

Interview with Dan Call of The Villains

Written by Sally Rosen - OFC Contributor

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[THE VILLAINS](#)

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OFC met with Dan Call, bassist and vocalist, of the Villains to chat about the band's newest album VELOCITY, Dan's views about the upcoming election and social media.

THE VILLAINS--Sean McNally (drums and vocals), Dan Call (bass and vocals), Magno (guitars, keys, and vocals), Michael Wilkes (guitars), Jimmy James "JJS" Schmitt (guitars and vocals)—recently released the lyric video for "Cadillac," the second single from their sophomore album, VELOCITY, which is out now via Toucan Cove

"Cadillac" is the follow-up to the first single, "Rainy Day Girl," which appeared on the BDS Triple A Indicator Most Added chart and was spun on such stations as WJCU (Cleveland), WOCM (Ocean City), KSPN (Los Angeles), WCBE (Columbus), KBAC (Las Vegas), WFIV (Knoxville), KRVM (Denver) and many others.

VELOCITY was produced by Stan Lynch (former Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers drummer, who also co-produced Don Henley's INSIDE JOB) and Billy Chapin (who has played guitar for Backstreet Boys and has produced music for Edwin McCain), and mixed by industry veteran John Kurzweg (Jewel, Creed). In the spirit of acts such as The Band, The Eagles, and Fleetwood Mac, THE VILLAINS utilize different singers and styles for a cohesive, but aurally interesting mix.

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Interview took place May 15, 2012

OFC: Congratulations on your new album VELOCITY, out now via Toucan Cove Entertainment Universal Republic. Can you talk about the making of the new album?

Dan: Sure! I'll make a long story very short. I have a friend, co-writer, guitarist named Peter Stroud who currently plays with Sheryl Crow. We were writing songs for the new record, and he had been going back and forth to L.A. to do demos for Don Henley. The producer on that Don Henley record is going to be Stan Lynch, and Stan was in The Heartbreakers as the drummer. Now he's been with Don Henley for the past 15 years. I was like "Wow, man. I would love to do a Villains record with a Heartbreaker like Stan or someone like that." He was like "Yeah, that'd be cool. Great." Then about an hour later, I get a call going "Hey, man! I'll pass the phone to Stan tomorrow—he was going back to L.A." So about two weeks later, I started getting these strange emails, and they were from Stan. We wanted to take advantage of what we had done on the first record Just Another Saturday Night and try to get something out there—I think that was in 2010—but then once we knew that we could work with Stan, we wanted to take our time and make the best record we could. We had done that, thankfully it got done, and here we are.

The single "Rainy Day Girl" is very impressive in the way that it's also on the listening channels of American Airlines. The vocals and harmonizing are very much reminiscent of the Eagles. Is that an influence from Stan Lynch or is it just coincident that that's the style of the Villains?

Well, it's kind of both, especially for this record. We backed up a country artist, not as the Villains, for about three years—2006 to about 2009—we all knew each other for years before too. It was always a lot of singing. Magno has a fantastic voice." Me and Jimmy James Schmitt sing a lot too. It's just kind of a natural thing with us. With the first record—I tell everyone the story—that was really just originally my song demos for publishing and from TV and movies and stuff like that. Once we got a little way into it, it turned into a record. It just naturally progressed, and I think Stan coming in—especially working with Don Henley, he produced the comeback record Hell Freezes Over—he wanted it to be a vocal-based record, and we were totally up for that. Now we're singing whether we want to or not.

I understand you enlisted some top shelf songwriters for VELOCITY as well—Tom

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Douglas on the country side who has written for Miranda Lambert and Tim McGraw. Then Richard Feldman who has written for Eric Clapton on “Behind the Sun” and Joe Cocker. Were you going for a classic rock country crossover with the album?

