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INTERVIEWER: Jacqueline Contré
CAMERA OPERATOR: Dean Whiskens
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Q: How do you describe where you live?

FW: It's an ecodevelopment. We live an eco life. We grow our own fruit and veg, we take our energy from a woodchip burner, and we use only what we need. We collect our water and we use all our water. It's cheaper to live here because we don't use as much energy.

Q: Could you tell us a bit about you and your background before you came across the company?

FW: I started playing guitar when I was nine years old with my dad in church. My dad taught me everything I needed to know about reggae and calypso music, and within two weeks of playing them in church with my dad I decided to learn about what was called music. It isn't the world music you know now, it was worldly music, music outside the church that we weren't supposed to play. But my mother and father made the mistake of buying me a pocket radio so I listened to Clash, I listened to rock, I listened to all kinds of devilish music. Then I took that to the church and played it, and they loved it. They didn't know where it came from, and they ? the spirit. That's how I started off playing guitar. When I was in my teens I took what I learned at church and performed it for some of the teachers at school and one of the teachers taught me how to play the blues. Then I started playing assemblies, and from assemblies I played in university bands and touring the different forms like Arabic music, flamenco, classical music, anything that was out there. That's basically my background in music – I just kind of follow what's happening and steal from it, steal bits from each music. I'm pretty quick at, if someone says, have you got a bit of flamenco, have you got a bit of this you can use on a song, I can bring it out, because I've traveled and I've learned and studied it.

Q: Did you have previous experience with singing and song writing?

FW: As a songwriter, I think mainly when I was at school I wrote love songs, lots of love songs. I was into the punk thing at the time and I was into groups like the Police and catchy little songs, so I wrote in that style. I was in a punk group called Naughty Thoughts. The guitarist was Paul Raven ?, so I did that for a while. I just followed trends in music and stole from it all. Did I answer you? What was the question again?

Q: The question was about your song writing experience.

FW: So ya mainly love songs, and some political songs, some early political stuff I wrote around the '90s. There was a lot of that around then. I was a black man growing up and feeling angry. That's when I first started to write, was to get the anger out of me. I think I was angrier than my mom and dad. We were a Christian family so we were looked after very well, fed well, I was spoilt, but there were all these conditions. I rebelled, and that's when I started to write songs.

Q: How did you come across Banner?

FW: There was a guy called Terry Lily and he played double bass with Banner back in the day, and I was interested in jazz music. I'd just come back from Spain, I was playing flamenco and I thought, I need to come back to my own blues and jazz playing. I met this guy called Terry Lily and he played jazz and was a great bass player. He taught me how to analyze and play jazz, and we jammed a lot. He played with Banner and ? about Banner. It was a Cuban appeal, the Irish Club, Birmingham, Moseley. Terry invited myself and Kath, my wife, to that fundraising appeal. There was a guy there, I didn't know who he was, his name's Dave Rogers. Terry came over to me and says, Dave wants to talk to you. I said, I don't know who he is. He said, Banner is looking for a guitarist. It was that night at the Cuban appeal that I first met Dave Rogers. The way I met him was kind of surreal, to be honest. Terry had told me that there was this guy looking for a guitarist and he was in the building. I didn't know who he was but I assumed ?, because you could see him getting closer and closer to me. I'm

at the bottom with my wife and Dave is about 100 metres and there's a guy and his ? is this side and his ? is, then all of a sudden he's here in my face. He says, my name's Dave Rogers, I'm looking for a guitarist; would you mind auditioning for Banner Theatre? The first thing I said to him was, no I don't audition. Not being cocky about it or anything, but either you want me or you don't. That was my mentality, because of everything else I'd done in the past I could just dive into it. He said, do you want to audition? I said no. But Terry must've said some good things about me, so he wanted me to be in Banner and he gave me an audition date. I kind of ignored it, to be honest. I totally ignored Dave Rogers and Banner Theatre. The night before he rang me up and says, have you looked at the audition tape? I was like, yes, just told a lie. But I was doing some work with the Liverpool ? at the time and I was with someone called Surinder Sandhu, a ? player, and we were doing this album together. So that was like, yeah, I think I'm gonna be famous now. Dave Rogers, who's he, kind of thing? So there was this interview that I had to attend, so the night before I played the tapes and thought, I can't be bothered. I think I've got it in my head now, and I know the chords that would work, but I can't keep playing it over and over and learn all the words. I'll just go to the interview. But what I did, because I didn't have all the material, I said to Dave, oh listen, and I turned it around. Paula was there and Sam and someone else. They were firing questions at me and I was answering back. I played the songs and I said, well have you ever thought of doing it this way? I just changed it quickly. No we haven't, actually. Then I said, do you actually play instruments yourself? What if we have a jam? I taught them how to play the blues and I taught them new chords they could use, and I took over the interview, to be honest. That's when I met Banner. I left thinking, I didn't really play their tunes but they played mine; I might never see them again. I got a phone call about three hours later saying, if you want to, you've got the job. That was my introduction to Dave Rogers and Banner Theatre.

