

STEVE MILLER BAND

New Album In The Works

The Steve Miller Band ripped through more than three dozen tracks during an eleven-day recording session at George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch in the spring of 2008; an enormous studio built by Lucas to accommodate symphony orchestras recording orchestral film soundtracks. The sessions followed a sold-out three-night run at San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium, where Miller test drove some of the new material with Steve Miller Band guest vocalist Sonny Charles.

Charles is a veteran rhythm and blues performer; one of the founding members of the Checkmates, a long-standing Las Vegas R&B group that only ended a forty-five year run on the Strip in 2006 with the death of his partner, Marvin "Sweet Louie" Smith. Under the name Sonny Charles and the Checkmates Ltd., the group scored a nationwide hit with "Black Pearl" in 1969 produced by Phil Spector and the Checkmates have been a fixture on the Vegas scene ever since. Miller and Charles have been friends for years and Charles joined the Miller band on the 2008 tour as special guest.

Engineer Andy Johns, probably best known for his work with Led Zeppelin, brought his expert touch and heavy rock ear to the project, while Miller and company ran through a repertoire of blues and R&B numbers carefully selected by Miller. "This is the frat rock album of all time," he says.



Andy Johns at Skywalker recording session for Steve Miller Band



Steve Miller was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on October 5, 1943. His mother was an accomplished singer, and his father, Dr. George "Sonny" Miller, was a physician by profession and an amateur recording engineer in his spare time. Many members of Steve's family were musicians, and he received his first guitar at age 4. Steve put it to good use performing songs for his family and playmates.

Les Paul, the inventor of the electric guitar and multi-track recording, and his wife, Mary Ford, were regular visitors at the Miller house. In fact, Steve's father was best man at their wedding. Les and Mary taught Steve his first chords when he was five years old. Steve still uses some of the techniques they taught him at that time.

The Miller family moved to Dallas, Texas in 1950. Steve's dad continued recording various styles of music. Great musicians of the time continued to appear at the Miller house, including legendary blues man T-Bone Walker.

The Marksmen, Steve's first band, was formed when he was only 12 years old. This rock and roll band had a solid booking the entire semester playing mostly for fraternities. Steve taught his older brother to play bass so he wouldn't have to rely on his mother for transportation.

The Marksmen continued to play for 5 more years. In high school, Steve asked his friend, William Royce "Boz" Scaggs, to perform vocals with the band. The greatest moment for them was when they backed blues hero, Jimmy Reed, at a local night club. However, at age 16 Steve left for college, which forced the band to break up. Steve attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison and formed a new band called The Ardells. Steve taught Boz Scaggs some chords, and he joined The Ardells the next year.

Steve continued working with The Ardells through the school year and staying in Madison during the summers to perform with a group called The Knightranes. The next year, Ben Sidran was added on keyboards for The Ardells.

Steve spent a semester at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark during his senior year. He returned to the U.S. and spent the summer enjoying the Chicago blues scene, including working with a young musician named Paul Butterfield. Lacking 6 hours for a degree in literature, Steve decided to move to Chicago to play the blues. Steve was soon on stage with the likes of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and Buddy Guy, who all encouraged him to continue playing.

Miller met Barry Goldberg and with bassist Roy Ruby and drummer Maurice McKinley formed The Goldberg-Miller Blues Band, playing Chicago clubs. The band was signed to Epic records during a convention in town. The recordings from this group are few and include a single called The Mother Song; however, there is one track on the box set performed by this band. They also appeared on Hullabaloo with the Four Tops and the Supremes. They took on a running gig at a club in Manhattan, only to return to a dead Chicago blues scene.

Disheartened, Steve went back to Texas in hopes of taking some music courses at the University of Texas at Austin. He was not admitted, so he bought a used Volkswagen Microbus and headed to San Francisco. Upon arrival, he spent his last \$5 to see the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and Jefferson Airplane at the Fillmore Auditorium. He jammed with Butterfield and announced his intention to stay in San Francisco.