That’s a very, very good question. I don’t know that we were actually going for anything. We knew what we wanted to do for sure: to make a really great American rock record—not rock in a hard rock sense, but just the classic style. It was funny because a lot of the reason that Tom Douglas and Mr. Feldman are on this record is I had asked Stan early on in the process of recording—we were going back and forth on songs—and he was brutally truthful. I said, “Look, man. You had number one hits like “Last Worthless Evening” with Don Henley and all this stuff. So, if you have any songs that are half-finished or just starting, just send it and we can work with it.” So, two days later, I get 30 to 40 songs. I go through them and heard “Rainy Day Girl” for the first time, “You Don’t Know a Thing,” and thought, “Well, these are really cool, but they need to be Villain-ized.” I didn’t know at that point who the writers were. I didn’t know that “You Don’t Know a Thing” was recorded by Ringo Starr in ‘93. I didn’t know anything; I just liked the basic demo. He (Stan) went back and started asking writers, and I started changing things around, and things got approved. It wasn’t until later that I figured out Tom Douglas was involved. Of course, when I did, I was like “Holy moly! This is unbelievable.” It was really cool, and we’ve all been friends ever since. I hope to keep writing with them from here on out. It wasn’t purposely planned—The Villains don’t really do anything like that. We get together, and what comes out is what comes out. It’s real. You’ll always get us; it’s never designed to do anything but move you.

I’m seeing a little bit of a trend—back to the country rock—I was just at Lady Antebellum this weekend and they played a cover of a Rolling Stones song, “Honky Tonk Women.” They had Darius Rucker who was rock pop and crossed over to country, the Eagles of course had been on tour with the Dixie Chicks last year. Do you think country rock is coming back or is getting reinvented as a genre?

Dan: I think so. It is interesting to watch. We’ve all spent a lot of time in Nashville, we recorded Velocity in Nashville, we were based out of Nashville when we were touring. I think it’s definitely making a comeback. It’s sort of like—I don’t know how to put this—it’s basically Nashville country pop rock for all intensive purposes. It crosses over. It’s really mixed in, and now it’s just part of the fiber. It really just depends on how country you want to get. If you think the pedal steel will work on a song, then we’ll put it in, but we won’t do it just to get that sort of sound. At the end of the day, if you believe in your tunes and people like them and they happen to be country rock or country Nashville or whatever it is, then you’ve done your job and everybody’s happy. There’s no doubt about it that country rock is definitely something that is growing. Absolutely.

The album artwork is very whimsical with cartoons, circus characters, and the cannon. How did you come up with the design?

Oh, man. It was really fun. We waited until about halfway through the recording process to start talking about the name of the record, and of course everyone had ideas. Some people thought it

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should be “Cadillac,” which is one of the tracks and “This is Nowhere,” which is another one of the tracks. Then out of nowhere, our drummer Sean sent an email. He was like “There’s this word that kind of intrigued me.” It was “velocity.” We talked about it and were like “What can we do with that? When you think of velocity, what do you picture when you think of that?” And a bullet firing out of a gun, something to that effect. Then it turned into the human cannonball. Then we started seeing 30s and 40s videos of town fairs where they would shoot the guy out of the cannon. We wanted to retain the lady on the cover from the first record to keep the theme going. It just turned into “Why don’t we make her the guy getting shot out of the cannon’s assistant?” Nobody may get it, but for us, the whole concept is having the cannon about to be fired by this beautiful girl who’s kind of looking off into space. But when you open the record up, the other piece of art is after the cannon has been fired, and he’s laying on the ground in front of it like it misfired. It’s sort of like you feel like you’re ready to go off into space with this hot chick, and then all of the sudden you’re down on the ground and go “Uh oh, what do I do now?” It was kind of funny and fun, and it just grew from there. It went from a bullet coming out of a gun to this. We love the circus atmosphere, whimsical stuff—it works with us. Everything just fit. It was really kind of easy, and everyone’s like “Wow, it’s so intricate.” It was just the right people, they understood what was going on, they understood what we were saying, and that’s how it happened.

What do you think about the whole social media culture? Is it superficial or is it genuinely embracing? What are you doing to engage your fans?

Dan: It’s overwhelming. I think, for a lot of people, it’s this monolith that they kind of understand. It’s funny—I was having a conversation the other day about Myspace. Remember when that was a big deal? It wasn’t that long ago, and I remember some person saying it was going to be the end of the record industry because then everybody will be able to put up what they want and there will be no middleman. My first thought was “Well, that’s great. The only problem is things are going to get overran with stuff, and at the end of the day, the cream is always going to rise to the top. In context, it puts you in direct—it’s immediate; it’s right there. It’s not like the 70s where you had to camp out in an arena and hopefully you might. You can directly get the information. I don’t think that’s a bad thing. I do think that in the totality of it, a lot of people don’t understand it. You’d think after 10 years of it, they would. I think it’s a good thing. I love talking to fans and people who dig what we’re doing, and it’s a great way to do that. It’s definitely a good way to get your vibe across. I’m all for it. It’s a new platform; you either embrace it or die. That’s the truth

Taylor Swift or Sheryl Crow, who would you chose to tour with and who would you date?