Q: Do you remember when it was?

FW: It would've been 1998, because that's the year I joined Banner I think, if I remember.

Q: Is it shortly after that that you had the interview?

FW: Well I met Dave at the Cuban thing and then the interview was possibly about two weeks later or a week later.

Q: What show did they audition you for?

FW: The first show I did with Banner was the show called Free for All; that was an NHS show. Then I did the show with Sophie as well, Sophie Partington. So Dave and Sophie took the lead role. From what I remember back then, it was a lot more cabaret movement in it, and I was a musician in that. I didn't really have a role or a cabaret role or anything until six months later when they got me to do little things. I thought it was stupid but I did it. They talked a lot about stage presence and you had to like jump out of your shell and not be frightened of who you can be. That person isn't you, it's just a role you're playing for two hours. You don't take it away with you, it's not you. The mistakes aren't yours because you're not that person, you're on stage in character. So Banner has taught me a lot about stage presence.

Q: Who do you actually do?

FW: From what I remember, the person that was directing was Maggie Ford, if I remember correctly, but there's been so many shows I might be wrong. But I think it was Maggie Ford. She was pretty good actually. I've never done acting; I'm a musician. I'm like, oh my god. I tried to analyze how TV people did it. Maggie Ford, her English is quite clear, she thinks like that and speaks like that. . . This is totally not what I want to do. I said, well why can't I just do it like a black guy? She said, that will do. So I managed to use black influences in the first show, because I was comfortable with it. I think after that and since then I've always used those characters as black references rather than Shakespeare. I can't do that at all so it's, ya man. My dad's an old black man so I can go into it, cuz I've seen that. I've had the experiences of black culture and I can use that in Banner Theatre.

Q: Do you have specific examples of where you've used that experience for a character?

FW: There was a thing, I don't know whether it was Free for All or the show after that. I can't remember what it was called.

Q: The show after that was Black and White.

FW: It was after that then. The line is, in 1917 the British took Iraq, God save the queen and the Union Jack. I went, in 1917 the British took Iraq, God save the queen and the Union Jack. I could do that, so I managed to use a black voice where it wasn't really needed, because I could get away with it. It was good and I could do that.

Q: Don Bouzek talks about you specifically when he refers to the way Banner stages people's voices and how it embodies experiences that may not be ours, but how you in particular were able to deliver a poem by a Kurdish poet. Does that ring a bell?

FW: That's probably, in 1917 the British took Iraq, God save the queen and the Union Jack. It's probably that; that was the thing that he first saw.

Q: Clearly, you don't need the Iraqi experience.

FW: No you don't need that, you just need your own experiences. We all sometimes the same thing from a different angle, depending on where you're born or your culture or what you see on the news; sometimes it's the same thing. So being able to use my own voice, I couldn't be someone from Iraq, it doesn't make sense. Well some people can do it, but I can't. I have to be myself and I have to see it my way. I could hear my dad saying those lines, so all I had to do is change, it could've been the British took Jamaica, my dad could've said that.

Q: What were your first impressions of Banner when you got involved in Free for All?

FW: Firstly, it's all about the music for me so I don't know if I had any preconceived ideas. If I could play music and those people I'm playing with are on the same level, then I'm happy with that. Plus I'm from a working class background. My dad worked at Goodyear and he

always said, go and vote, do this and that. Banner felt okay. I remember the interview though, I don't really think I'm as political as they... I know I'm black, I know what I've felt and seen, so it's easier for me to talk about those things. I had to actually quickly learn about the issues to get into Banner, because it wasn't just about me anymore. I mean it's never just been about me being black, but sitting there with Dave and Dave talked about people's struggles and I thought, he we're a struggle family, aren't we? What was good about that was it was never just me on my own anymore. It was a group of people who were giving me ?? we'd tour and do a message together. So Banner became part of my family, I became part of the Banner family.

FW: After Free for All it was Black and White in the Red. You would've been very central to that. What do you remember about it?

