

## “Celebrating The Wins,” My Conversation with Gena Britt and Dani Flowers

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The band Sister Sadie isn't a survivor; they're a thriver. Originally intended to be a one-off -- because they thought it would be fun to show at The Station Inn in Nashville in 2012 -- they sensed the music they made was too good to be a one-night stand. Others took note, too. Gig offers came in, then an album, then a Grammy nomination. This success was followed by the departures of founding members Dale Ann Bradley and Tina Adair, losses of talent that might cripple a lesser band. But not Sister Sadie. They retooled with new members, who brought fresh sounds and fresh ideas to the band, and in so doing, they defined themselves not as the band “that used to be” but as the band “that is and will be.” This is my conversation with founding member Gena Britt and with Dani Flowers before their show at the Blue Strawberry in St. Louis.



**Keith Dudding:** Gena Britt and Danny Flowers of Sister Sadie, I last saw you up at the Minnesota Bluegrass and Old-Time Music Festival in Minnesota last August. How have things been going since then?

**Gena Britt:** Things have been going great. We've been touring a lot. We kicked off the year on January 2nd and recorded a brand new album in about five days, so we're excited about working up new material and getting back out on the road.

**Me:** When will the new album be out?

**GB:** We're not exactly sure on this new record. There will be singles released ahead of the album release later this year, hopefully.

**Me:** Now, we've been hearing the single of “Touch of Grey,” your cover of the Grateful Dead tune, recorded live at Del Fest. That's just out recently, right?

**GB:** Yes. We did that live at DelFest last year. And we just found out not too long ago, actually, that was going to be included on the album, and so we're honored to be on there.

**Me:** Now, when you say the album, is that a DelFest Live album?

**GB:** It is for sure. Yeah, there's a lot of great artists. It was just an honor to be included on it.

**KD:** And why “Touch of Grey”? I mean, I know you've covered other material before, but that was sort of like-- (Gena gestures towards Dani) -- you're pointing at Dani here.

**Dani Flowers:** Yeah, I'm going to be so honest with you. None of us are really Deadheads. We do all appreciate, you know, the musical contributions of Jerry Garcia, the Grateful Dead. But our manager, Ariel Rosenberg, is a huge Deadhead, so he's been trying to get us to do some Dead tunes for a while. And then this recording sort of presented itself. All the artists were honoring the Grateful Dead at DelFest, so each of us did a song during our set. And we just kind of dove in. We just were on the road, listening together in the car, going through tunes that we thought, you know, we either related to or that we could pull off. And this one was, we were pretty unanimous about this.

**KD:** Would you give us a brief origin of Sister Sadie? Because 2016 at The Station Inn was supposed to be a one-off gig, is that right?

**GB:** That's right. It was actually December of 2012. We got together, Deanie Richardson, the fiddle player, and I got together with some friends of ours, female friends that played music, and we just thought it would be a fun show to

get together at Christmas time, just to kind of get together and do a show together. And then from the first note we played, it was ... we kind of all looked around at each other and we were like, "Okay, this is pretty special." And then we started getting phone calls to do more shows and it kind of evolved on its own. And here we are, it's 2026, so it's quite a few years later, and here we're still ... we still are, Deanie and I, the girls in the band call us the "OGs."

**KD:** Was there a moment like, "Are we calling us a band? Is this a thing now? Is that what we're calling it?"

**GB:** Yeah, we weren't sure exactly what we were going to do. We thought, okay, we actually called it a "special project band" to begin with. And we didn't want to do that many things because we all, at the time, there were a lot older women in the band than there are now. And there are so many other things that we were involved with. I had smaller kids than I do now, and I didn't want to really make a commitment to be a full-time band at that time. And then just like I said, things just kind of organically started happening. We got a call from a record label to record an album and then we got a Grammy nomination. We got invited to the Grand Ole Opry and we were like, "What if we really tried?". And that's kind of where we are now. We're kind of giving it 100% now.

**KD:** Dale Ann Bradley, you mentioned, was the lead singer and Tina Adair also in the band. Both have since left because they had solo careers before and they're concentrating that now. Did their departure ever threaten the band as a performing unit? I mean, did you allow for that or was it kind of like, "Well, what do we do now?"

