like I want to get—I want to get into the song. I know the song so well that I'm not even there.
- **[26:31] Graham Brown:** When we play live, I don't want to do any thinking at all. I just want to be playing, I'll be in that song and feel like I'm in the biggest set of headphones in the world. And when—and I'm always trying to hit that. Like when I play solos live, even on the records, they're first take, second take, I don't sit and figure something out, I just hold the tape, I'll feel something and I just wing it.
- **[26:56] Interviewer:** I wanted to ask you about your guitar playing, because you are an excellent guitarist, which a lot of singer-songwriters aren't necessarily. You know, the primary focus is the songwriting or maybe the singing or the lyrics or whatever, but you've got that other sort of arrow in your quiver. Is that—who do you look up to as a guitarist? Who are you sort of, you know?
- **[27:21] Graham Brown:** Well, I mean, grew up—obviously grew up listening to Hendrix and stuff like that when I was 14. I mean, I worked a summer job just so I could buy myself a wah-wah pedal, and I mean, I heard "Rainy Day, Dream Away" and I just melted. I just like, "My god, I want to learn how to do that."
- **[27:41] Graham Brown:** And you know, so I started putting bands together from grade six onward. And in my same school was Moe Berg from Pursuit of Happiness. Yeah, yeah, I know Moe. Yeah, Moe was a year older than I was, and yeah, so we both had our bands and play on the talent night circuit at school.
- **[28:03] Graham Brown:** But yeah, it was good. But the guitar players, I mean, I love Roy Buchanan and Jeff Beck. How can you not? It's not necessarily the kind of stuff I do, you know? I just consider myself a bit of a folk singer that bashes the G guitar a little bit, I don't think myself that much of a guitar player, but some people—
- **[28:23] Interviewer:** You're doing a pretty good impression of a good guitar player, I'll tell you.
- **[28:26] Graham Brown:** There you go, there you go, it's all new delivery.

- **[28:30] Interviewer:** Do you—I mean, do you play every day? Do you sing every day? Are you writing every day? Is it—is it that kind of a thing for you, or does it kind of go in, you know, when you need to do something, you're doing it?
- **[28:44] Graham Brown:** No, oh no, I'm picking it up every day. If not every day, if there's something I have to do or travel somewhere or do something, but it's not there. I mean, it's in my head, right? But I have a pad by my bed, I wake up in the middle of the night with songs in my head, like scribble, scribble, scribble, and then one morning wake up and go, "What—might write prescriptions or something."
- **[29:16] Interviewer:** Yeah, well, and speaking of traveling, you were just over in England right a little while ago?
- **[29:22] Graham Brown:** Yeah, yeah, like April, I think.
- **[29:26] Interviewer:** April, I guess so, I think so. So how was that? We like it there. Do they—you've been there before, do they—do you have kind of a following there?
- **[29:39] Graham Brown:** Well, actually, we sell most of our records really digitally, you know, and most people are buying digital stuff, and it's not really—Europeans still like to buy their CDs and stuff, and I bring CDs because albums is too much to carry, sure. And it's quite expensive to press those, and the fact that most people are buying digital kind of makes it easier for me.
- **[30:02] Graham Brown:** But no, the UK was wonderful. We had a pretty magical show in the Cavern—it's like two or three encores. And then Lennon's Pub across the street the next day, we had an afternoon show, and every show the band always puts on a good show, we always play well.
- **[30:23] Graham Brown:** And you know, the management over there, record distributors, like, "You guys ever have a bad show?" I'm like, "Why the hell would I do that?" No, I said, "No, we've never had a bad show. The shows were—we didn't climb the top of the mountain, but we were still pretty damn good."
- **[30:39] Graham Brown:** It's like, so any—we did the afternoon show at Lennon's Pub and we're packing up, and it's like, "Leave here, you're playing tonight." "Like, oh, but I have to be in Birmingham by tomorrow." "No, you'll be up—we'll get you—we'll get you a bus to get there." Like, okay.
- **[30:57] Graham Brown:** So they end up playing there in the day, then they invite us to stay, play the night, and then we were—next day, it wasn't Birmingham, it was then it was London, some downstairs club, some pretty famous club. And I hadn't slept in like 36 hours, and we did a live BBC recording session like with a live studio audience at that in between those, so it was like, it's pretty busy, three or four days, and it was a lot of fun.
- **[31:35] Interviewer:** Ironically, I was in Liverpool like two days before you played there.