FW: Black and White in the Red, I suppose Dave Rogers is white and I'm black. I don't think Dave could see all the angles unless he had a black person in it. With me being black, I could actually communicate with black people there, and they would say things that they wouldn't otherwise say to a white person. Black people would not have said as much in the interview process had I not been there. We share the same culture, we share the same foods, our sandwiches were the same. So for me it was intensive doing it because I didn't know how nasty the system could be towards black people, especially the fire brigade, because they're there to save people's lives, to put fires out. So you get that institutional racism and there were things I had to learn about that. I've had people tell me about razorblades being put in their shoes as part of the initiation thing that you have to do. It's all been recorded, it's there on the screen about someone above them in rank putting their willy in someone's mouth, just hovering it and people laughing, and taking it out. So to come across that and to have to learn that's what happens, I know it happens to a lot of people, but people forget about these things. For instance, they were saying that everyone had to go through these processes to be in the fire service, and that's a culture. But what if you come from a different culture and we don't do that? We just don't put penises in people's mouth and put glass in your shoes and have a laugh, and if you can take it you're in and if you can't take it you're out. We don't do that. So I was a bit, fucking hell man, this institutional racism seems a bit bad. But they kind of cover it over by saying, this is what we do for you to become a

part of the first service. I've had to learn and I've had to deal with that. It's easy for me to walk away from interviewing them, but that was hard to know that these black people had gone through that. That's going to happen for a long time; it might never change. But I can actually walk away from it. It was tough.

Q: What was it like to be part of that show?

FW: It was interesting, because it was the first time that Dave allowed me to be totally myself. Before that when I first started with Banner we didn't use jazz chords, we didn't use certain chords, because it was folk music. So it was the first time, because of black culture, I was allowed to use reggae and some jazz chords and this and that. So for me it was a great experience and it meant that I managed to get my first say in Banner and Dave listened to what I said about the music. So I enjoyed that bit but it was still difficult performing to black people, like I said, because I could walk away from it. It's easy to walk away from something, but to deliver a show and then have black people come to you after the show and say, this really upset me, and some of them had nowhere to go afterwards, no one to talk to about how they felt. They told me they were really upset, and they didn't have a support system, so that was upsetting. But because of that show every show that I did after that Dave opened his mind to my playing and to my thinking. So for that reason Free for All was a great show, but it came with its burdens and problems. Well not problems, but it was just the racism thing, that I've always been able to walk away from it if I can. But when you're in Banner Theatre you're facing it and you're learning about yourself and about how other people deal with it. In the process of recording them it's about their feelings and it takes you deep into yourself sometimes.

Q: Were you part of the researching and writing of the show?

FW: Free for All? Free for All I had nothing to do with; I was just a musician. But with Black and White in the Red, me and Dave worked 50-50, so it was both of us. Dave is what I call the three chord trick man – he's got three really good chords and his songs sound very similar. I've got a few other chords that I throw in, and that changes the way he delivers his songs. It'll be, oh let's not go there now, I like what we've done ??? In Black and White in

the Red I use a lot of black culture but also punk, because punk and reggae are kind of linked. There was a song, the Clash, a punk band, developed a sound because they listened to reggae. So a lot of punk bands back in the day learned a lot of the chords and things from black people, from blues. Then a reggae sound comes up, and a lot of it was based on their knowledge of reggae music. So I decided to write a punk song, and the song is the Black Suit of Blame. I'm not sure if Dave wanted to do that at first, it was not folk. I said, just go and do it, mate, just do it and see what happens. Try it. We got a tour and I said, will you sing the Black Suit of Blame? So it's been an interesting process writing with Dave and to have him lead me to a direction with these chords and have him be interesting in what I think. So that was 50-50 all the way through, that was us, even though Dave did come up with the songs really and I came up with the music, but I managed to change his words by saying, why don't we make the chorus longer? Well you could use this word and you could use that word. So I managed to luckily put a few words into his songs and give him ideas for chords. It's a great experience.

Q: So your work with Dave was around the music and the lyrics.

FW: Ya, for me that's why we've got on because it's just about the songs for me. It's about hearing his words and then, so that the show doesn't sound the same all the way through, giving him choices – have you thought about using a bit of ska, have you thought about using rock? Before that I'm not sure, even though he was into listening to jazz and blues and other forms of music, I don't think he used them in Banner. I know there was the show before me with the African guys, that was interesting.

Q: They Get Free Mobiles? Yes, two former asylum seekers were in that.