I’m going to say Sheryl because I know it would be fun. Now, dating? Can I say Sheryl Crow when she was Taylor Swift’s age? Taylor Swift is a very, very attractive young lady; she’s just not my style. I would definitely say Sheryl. She’s my style.

Election year is coming up and it's not uncommon to see bands and artists expressing their political views and even endorsing and campaigning with candidates. What do you think about musicians who use their popularity to extend their political agenda?

They have a right to do so; they're American. I'm not big on that. It's not something I would endorse. You never say never. I can't say that we wouldn't endorse a certain candidate down the line. It kind of gets old, the people who have that sway and say what's on their mind. A lot of them have not lived in the shoes or are not living in the shoes that a lot of people are living in. To me, it's kind of silly. I hate to say it, but 95 percent of the musicians and actors who politically don't really know what the f*#! they're talking about anyway. They have every right to do it. If you want to, go ahead and knock yourself out, but we're here to connect with people. We're here to try to move them with music, and I don't care where you're from, what you do, what color you are. None of us do. We just want you to enjoy it. If we can connect with you on that level, why bring something that's just going to push someone farther away? I just don't see the point in it. Once again, just knock yourself out. I will just remind you of the Big and Rich song, or maybe it was just Rich, for the McCain campaign in 2000, "Raisin' McCain." That was an awful, awful song. Sometimes those can come across as very silly.

What do you think about President Obama's statement on gay marriages?

I think that it was out of necessity. I think that anybody that thinks that he didn't already feel that way towards gay marriage is naïve at best. I'm all for it. I think as far as a social issue for people our age, I think it just crosses those lines. It's a cool thing, was it a political thing? Probably, but everything is. I'm in favor of it, and I'm happy you said it. I think it's a good thing and all the friends that I have that are gay are really fun. And the president, the most powerful person in the world, said that and it moves them, and they have every right to feel moved. I'm totally okay with it.

On the touring front, I see you're opening with Little Feat for a few engagements. What are your plans for the rest of the summer?

We are working on a couple of different things as we speak. We are going to go back up to Nashville and do the Billy Block Show again at the end of June. We were looking at a tour right now for July, beginning of August. You never want to say anything until it's set and confirmed, but we are going to do more days. We'll see the first couple weeks of August, and we have a couple festivals that we're doing right after that, like Winterfest in Pensacola, the Grant Part Festival in Atlanta which is always a big deal...So there's a lot of stuff and we're booking more as we move along with the promotion of this record. As soon as I know more details, you'll be the first to know.

Do you have a personal message you'd like to impart to your fans?

Wow, these are good questions! Give me just a second to think about this. Buy the record now! I don't want to eat Waffle House. Nah, I'm kidding. To our fans, we can't thank you enough. You

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guys are the whole reason we do this. Of course we love making music, but more than that to know that it connected with anyone and moved them is a very humbling thing. We can't say any more how much we appreciate our fans. We love seeing you guys when we're playing, and it means everything to us to just take the time and come out and have a great time. You bring the beer, we'll bring the hot dogs, play a little music, it'll be great.

In touring news, the band will be heading out with Little Feat later this summer, mixed in with some headlining and festival dates of their own. Check out THE

VILLAINS at any of the following tour stops:

DATE	CITY	VENUE
Tue 6/26	Nashville, TN	The Rutledge
* Fri 8/3	Atlanta, GA	Variety Playhouse
* Sat 8/4	Carrboro, NC	Cat's Cradle
Sat 8/25	Atlanta, GA	Grant Park Summer Shade Festival
Sun 8/26	Atlanta, GA	Grant Park Summer Shade Festival
* Sat 9/8	Cincinnati, OH	PNC Pavilion (also Delbert McClinton, Dirty Dozen Brass Band)
* Mon 9/10	Little Rock, AR	Revolution Music Room
* Tue 9/11	Tulsa, OK	Cain's Ballroom
* Thu 9/13	Denver, CO	Bluebird Theatre
* Sat 9/15	Flagstaff, AZ	Orphuem Theatre
* Sun 9/16	Los Angeles, CA	El Rey Theatre
Sun 9/30	Pensacola, FL	Deluna Fest
* Shows with Little Feat.		