- **[31:39] Graham Brown:** Oh, that's funny. Funny, it's a great time. Yeah, anyway, we're trying to get back there right now, I'm trying to work on—
- **[31:47] Interviewer:** You need a decent agent there now.
- **[31:51] Graham Brown:** But now it's a little bit different than the last time we were there, and now it's like, okay, you need to go through the agency. So I'm trying to see who I can get. Like you mentioned about publishers, I've like—I've tried to be in contact with music supervisors, publishers my whole career, I can't get anybody to open the door to me ever.
- **[32:11] Graham Brown:** It's like, even the radio, local radio here, I give them every album we do, and they're local FM stations: "Oh, great record, we're not going to play it." Of course you're not, it's got to be—
- **[32:25] Interviewer:** It's got to be frustrating though, you know, you've been doing—
- **[32:30] Graham Brown:** Yeah, it is, it is frustrating, yeah. I can't let it bother me or stop me before I do it, you know? I had a bit of a discussion with the program, the music director. I went, "Well, what do you—do you like the record, but you won't play it?" I go, "Well, I know there's two people that basically program all the station FM stations across the country, right? So what is it? What are you doing then? If you—you're just a mouthpiece, what do you—"
- **[33:00] Graham Brown:** No, he's not playing my record, so I might as well be honest with him. Yeah, what do you got to lose, right? Yeah, exactly. I thought, "Oh, maybe he'll take my track and I'll play my just for that cause." Anyway, he had no answer. It's like, "You're music director for what?" You know, they—sadly, DJs, you know that Tom Petty said, "DJ's dead."
- **[33:22] Interviewer:** Oh yeah, well I mean, you and I are I think around the same age, so we're old enough to remember FM radio in the '70s when it was kind of free-form and you could—you know, that's where I discovered a lot of music, and I'm sure you did too.
- **[33:36] Graham Brown:** Yeah, even into the '80s. I mean, my old band was on the radio all the time everywhere, our records are on over in the UK getting played, but not here. I mean, CBC doesn't play our stuff.
- **[33:50] Graham Brown:** It's like, you kind of go, "Okay, so you try, you give them the stuff. Here's the stuff, here's what we do, we're a pro band." I don't want to whine about it. It's like—it's unfortunate, you know, they play the same six, seven Canadian bands over and over and over again, and they're—and their songs are good, good for them, but it's not so good for me.
- **[34:18] Interviewer:** Yeah, no kidding. So how have your goals and your priorities changed over this time, or have they? Are you still just kind of the same guy you were 30 years ago when you started doing this?