FW: That's right. When you can get that collaboration with people outside England, that was pretty good.

Q: How do you feel about the evolution?

FW: I feel great about it. I'm a bit of a music nerd, to be honest. I'm a music geek so I have lots of music in me, I have lots of styles. Someone's got to use them. I don't know why I've decided to learn all this music and styles, it's just my interest. One thing my dad said to me – anything that anyone in the world can do, if they can do it you can do it too. So I've learned lots of things and I've not mastered anything, but that's me. I'll learn lots of things but not master one thing; I just know bits. Sometimes I'd like to master one style, like classical, but I'm not supposed to. I'd never meet people like Dave Rogers, Surrinder Sandhu, and all the people I've collaborated with if I'd stuck with one form of music.

Q: Do you have any views about the multimedia form that Banner uses for their shows?

FW: Views on the form? I think the form works. I enjoy writing songs with Dave on issues but none of it makes sense unless I see the actuality first. So the fact that we've recorded someone delivering a message about what they've bring through is really great for me because I can then absorb that information and use it in a song. So it makes sense to me. Everything on stage is related. It took me a while to get into it. The first few shows I didn't know where I belonged, and there have been times when I didn't know where I belonged in Banner. You write a fantastic song and it's like four minutes long, and then you have to break it up in sections and then you have to fire it up again and then the energy link is gone. So sometimes it's difficult to do that for me on stage, because I like to see a song all the way through. So I do find that sometimes it jars with me. We have to show the actuality because it makes sense to show it. It's asylum seekers' words, refugees' words, teachers' words. This is what's really happening, not what we think is happening. This is what's really happening, so it needs to be said. But I've got this chord and then it's. . . So the first year it was difficult but then I got used to it; I've got to stop and I'm really enjoying this music. But it does work.

Q: How do you know it works?

FW: Because usually at the end of the show we talk to people and they tell us what works and what not. So it's not what I say but it's what we're told works by the audience. Sometimes they'll tell us that maybe the song should've had two pieces of actuality rather than seven pieces, because there's too much happening. How do I know if it works? It's if

the audience gets the message and talks about it at the end, then it's working as far as I'm concerned. Usually at the end of a show people want to talk to you. In the early days I used to go straight to the bar and have a few beers. I don't drink as much nowadays so there's time to listen to people. Sometimes people need to get things off their chest because they've been upset about it, and they'll talk to you for three hours about it. You have to be there for that as well.

Q: The song Too Much Pressure – who wrote it and when was it written?

FW: It was written by Dave and it was written for Black and White in the Red.

Q: I always associate it with you, not Dave.

FW: No, I've only written one song in Banner even though I've had a lot to do with a lot of the songs, the way Dave writes the chorus, I've had a lot to do with that and the construction of the song. Dave is a folk singer and I play folk music, I love folk music, but there are other formats to songs that I've had to show him and teach him to break the song up. What was the question again?

Q: It was about Too Much Pressure. But you sing it, don't you?

FW: No, Dave sang it on the album itself. In those days it was Dave's voice. With me with Banner I was a guitarist and I'd help him construct the song, but he was the singer. It wasn't until, I mean I did sing, when I took control of the stage I can't remember. But more recently it was Rise Up. The way that came about was when Don came over from Canada. Don was always more interested in not just Dave being the singer, but he used Fred or whoever. He used Charlie, Charlie was the techie and he had to go up on stage for that. What song was that, the one me and Vince sing? War In The Streets, ya that was Charlie at first, Charlie was singing that. So that song's been with Banner for a long time. The way that came about is I think Dave wanted to sing that, and it wasn't quite sounding quite right. I had a song that I wrote a few years that had "war in the streets". . . A lot of the music that I've been involved in with Banner, some of the songs I've written myself but I never got around to using, I'd