Steve contacted Tim Davis, whom he knew from another band in Madison. Steve invited Davis and guitarist James "Curley" Cooke to come experience the San Francisco music scene. Adding Lonnie Turner on bass, the Steve Miller Blues Band was born. Miller was broke, sometimes sleeping in his van. The band landed a gig at the Avalon Ballroom, allowing Steve the money for an apartment.

The band debuted at the Avalon in January 1967, and they were an immediate success. They became a headliner at the Ballroom, playing at least once a month. They played the Fillmore in April, and they were booked for the Monterey Pop Festival in June. The week after Monterey, the Miller Blues Band backed Chuck Berry at the Fillmore Auditorium. This performance was recorded for an album (This is the only Miller Blues Band performance currently available on CD).

After Monterey, the band signed with Capitol Records. Steve demanded the most lucrative contract in music history, setting a new standard for future artists. Steve contacted old friend Boz Scaggs and invited him to join. Jim Peterman replaced "Curley" Cooke, and "Blues" was dropped from the band's name. The Steve Miller Band flew to England to record their first album with Glyn Johns as engineer. Children of the Future was released in May 1968 and was a staple of progressive FM stations throughout the country. Many would agree that this is one of the greatest debut albums ever.

The band did not see their first top 40 album until *Sailor*, released in October of the same year. This album featured Miller's first hit, *Living in the U.S.A.* and also introduced us to the *Gangster of Love*.

Peterman, tired of life on the road, and Scaggs, interested in pursuing his own career, left the group. Ben Sidran, who had worked with Steve in *The Ardells*, was invited to join. *Brave New World* was released June 1969. Johns and Miller mastered the album in England at which time Steve was allowed to sit in on a Beatles recording session. Miller and Paul McCartney recorded *My Dark Hour* with Paul appearing under the alias Paul Ramon. This song features Steve on lead and rhythm guitar, and McCartney on drums and bass. This top 40 album also introduced us to the *Space Cowboy*.

Your Saving Grace, released in November 1969, also made it in the top 40. This album, as well as the previous one, included some session work by keyboardist Nicky Hopkins whose talent is displayed marvelously on the track *Baby's House*.

Miller was increasingly recording with others outside of the band, and tensions were high among many of the members. The next album marked the loss of Lonnie Turner, replaced by Bobby Winkelman. Ben Sidran also left to pursue his own career. Steve took what tapes that had been recorded to Nashville, where in between dates on the road with the likes of Jimi Hendrix and the Grateful Dead, he completed the album with harmonica player Charlie McCoy, fiddler Buddy Spicher, and guitarist Wayne Moss. *Number 5*, released July 1970, was the greatest success to date.

The touring schedule was hectic, there was bickering between band members, and Capitol was constantly demanding new albums. At the same time, Steve was having some difficulties in his personal life, having married and divorced within a year. Tim Davis and Bobby Winkelman both left the group, replaced by Jack King on drums and Ross Valory on bass. Capitol, demanding yet another album, forced the cut of the next LP in one night. This album was taken to press after the first mix, and Steve was "ashamed of the album and sick at heart." *Rock Love* was released September 1971 to a comparatively dismal reception.

The next album, *Recall the Beginning...A Journey From Eden* featured session work by a variety of people. Released in March 1972, this album did not achieve the success of any of the others. However, the album deserves a second look with great tracks like *Nothing Lasts*, *Journey From Eden*, and *Love's Riddle*. Steve also introduced us to Maurice and the pompitous of love on *Enter Maurice*. Neither this album or *Rock Love* have ever been released on CD.

Miller broke his neck in a car wreck in 1972 while on his way to the airport for a European tour. He was in much pain, but he did not cancel the American leg of the tour until he fell ill with hepatitis. Steve went home to his parents in Dallas for eight months to nurse himself back to health. This was an important turning point in his career, and a time at which he did some deep reflection.