- **[34:28] Graham Brown:** Well, a hell of a lot smarter, obviously. Not all musicians are—those are not, some are—some of my old bandmates are dead. I'm still a hardworking guy. I put my—I have an idea, I put my—I work hard at it, and no one can ever say I was lazy. So it's like—it's a passion for me, and I'm a songwriter. I don't understand, I have friends that have like, "Oh, I quit, I don't write anymore."
- **[35:08] Graham Brown:** Like, I can't. That's what I do, you know, whether I'm making a good living at it or not, I'm still going to be doing it. I just—that's what I do. And you know, I've—you know, as an independent guy, I think I've sold like 50,000 records or something, so it's not bad for a guy, you know, selling out of his trunk. So I'm not—I'm going to keep—I'm going to keep making records while I'm alive and above ground and want to, and it's still fun.
- **[35:42] Interviewer:** Do you have any goals other than artistic ones? One second, I got a little something, low battery mode.
- **[35:50] Graham Brown:** So I had low battery mode there. I get—you know, because I mean, obviously, you know, you spend your time, you work hard at your craft, you're obviously want to get better at your craft, that's a noble goal and the one you should have.
- **[36:01] Interviewer:** Do you—given what we've been talking about, about the frustrations of all the commercial side of things, have you given up on that sort of pursuit of those kinds of goals and just gone, "Screw that, I'm just going to do what I do, and if somebody wants to play it or buy it, or—"?
- **[36:21] Graham Brown:** Well, I've had that mindset since 1986, whenever we got—where we got dropped by Geffen after I lost the Geffen deal. I walked away from that record deal, you know? It was two or three albums, and halfway through the recording, I'm like, "This is shit, they're ruining my songs."
- **[36:40] Graham Brown:** And they threatened to sue me because I was the singer, the band leader, and everything. I was like, "I'm out of here," I grabbed my gear, went back to Vancouver. The rest of the band folded at some point. By the time, you know, three weeks later they came back, I already had another band, I already wrote another—I already had a couple sets' worth of new material.
- **[37:03] Interviewer:** Man, I would not—if I was in your band, I wouldn't be late for practice, because you know—
- **[37:07] Graham Brown:** It was never like that. I'm very kind to my band. But at that point during the recording of the, you know, major record deal, the first album, and it was there was shit happening, and you know, producer blowing a bunch of coke and stuff, and it's like, "What the fuck is this shit?" And then bringing in his friends to play guitar parts or singers and background vocals. It's like, we can—I can do that, why? This is my song.
- **[37:41] Graham Brown:** And it was tons of reverb, it's just like it drove me nuts. And that's, you know, at some point I'm sitting outside North Thompson Studios in the same

room that Van Halen did their big hit record, and I'm sitting there and I look up and there's a beautiful, beautiful full moon shining down, and Barbra Streisand and Don Johnson are walking in.

- **[38:02] Graham Brown:** I guess I must look pretty down, and I was thinking, "God, I got here, I have to walk away from all this shit, I can't do this shit." And Barbra Streisand's like, "Are you okay, son?" I'm like, "Yeah, my record company's just fucking me over." She goes, "Move on, get another one." It's like, "Yeah, yeah."
- **[38:20] Graham Brown:** Anyways, so I packed up the gear, and the show before that, like I was writing 90% of the songs, and the other guys—which band was this with? That was Brilliant Orange.
- **[38:34] Interviewer:** Oh okay.
- **[38:35] Graham Brown:** And still a great bunch of guys, I wish them all the best. And then the management wanted me to give a bunch of my songwriting royalties, split the royalties with the guys in the band. I said, "You know, I'm like, well, I wrote all these songs before I even met these guys, it's my song."
- **[38:55] Graham Brown:** And anyway, I finally caved, and I thought, "Well, fuck that." Okay, so and I as—even back then I was writing lots of songs, so a year goes past and we're on the road through the states and stuff, and the management—first of all, the manager came to me a year earlier, like, "Well, you know," I said, "I write these songs, not the band," and manager told me, "No, Graeme, you write the words, the band writes the songs."
- **[39:22] Graham Brown:** I went, "Oh really, okay." So I'm writing hundreds of songs, I'm not bringing them to the band. And a year goes by, and management and marketing people are like, "Well, you haven't brought any new songs to the band." I go, "Hey, I don't write songs, I just write words." And the looks that they're—thunk daggers at me.
- **[39:51] Graham Brown:** And then, surely like a week later, I'm just like, "I'm so out of here." So I came back home and I went to the law library, I studied on entertainment law a bit, I realized the record deal I signed was absolutely horrible, and they took all my publishing, and it was—I was a fool, even though my lawyer told me it was a good deal, it wasn't.
- **[40:09] Graham Brown:** So I started my own record label, and the last 15, 14 albums that are on my website are all on my own record label. So every time I sell one for 10 bucks, I get 10 bucks.
- **[40:21] Interviewer:** So you know, it sounds like you wouldn't even want to be associated with that part of the business now anyway, right?
- **[40:29] Graham Brown:** No, I—you know, I love to—no, they've got the machine going. It'd be nice to get in there, it'd be nice to have someone in a bus drive me around,

take me to where I need to play, go play, get up, get washed, have a nice hotel, go someplace. I wish I had that, but it's all recoupable, right?