give to Dave. So that would be in sections like “war in the street, that’s me. On another show we did, I can’t remember the show, and I’d sing “steal away, steal away, haven’t got time to stay”. Well that’s a negro spiritual and I took that straight from church. So the colorations have been folk and whatever cultural song I can bring into Banner. The song that I wrote, Don came over to the UK and we had about a week of writing. The song said, and I just recorded my own album and Dave wanted me to sing that because he heard it and liked it. Dave and Don were like, can you write this song in 20 minutes? Twenty minutes to write a song. So I went downstairs and I just scribbled, and after 20 minutes there was a song. I thought, they’re going to hate this song because I’m not using any reference, because you just can’t do 20 minutes. Dave’s pretty good at that, he can weave a song and put everything in it so by the end of the song you know what’s happening. I find something like that difficult because my song writing is more on the pop side. So I had to go downstairs, and within 20 minutes I’ve written this song. I thought, it’s not really looking at one issue, it’s looking at the overall issue, them and us. I just sang it in front of Dave and Don because after you’ve been away for 20 minutes we all came together back in this room and it’s what have you got time. You kind of pull out your folder and you don’t want to sing it but it’s your turn and you go, alright then. They’re like, we love it. What part of it do you love? So that’s the only song that all the way through I’ve written in Banner, but everything else has been me and Dave, mainly Dave as the writer.

Q: In Black and White in the Red, was it just two of you performing?

FW: Yes it was, it was two of us. I think Jilah came in the next show, and that’s due to the refugees and asylum seekers. Jilah is a violin player, but as far as I remember it was me and Dave all the way through.

Q: And then Migrant Voices.

FW: That’s when Jilah came into it.

Q: Any memories of that show?

FW: Migrant Voices, ya. Jilah, what a power back in those days. Me and Dave started to look at the songs, look at refugees and asylum seekers. But when Jilah turned up it seemed to make sense. Not only that, but the yin and yang in Banner was right – there wasn't just two men anymore. Having this woman, that was so powerful. She was a strong character, massive. And we could play together. She understood everything I played – gypsy jazz, Greek music, Kurdish music. So as soon as our minds popped together the songs changed and we became more aware of the culture through the music. Where's Jilah exactly from? Well she comes with that, it's in her music, so it made the show make sense. It would've have made sense if it was just me and Dave. I know jazz and I know some R&B music, Dave knows folks, so that fit in there doing those tones and those quarter notes. Then to play reggae with those chords and notes and everything just made sense. To me she was one of the biggest things to happen to Banner when Jilah turned up. The dynamics in the group with me and Dave and how we wrote and the way we looked at the music. The actuality was interesting then just to have real sound rather than recorded sound. I'm not saying anything against recorded sound, but to have someone playing on the actuality, to be able to watch them and feel them, is brilliant.

Q: Is that something that you were able to do in further shows?

FW: Well in every show that Jilah was involved in we did that.

Q: Were you involved in Burning Issues?

FW: Yes, I was.

Q: Was Jilah there as well?

FW: She was, in Burning Issues she was. If I'm getting any of this wrong I'm just getting old now, I'm 50.

Q: And then Wild Geese?

FW: Jilah was in that, because we had an album and she' on the album, so she's in it.

Q: Could you talk about the process of making an album?

FW: What's interesting about making an album is you have to learn the chords and everything properly. When you're on stage there's an element of, not rock star, it's not about look at me but it's about playing an instrument and letting the music jump out of you. But when you're recording an element you have to contain your energy directed into this microphone. When you're on stage I can see Dave, I can see Jilah. If Dave makes a mistake I can flip it, I can say something, we can have a laugh about it, we can tease the audience. None of that when you're recording an album, so you need to make sure that you learn your lines properly. But the process, you actually really get into the song because you're putting it down forever. You're putting it down not just for a moment. When does a musician get to see himself on stage? You don't, I'm always playing outwards. But when you're recorded you can analyze yourself, you can be critical of yourself, it's a different process and you try to bring the best of you out into that microphone. You've only got that second. It's almost like being nervous and containing yourself and only speak when you're told to speak, and making sure you say the right thing at the right time. You can only do that if you learn the songs properly and you're confident enough as a musician to do it. It's a process of you learn the songs, you meet in the studio, you put your parts down, fragments of yourself. You don't know what you feel like because it's a fragment each time of yourself. You leave a fragment of yourself and then you hear from these fragments what the person behind the controls is doing with you. They're like a puppeteer putting you to the left or the right, taking some of your lines out, putting someone's lines where your lines were, and changing the performance to make an album. You have to give yourself to it and give birth to it after that and let go of it and say, well that's the project, that's what I'm here to do. Then it goes from that process then of us getting a rough mix and then listening to it and saying what sounds need to be tweaked or should we put in there or take that out. Then it gets to the last process where it's mastered and then it comes back to us and we all sit there listening to it thinking, are we happy with that? This is going out to the world next week, this is it, we'll have to agree on it. That's an interesting part of recording because basically you can only, I might not like my guitar. I'm usually okay with most of it, but say I don't like a section

of my guitar and everybody else likes it. I've got to give in and that's it, that's the way it's going to be. If everyone's happy, that is as perfect as it can be, not for me but for everybody else. And to be honest, I've played on albums and recorded where I've heard a section of myself and not liked it, and changed it and wished I hadn't. The brain says you can do it like this but you want to do it like this, like that, it should be like this. A recording is set forever so you have to really learn to give birth to it and move on.