**GB:** Yeah, that's a great question. You know, the original band was Deanie and I, Dale Ann, Tina Adair and Beth Lawrence. And all of their departures ... when someone leaves a band and you bring somebody new in ... it brings change. Of course, there have been times when we've had departures that we were like, "Okay, we've had a really good run. Do we want to keep doing this?" And Deanie and I kind of look at each other every time and we're like, "Oh yeah, we got this." So, but yeah, we do think about who's leaving and how hard it might be not to replace someone but to reconfigure the band. And it's been a great thing with the new people that we've brought in now. We have songwriting abilities that we may not have had before. We've got instrumentalists that ... you know, Rainey, our mandolin player now, was named the Momentum Musician of the Year at IBMA this past year. With each change we bring, we embrace it and we work forward. And I think it's just ... it's a great thing right now.

**KD:** Well, let me throw this to Dani, since you're, no offense, you're one of the replacement parts. How did you come to Sister Sadie?

**DF:** It's funny, I've known, aside from Katie and Rainey who joined after me, I've known everybody in the band for a long time. I've known Deanie for twenty years this year. I've known Gena for almost twenty years as well, probably like seventeen. And I've known Jaylee since she was like 11 years old and she's 25, about to be 25. We've all been friends for a while. And in fact, on the first Sister Sadie record that was nominated for a Grammy, Sister Sadie 2, they recorded and Gena sang a song that I had written, so they've always come to me for tunes and I've always been, you know, a huge fan. And so I think they just, they had a vocalist to replace at one point and they gave me a call. Deanie literally phrased it, she goes, "I need you to do me a favor." And I was like, "What is it?" And she said, "I need you to join Sister Sadie." And I was like, "Done. What else? What else? What's the favor?"

**KD (trying to be funny):** "I'm not helping you move, but I will join your band." You mentioned you're from an hour east of here. Is this Sister Sadie's first St. Louis appearance.

**GB:** It is. We've been wanting to come here for a long time, and this is our very first time in fourteen years to play in St. Louis, I think.

**KD:** Well, glad to have you. The first time you play a new room, do you do anything different, anything special, or is at this point a stage is a stage is a stage?

**DF:** I feel like we try to treat each stage as "a stage is a stage is a stage," but there is a little bit of a difference between playing like an outdoor festival for people who are there to see multiple bands versus a theater or a setting like this where we're, you know, we're on the bill, so they're here to see us.

**KD:** And sold out too.

**DF:** Yeah, which is crazy in St. Louis. But the thing about a place like this, the Blue Strawberry, is it's very similar to the Station Inn, which is where the band started. There's tables to sit, to eat, to hang out, and it seems to be, this is my first time here, but just looking around, it's very much a listening room. Ee really enjoy playing places like that.

**KD:** Bluegrass used to be initially, you know, exclusively an "All Boys Club," reflecting the of times. Gradually the door opened and women... they knocked the door open and made their way in. As a banjo player, were all of your early influences, all your role models men, because there weren't other female banjo players? Or were there ones that I just didn't know about?

**GB:** I had a lot of male role models that I looked up to on banjo playing, but one of my biggest role models was a female and that's Lynn Morris. And I loved her so much. I wanted to be Lynn Morris because ... just her. Her business sense, the way she played. There are very few people in the world that can play banjo and sing lead at the same time. She was one of them. And just admired her because of that. She's just the kindest human being also. A very big influence for me was Lynn Morris.

**KD:** And now I assume that you're probably a big influence and a role model for aspiring young banjo players who maybe didn't see somebody who looked like them on stage before.

**GD:** Oh, thank you. That means a lot to all of us in the band. We love to see little girls come up to us and ask us to do certain things or they want to take a picture with us and follow us around. And Dani's got a little prodigy that she works with. Her name is Mally Bell. She's a little songwriter and she really looks up to Dani. We love seeing things like that and the younger generation come along. That's our future.

