

STORMY MONDAY BLUES

The Allman Brothers Band

Saturday, October 30th 1971:

Listening to Mike Raven's Radio 1 show late one chilly autumn night in 1971 I came across the brilliant guitar playing of Duane Allman. I was a 15-year-old schoolboy at the time, safely tucked up in bed with my trusty transistor radio turned up as loud as I dared. I had been teaching myself the guitar for just under a year and was (I foolishly imagined) well on the way to becoming a rock star. The blues was my game. I reckoned I had just about mastered the genre by then – it was just three chords and a twiddly turnaround at the end of each verse. Simple. Add a few diminished chords to my repertoire and master the pentatonic and mixolydian scales and the world would be my oyster.

The song Raven played that night "Stormy Monday Blues" changed all that. Years later I learned that it had always had a lot of chords – both T-Bone Walker's original and Bobby "Blue" Bland's later version – but the Allmans seemed determined to cram into its 12 bars as many chords as I had ever known and several I hadn't: ninths, minor sevenths, augmented. What witchcraft was this?

*They call it Stormy Monday
But Tuesday's just as bad
They call it Stormy Monday
But Tuesday's just as bad
Lord, and Wednesday's worse
And Thursday's all so sad*

*The Eagle flies on Friday
Saturday I go out to play
The Eagle flies on Friday
Saturday I go out to play
Sunday I go to church
Lord, and I kneel down and pray*

*Lord have mercy,
Lord have mercy on me.
Lord have mercy,
Lord have mercy on me.
Though I'm tryin' and tryin' to find my baby
Won't someone please send her home to me*

Gregg Allman's voice has never sounded as good as on this memorable slow blues but it is his older brother Duane's guitar solo that immediately grabbed me by the throat, strangling any notion that I had a handle on this music. I was completely mesmerised.

Like most truly great guitar solos it is simple and unflashy, the magic coming from the elegant phrasing, the rich melody and the subtle changes in tone and attack. It is not one of Duane's electrifying slide solos – for those, listen to Statesboro Blues or Done Somebody Wrong. Instead, it builds calmly to a majestic climax – one that left me breathless with a hunger to hear more.

"That was Stormy Monday Blues," said Raven as the song finished. "A tribute to Duane Allman, who sadly died yesterday." I was aghast. A new hero discovered and lost, all in the strumming of a chord.

Fifty years later, though, and I am still in thrall to the virtuosity of Duane Allman's guitar playing, while barely a week goes by without me listening to at least one track from the Allman Brothers' classic album At Fillmore East. I still haven't mastered the mixolydian scale though.

WHIPPING POST

The Allman Brothers Band

On 29 October 1971, a long-haired motorcyclist was making his way through the Georgia town of Macon when he was forced to swerve to avoid a truck that had unexpectedly started to make a turn in front of him. Clipping the back of the vehicle, he lost control and was thrown from his machine. A few hours later he died of his injuries in hospital.

Duane Allman's life was cut cruelly short at just 24. His Allman Brothers Band were on the verge of hitting the big time after having just released At The Fillmore East, widely regarded now as one of the greatest live rock albums ever made.

Regularly voted in the top 10 of the world's finest guitarists, Allman is a ghostly presence in the firmament of rock music. Until the advent of YouTube in 2005 there was no commercially available footage of him and to many he was as elusive and mysterious as some of the old blues legends of the 1930s.

I had been a fan of the band since the day after Duane died – I heard Stormy Monday played as a late-night tribute on Mike Raven's Radio 1 show – but for over 30 years I had never actually seen him. Then one day I found a clip on YouTube and the thrill of finally being able to watch him and the band play was indescribable.

The video featured a show at the Fillmore East and started off with Don't Keep Me Wondering. I was totally mesmerised, waiting for Duane's solo and the chance to examine his unique slide technique, which to my ears sounds heavily influenced by the vamping sound of a blues harmonica.

Sadly the director didn't share my enthusiasm, for as soon as Duane launched into his pyrotechnics the camera zoomed in on fellow guitarist Dickey Betts playing rhythm.

This visual frustration has continued with the few videos that have subsequently emerged of Duane Allman in action – rarely is there any extended close-up.

There are, thankfully, plenty of audio recordings to enjoy but none can match the brilliance of At The Fillmore East, which should feature in every rock fan's collection.