Q: So why do a DVD and CD in the first place?

FW: A lot of people that come to the Banner shows want to take home some Banner, because it doesn't end after the gig. They know what we're talking about, they know what we've said and they're making sense of it, but they want to take something home to make sense of. They usually come to us and say, is that song on the album? Which song? That one, and they sing it to us. We go, no, but there's other tracks and they're just as good. You have to then sell it to them. So they're fired up because it's the information and they react to that song, it means something to them. They've opened up to it and they want to take that song home with them, they want to take some Banner home. That's why we make the album, and I suppose it's for sales and it does help the Banner cause. It pays for whatever we need, some bits of paper in the office and all that stuff. But usually it's because the person at the show wants to take home Banner Theatre.

Q: There was a show called Strangers in Paradise Circus which then became They Get Free Mobiles. Did you get any more people, or was it still just the three of you?

FW: No, I wasn't in those shows. That's when I left Banner to set up my greet card company. But what I did, I was doing musical director in it, so I directed those shows musically but I didn't appear on them.

Q: Was the first thing you directed musically Strangers in Paradise Circus?

FW: I think work with Dave is directing. He's got the words and he . . . The question again?

Q: I'd forgotten that you'd left at that point, 2006 or '07?

FW: Ya, something like that. I think it was 2006.

FW: But you still retain a link with Banner.

FW: I still retain a link because I've learned to direct Dave so in doing that Dave... When I say directing, to ? ideas. I think because of that, and that friendship, when I decided I need to take a break from Banner and do something else I think he liked what we did and said, could you do some of that? Actually on some of those songs I wrote the chords with him, so I knew what was happening with the chords and the progressions. So it was easy for me to direct, I wouldn't say easy, I'd say to be able to close my eyes and listen to it, and if something jars on me I know it's not right. Saying let's change that because it jars me didn't feel right. If that's directing then that's what I did, I just said, could we just try it like this. Or let's try it four ways, let's take one of those. If that's directing, then that's what I did. It just didn't feel right and I said something, and I got the title director because of that.

Q: Who did you direct?

FW: Tshepe, Jilah, Dave. . .

Q: Did you direct Zirak as well?

FW: Ya. When did Zirak come into it?

Q: I can't remember exactly.

FW: I feel like I've been on stage with him but maybe I haven't. He did some music and I did some stuff with him on that. But I'm sure I've been on stage with Zirak. He might've done stuff before that but then joined later, I think that's what happened. Then from Zirak Vince took the place of Tshepe, because Tshepe was a keyboard player and Vince took Tshepe's place. All that is because I left, so all these were kind of replacements.

Q: When did you come back as a performer? And why?

FW: There's lots of reasons. One of the reasons was the recession came up so the card company was going through some rough times anyway and Dave was asking me to direct still. Vince was saying, why don't you come back to Banner? I was like, I'm going to sort out my affairs and everything else. I just went through a bankruptcy as well with the card company. But it was Vince that said, why don't you come back to Banner? You're directing, you know it so well, they would like you, why don't you come back? After a while there were voices saying, why don't you come back? I think Dave mentioned it, but it wasn't until Joyce mentioned it. I was chatting with Joyce. Dave was upstairs, I was sitting downstairs and she said, ????. I'm, ya sure. Ya, Dave would like that. I thought, okay. It was as simple as that.

Q: What show was that?

FW: Was it Fighting the Cuts? Ya, it would be Fighting the Cuts. In my mind I really never left Banner, because I'm always doing something with Banner. So even though I've left and come back and I'm in a new show, I've still seen other shows and been involved in them.

Q: So what was it like coming back? Was it the same as before?