He returned to California, and with Gerald Johnson on bass, Dicky Thompson on keyboards, and Jack King on drums, emerged from the studio after 19 days with a brand new, more radio friendly sound. *The Joker* was released October 1973, and was the first album Steve had produced himself. He finally had a number 1 song. Touring increased with opening acts such as Boz Scaggs and James Cotton.

Between touring, managing his career, writing songs, and recording 8 albums in 65 months, Steve was exhausted. He decided to take some time off, and he spent the next year and a half writing and recording the bulk of his next two albums. *Fly Like an Eagle* was released May 1976, featuring Lonnie Turner on bass and Gary Mallaber on drums.

Book of Dreams was released one year and one day later with the addition of Byron Allred on keyboards and session work by Greg Douglass, David Denny, and Norton Buffalo. The two albums contained a string of multiple hit songs. The band was now playing arenas rather than theaters. Both albums were certified quadruple platinum.

Steve took another break after extensive touring through 1978. He bought a 500 acre farm outside of Grants Pass, Oregon, and married again. The recording studio he had built inside of his house never quite met his standards. He sold the farm, moved to Seattle, and his second marriage ended.

Lonnie Turner was replaced by Gerald Johnson, and the band released *Circle of Love* in 1981. This album almost made it in the top 20, and featured a minor hit song in the top 40--*Heart Like a Wheel* (which was also their first music video).

With the addition of Kenny Lee Lewis and John Massaro on rhythm guitar, Steve reached platinum status once again with the release of *Abracadabra* in June 1982. A live album and video were released the following year.

John Massaro and Gerald Johnson departed. *Italian X Rays*, the band's first digital recording, was released November 1984, but was not received as well as any album since *Children of the Future*. This despite the fact that

it was probably one of Miller's best works.

Steve released *Living in the 20th Century* in 1986. This album yielded the hit *I Want to Make the World Turn Around*. However, the best part of this album was side 2. Drawing from his Texas roots, Steve performed great renditions of blues standards by Jimmy Reed, Willie Dixon and others. These songs were recorded again during a private performance and released on the video *Blues in the 20th Century*.

Steve returned to his roots in 1988 with the release of *Born 2B Blue* with a completely new band (actually, he borrowed the use of Ben Sidran and his own jazz band). This album was never intended to be a chart topper, but it received much acclaim from music critics. This album earned respect rather than money, and it displays the versatility of the great Steve Miller. The album consisted of remakes of 10 jazz and blues standards.

In 1988, Les Paul invited Steve to appear on a Cinemax special with other great guitarists, including B.B. King, David Gilmour, and Eddie Van Halen. This was the first live performance by Steve Miller since 1983 (This is available on video under the title *Les Paul and Friends: He Changed the Music*). After the show, he attended a Pink Floyd concert at the request of Gilmour. Steve decided it was time to hit the road again.

Steve began touring again in 1989, not having done so since the *Abracadabra* tours in 1982 and 1983. Since then, his summer tours have consistently been a big attraction and a top grosser, growing in size every year.

June 1993 marked the release of his most recent album, *Wide River*. Added to Ben Sidran and his band were Ben's son, Leo, session guitarist David Denny, and the unbelievable harmonica player, Norton Buffalo. This album features a similar rock/pop/blues mix as exemplified in much of Steve's earlier work. In 1994, the box set was released with several previously unreleased tracks and one new song. Steve currently resides with his wife in Ketchum, ID.

Steve revived the Steve Miller Blues Band in late 1995, performing several all blues shows along the west coast. These performances were recorded for an album that may be released in the future. Also, during the summer of 1995, Miller and Paul McCartney worked together recording several original tunes. Some of these appear on Paul's album *Flaming Pie*.

Continuing to sell over a million albums per year, and performing at sold out concerts throughout the U.S., The Steve Miller Band is still going strong.



Steve Miller - Vocals & Guitar



Norton Buffalo - Harmonicas



Kenny Lee Lewis - Guitars



Billy Peterson - Bass



Gordy Knudtson - Drums



Joseph Wooten - Keyboards



Sonny Charles - Vocals