- **[40:52] Graham Brown:** So you know, it was \$5 for a staple on my—on my contract, they sent me five bucks for the staple, exactly. Yeah, it's like going to the hospital in the States, you know, \$100 aspirins and you know.
- **[41:05] Graham Brown:** But I don't want to—I'm not—I don't want to whine about that stuff. It was just a learning experience, I think about it, and it made me who I am today. And to answer, I guess, to go back to answer your question, do I still have aspirations for those things?
- **[41:22] Graham Brown:** Like I said, since '85, all I've wanted to do was be able to be a working musician and be able to pay my rent, or your mortgage, whatever you have, and have, you know, have a few guitars—and all my stuff is old and vintage, it's because it works great, sounds great, why—I don't need anything new.
- **[41:37] Interviewer:** Yeah, why would you?
- **[41:38] Graham Brown:** Yeah. And this guy always comes to our shows, "Don't you have any new guitars?" It's like, "Yeah, okay, I already—" it's some guy named Al, I already know who he is. But, and also who—nobody has new. I mean, you know, it's like you go go see anybody, go see Dylan, he's not playing a new Stratocaster, no, because they're all garbage.
- **[42:02] Graham Brown:** Go look at Neil Young, he's got the old Les Paul, the old White Falcon, you know. You've got what—I've seen you with like three different Telecasters, I don't know how many you might have.
- **[42:12] Graham Brown:** I got three. I got that one, I got, you know, this one, yeah, the sunburst. There's a sunburst and a blonde one and a black one. The black one is sort of my main one, I've had that for 40—since 197—1975, I think.
- **[42:31] Interviewer:** Did you have—have you read Rick Emmett's book? He wrote a whole book about—he had a custom Telecaster made and it's kind of about making this guitar and the album he made with it, but it's also kind of a love letter to the Telecaster.
- **[42:44] Graham Brown:** Oh really? I know, I'll pick it up.
- **[42:47] Interviewer:** Yeah, it's very interesting. And what—I mean, you're obviously a Telecaster guy. What is it about the Telecaster?
- **[42:55] Graham Brown:** Well, you can hammer nails with these things and they stay in tune. It's just—I tried a Strat for a while, but because the knob—the volume knob is right here, right, every time I—I kept turning myself off. And I—I you know, I rent one, and then I borrow one off my other guitar player for a while.

- **[43:15] Graham Brown:** I was like, I went, "You know what, I'm a Telly guy. Jesus, I've been playing Tellies for like 50 years, why am I trying something different?" I just felt uncomfortable.
- **[43:21] Interviewer:** And you're in good company. I mean, Jimmy Page, Roy Buchanan, you know, I mean—
- **[43:28] Graham Brown:** Yeah, Townsend, Townsend, yeah. It covers—you know, I play through a Hiwatt, an old Hiwatt amp I've had for forever since late 1979 or 1980 or something. But, um, yeah, I said, you know, I got a nice Fender Tweed as well, a little small Fender '50s something Tweed.
- **[43:55] Graham Brown:** But, um, when you hooked them all up together when we played the Commodore last time, it's like it was godlike. I hit box, I put them in, I mixed them together, just like—my god, it was just—the headlining band actually was the Road Hammers, they came flying out onto the stage, sound check, go, "What the fuck is that?"
- **[44:16] Graham Brown:** And I'm just like, "That's good." They're like, "Whoa, like the tone, I can't even explain how to—" Oh, sounds like—looks like my battery's—is my battery starting to fade? All right, brother, well, I will let you go because I've taken up enough of your time, but this has been a—this has been a lot of fun.
- **[44:33] Interviewer:** Oh yeah, thank you for your time.
- **[44:34] Graham Brown:** Oh, my pleasure. And I look forward to the next 15 albums, which I'm guessing will be coming in rapid succession.
- **[44:44] Interviewer:** Well, there will be another one pretty soon. I'm going to get in right away and track all these 20-odd new songs I have. Kind of pumped about it.
- **[44:52] Graham Brown:** Excellent. Well, thank you, and spread the word, I appreciate it.
- **[44:57] Interviewer:** All right, my pleasure, man. Have a good rest of your evening.
- **[45:00] Graham Brown:** You too, take care, man. Okay, bye.
- **[45:01] Interviewer:** Goodbye.

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