FW: Different, totally different. Banner from being Dave joking on stage and Jilah repeating it and getting excited, it was Vince and Laura. They had a different outlook to the way I looked at chords and songs. Vince is a great musician and I think he would get bored if Dave was playing three chords, so Vince is quite strict like that. Laura, if you make a mistake she stops you. So the exploring is different, oh divas. I mean that in the nicest possible way. How am I going to find myself if I can't explore? The face of Banner had changed in the way people do things, and you have to accept that. So coming back into Banner I had to go, okay my position is here, ? is here and they're quite strong too. This is how they want to do it. We did a gig and I was shy coming back into Banner because I hadn't done any singing for a while and there's these two. Obviously they've been touring with Dave, they know

everything about the way the songs go. Why have they called me back, cuz they've got each of them? One gig I can't just go uh, this is not me. I go la-la-la and got told off by them. So I just kept doing it and I ? myself until I started to find myself. You can't find yourself if people are telling you who you are, so you have to rebel. That's what I did. I just went, okay then I'll just do it and then you'll just go, ya, that kind of thing. So it took me a while to find myself in Banner because of the dynamics and also where other people thought my voice would fit. We've got our voices, you have to sing this way. But I learned a lot from them as well, a different discipline with a different set of people and you have to fit in and learn how they work. After a few months I was okay with that and then I could say, well this would work as well, these are the chords I like.

Q: Was the direction you were given not helpful? I don't know if there was a musical director at that time.

FW: No, there was no music director whatsoever. No stage direction, nothing. It was just, this is what's been happening, you fit in, you change things slowly, you put yourself in there slowly.

Q: So you joined a show that was already going.

FW: Yes, the show was already going. Not only that, Vince and Laura had been working and collaborating with Dave so a new thing was happening. I had to fit into that new way of doing things.

Q: Can you talk about The First of May Band?

FW: I'm trying to remember. There was always a band but The First of May Band feels more recent, even though it's been around for a while. Jilah was in it so it's got to be over 10 years old. I think whoever booked us didn't want the actuality and everything, they just wanted songs, so we can do that. It was just the three of us singing songs all the way through, and I think that's how The First of May Band came about, but don't quote me on that. I remember

that flyer because I remember I didn't quite like the way I looked on it. That's something else you have to learn to live with, the way you look on flyers.

Q: Tell us about the work of the band. How different is it from the show?

FW: Am I talking about how it used to be in The First of May Band? Well the thing about being in The First of May Band is that it is a band. No actuality. Maybe in the past there've been one or two slides or something, but there's no actuality. So it's the three of us and we introduce the songs and then sing the song all the way through, with solos, and we dazzle the audience with our music. It's the time we get to show that we can really play our licks and lines and get them to dance and move with us all the way through the song so they get to know us. The audience never quite knows you with a Banner show, because you're up on the stage and everything else. At the end of a First of May gig, because you're seen on the way through, they really feel they know you. So the relationship with the audience is different as well. But I think what's good about it is that it has a beginning, middle and end, and that's it. It's not better than a Banner show, it's just different. It's just that's your conclusion – there's your song. I'm looking at you again, they're engaging you all the way through the show. There's nothing else but you, your words, your eyes, and you learn something about yourself as well because of the focus. When I play with other bands, when I'm in Blues Guy and my guitar and someone else shows up, but the three of us together keeping that audience for an hour or two. And you know the other people on stage and you feel really secure and safe with these people. You feel like you could go anywhere with them because you're together on stage in that moment delivering a message for one and a half hours. It feels totally different to having actuality and stuff and sharing the actuality in words and something else. It's just you, the three of you for an hour and a half delivering. And you get to know people, you kind of watch their faces. You get someone that smiles at you, ? you can tell. You can tell things. You can see that person, I wanna be friends with you. You can suss the room differently, whereas you can't suss that with the actuality because you never quite look at the audience, you always think about what comes next.

Q: Does it also mean that people don't come to you to talk about issues at the end of the concert in the way that they do after a Banner show?

FW: They do, they talk to me just as much but this is different, over at the bar. The difference is that at the end of The First of May Band if you play in front of people and they're watching you, making eye contact and getting to know you, they will approach you at the end. And where do you go? You go to the bar and continue. So with The First of May Band usually you get a few more beers in, whereas with Banner you might not get any beer, you might get a cup of tea. It's a different kind of gig.

Q: What about the performances you do at a rally or in the street – is that different again?

FW: Ya being on the street is totally different because it's the feeling you get from it. I can explain it. You're waiting for something to happen because there's nothing happening, or there is something but you're waiting to be a part of it. Or you get into the Banner van, you get there before the rally, you set up, then before you know it you can see people turning up like droves coming towards you, so you make something happen. They're watching you know that you're going to make something happen in a minute, and you're watching them come towards you knowing that you're going to have to make something happen in a minute. We're a bit twitchy and nervous and then first chord, first song, you're awake. It's totally different at a rally – the way you move, the way you become part of the audience. It's not really a stage; it is but it's not. The way you work with the audience, the way you can communicate. If you're on stage you can totally leave it. It's totally different. The way you organize your presence is totally different.