**KD:** You're growing the next generation of Sadies. How long have you been writing songs, Dani?

**DF:** I moved to Nashville in 2006 when I was 17, and I started writing songs probably within a couple of years. I grew up loving country music and then got into bluegrass when I was about 12, but I never really thought about writing songs. And I moved to Nashville to, you know, get a record deal, be a country music star, that whole thing, as you do, and was just kind of was embraced by some songwriters who liked what I was doing artist-wise and just sort of asked if I'd like to write songs with them. And so I ended up in the room really early on with some of the best writers in Nashville ... with Ronnie Bowman and Bill Anderson and Leslie Satcher. Yeah, like I had no business being in the room with Bill Anderson, but you know, I just, I had some mentors who were kind enough to tell these people that they should take a chance on me. And I just immediately fell in love with writing songs. I found it really interesting. I did a lot of co-writing in the beginning. I found it really interesting to, you know, watch how everybody did it differently. How, most of the time, there were just a couple of us in a room just literally throwing random ideas from the sky out into the room and turning it into something that rhymed and made sense and sounded pretty. I've been doing it for about, I would say, 18 years in Nashville specifically.

**KD:** You and Jaelee Roberts tend to share lead vocal duties in the band. When you write a song, how do you decide "This one's going to be her, or this one's going to be me"?

**DF:** It's a weird thing. It usually ends up being pretty obvious and unanimous between the six of us and between Jaelee and I, There are several songs on our records that I've written that I'm not singing. And there are songs that I didn't write that I am singing the lead vocal on. I think it's all just a matter of kind of who gravitates toward which song. And I don't know, it just somehow ends up being really obvious, which is ... it's odd because Jaelee and I sing very similarly. Like she's my absolute favorite person to sing harmony with, and she's like my favorite person to sing harmony with me. And we're also very different at the same time. So yeah, I mean, it's just kind of ... it's just one of those things. It's kind of a vibe thing.

**KD:** Still having fun?

**GB:** So much fun. Yeah, we, this is a two-week run. Yesterday was the first day of two weeks being on tour., there's one song that's on our new album that Dani wrote. It's called "Marbles in Muskogee." It's about a road trip that the band had and every piece of information that's in the song is absolutely true. And yeah, we have a lot of fun. Dani, you want to tell the story about our song?

**DF:** We do have this song on our new record that's called "Marbles in Muskogee," which the backstory on the marbles is probably one for another time. But basically I wrote this song about a trip that we took that went from Nashville to Muskogee, Oklahoma, to Taos, New Mexico, to Phoenix, Arizona, which is fully 24 hours of the drive from Nashville. And then we drove back to Nashville the full 24 hours. It does get strenuous. It is a little hard and tiresome sometimes, but I think it's just a testament to like how much fun we have and how much we love it is that we're willing to do trips like that. Or like this one, where we're traveling in two cars, like everyday vehicles; we're not in a band van or a bus or an RV or anything like that. We do have a great time. It's sometimes really hard, but we all love what we do. We all love the music that we've created that we get to share with folks and we all love each other. It's a really ... it's a really great time.

**KD:** Now when you travel, like the "kids table" at Thanksgiving, is there an "OG car" and then there's a "new kids car"?

**DF:** No, there's two OG cars is how it usually goes. Gena takes some, Deanie takes some.

**KD:** You make music, and the music is the art, but you're not necessarily paid for the time on stage. It's all the other stuff, because it's music business. So how's business?

**GB:** Business is great. And to the thing you just said ... I was laying in the hotel room this morning and I got a text message from my daughter. The things that we don't get paid for is being away from our families and things like that. But I got a message from my daughter and she was telling me how proud she was of me and that she loved me. And It's just ... I cried because that's things that you aspire for. And she said, I'm so happy that you are still chasing, or she said that you're living your dream and that I provide for my kids. And that's what we all-- we all have families at home and that's why we do this. We do this for ourselves, but we also do this for our families.

**DF:** That's a big, big agreement. And it is. It's really special. I read that message and almost cried to see Gena's daughters be so proud of her because we really are ... all of us dreamt of this in some capacity from the time that we were very, very, very young children. To be able to do it ... and I worked in Nashville as a solo artist for a very long time, and those wins are great ... but there's something really special about having somebody, or six or seven somebodies, to celebrate all of the wins with. It's extra special. Yeah, I mean, business is good, even when business is bad. Business is good, I think.