Q: What do you have to do when you're at a rally?

FW: Most of it is the anticipation. You can sense everyone's in anticipation. It's like a buzz over people's heads, what's going to happen next? They're expecting something like this amazing thing to happen or what's going to happen. Who's going to turn up? All these questions, all these things are happening. It's usually outdoors so there's an outdoors feeling. I can't even explain it, it's just very powerful, it's just totally different. They're not really coming to see you, they're coming to be a part of something and you're there to be a part of something. That's what you're there for, to be the same as them and all a part of this

thing. It all comes together like a jigsaw that you're part of this thing. Whereas when you're on stage they pay to see Banner Theatre, they pay to see The First of May Band, you're a part of something, a greater thing. It might be greater when ? a part of something.

Q: How do you maximize the impact of the message when you're in different types of shows?

FW: There's different processes; at the end it's the same thing. You're waiting your turn to say something or to deliver something. It doesn't matter where it is, the way you get there is different, the way you wait for something to happen is different. But when you engage with the audience or people who are saying the same thing, the difference is outdoors when you're outdoors you might have to jump around a bit more. When you're at a venue people sit down and watch you. At a rally or march people are doing stuff so you might have to move around a bit. You might have to really present yourself on stage more theatrically. I tend to get into it because it's easy to look at a tree or look at something else or to talk to each other. There's a performance you have to deal with, if you know what I mean. But it's still you. The message is still the same, it's just that you have to tweak it a little bit more, depending where you are. You can feel that by the way you engage the audience. Like I said, if it's a venue they're paying to watch you so they're going to be staring at you. Even if you do nothing or you're preparing to say something, you can feel them looking at you in anticipation of what you're going to say. That's kind of eww sometimes, if you know what I mean. But when you're outdoors it feels different. You feel like it's more rock and roll, it's more trash, c'mon and get them, it's all about that, you stir them up. That doesn't always work in a venue all the way through. But when we're outdoors at rallies and things we can do that, we can be a rock band. Dave turns into a ? and becomes a different character, just because you can with a microphone. He gets into this ? where he uses his body, which he never does in a venue, he's more concerned about people watching. But outdoors, different character, all of us are a different character. Same message, we just know that we have to do it a bit differently to keep the attention of the people on us.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to contribute?

FW: No. I've got lots of secrets. Banner has been an amazing journey for all of us. Things are changing, there's a lot of stuff happening. I get worried about Dave, I get worried about how we can do ???. I wouldn't say worried, because he's just going to go on like a Duracell battery anyway. I could tell you lots of things about traveling Canada, the fun stage of Banner where it's off stage and we've got three weeks in Canada. I'm just smiling at the stuff I could tell you.

Q: Any particular memories?

FW: To be honest, when I started with Banner I was a lot younger and I was a bit of a rebel to be honest. I did like to have a drink, and Dave ? about that. He wasn't too bad, to be honest. He'd tell other people off but he didn't tell me off. We had this rule of no drinking. But I was young. Touring and after show drinking with people, playing guitars, being loud and brash and party atmosphere – that was great. It can't go on forever, we're all getting older. But I have fond memories of Jilah and Sophie off stage, getting to know people off stage. Some great times. Banner is that, it is a family. So a lot of the things we could talk about, like camping together and all that stuff, is kind of private. But there's a lot that you could talk about.

Q: And a sometimes dysfunctional family?

FW: Sometimes very dysfunctional, very dysfunctional.

Q: If you could change anything about Banner, what would you change?

FW: If I could change one thing it would be that Dave Rogers is getting older. I'd hate to call him old because he's still got the energy and everything else, but he's getting older and things are changing in his life and his family life. There's things that we've talked about putting in place younger people and other things that we've talked about that didn't really get listened to. I think looking at it now, if we'd talked about it we'd be in a better position. Dave's got to sort things out at home, we all know what's happening. But I feel like if we'd put things into place before he could relax. But he can't. His brain is triggered, he is Banner. I

would change it so that he could, but it's hard to say change because that's the way he is. Nothing else I would change about Banner, nothing else. Banner has gone through developmental stages, some of it I've like and some I haven't. But once I've engaged in the changes and put myself into the changes, change with the changes and then change the changes to suit me. I had to change everyone to know that I'm still here. So I wouldn't change too much.

[END]