Back in 2020 a new album was released, taken from a recently rediscovered cassette recording of Duane Allman's final live performance less than two weeks before his untimely death. The Final Note (Live at Painters Mill Music Fair – 10-17-71) was recorded by a young journalist, Sam Idas, who brought along his hand-held cassette player, ostensibly to record a post-gig interview with the band.

'My only intention was to record the interview,' he said. 'This was a brand new cassette recorder with an internal microphone, and I had one 60-minute cassette tape. I was sitting there with the recorder in my lap, and I remember thinking: Why don't I try this out? I can record the concert! It was a totally spontaneous decision.'

The result – very much of bootleg quality – nevertheless captures the band in top form, echoing their performances at the Fillmore. It ends with a rip-roaring 13-minute version of Whipping Post and it is poignant to reflect, as the final note fades away, that Duane Allman would never play again.

Whipping Post was a live favourite throughout the Allman Brothers' career (they finally disbanded in 2014) as a vehicle for lengthy, jazzy improvisation. A love song but hardly romantic, its theme is more one of conflict and abuse. It kicks off with a hypnotic Berry Oakley bass riff in an unusual 11/4 time signature before Gregg Allman's vocals enter the fray...

*I've been run down and I've been lied to
And I don't know why, I let that mean woman make me out a fool
She took all my money, wrecked my new car
Now she's with one of my good-time buddies
Drinking in some cross-town bar*

*Sometimes I feel, sometimes I feel
Like I been tied to the whippin' post*

*Tied to the whippin' post, tied to the whippin' post
Good Lord, I feel like I'm dyin'*

*My friends tell me, that I've been such a fool
But I had to stand by and take it baby, all for lovin' you
Drown myself in sorrow as I look at what you've done
But nothing seemed to change, the bad times stayed the same
And I can't run*

*Sometimes I feel, sometimes I feel
Like I been tied to the whippin' post*

*Tied to the whippin' post, tied to the whippin' post
Good Lord, I feel like I'm dyin'*

Gregg Allman, who died in 2017, described – in his fascinating 2012 autobiography *My Cross To Bear* – how he wrote the song while staying in a friend's house near Jacksonville in Florida: 'I was staying up in the very top of the house, in this sitting room with a real nice couch in it. So that first night, I laid me down to go to sleep on my attic couch, and I dozed off for a while. All of a sudden I woke up, because a song had me by the ass.

'The intro had three sets of three, and two little steps that allowed you to jump back up on the next triad. I thought it was different, and I love different things. It hit me like a ton of bricks.

'I started feeling around for a light switch, but I couldn't find one anywhere. I found my way into the kitchen and it was pitch dark. I had my hands out and I touched an ironing board. I was feeling all around the counters for a piece of paper. I couldn't find any paper or a pencil anywhere, but I did find a box of kitchen matches.

'A car happened to go by, and its lights flashed long enough to allow me to see that red, white, and blue box. I knew I could use the matches to write with, because I had diddled around enough with art to know that charcoal would work. I figured the ironing board cover would work as a pad, so I'd strike a match, blow it out, use the charcoal tip to write with, and then strike another one. I charted out the three triads and the two little steps, and then I went to work on the lyrics.'

Not everyone was happy though. The next morning Gregg's host was furious at the state of her ironing board.

BLUE SKY

The Allman Brothers Band

In the summer of 1974, like many other 18-year-olds at the time, I was nervously awaiting my A-Level results. I needed a B and two Cs in order to read International History and Politics at Leeds University and wasn't too hopeful.

In those days such notifications came via the postman and I remember the scene when - on the designated day - the familiar figure walked up to my front door as I idled about in the street, trying to look nonchalant.

Grabbing the letter I ripped it open and saw – in wonderful black and white - that I'd achieved the almost unimaginable feat of an A and two Bs. I smiled to myself and then smiled some more and then, with a rictus grin locked on my face, raced inside. I needed, right there and then, to hear some music, good time, infectious, happy music which – as an obsessive fan of delta blues – didn't feature much in my collection.

I stared impatiently at my shelves of LPs, not wanting to lose the moment, and finally grabbed Eat A Peach by the Allman Brothers Band. There was a sparking blue sky outside so on the turntable went Blue Sky. Perfect. Perfect then and perfect now. It is still my go-to tune to create a real good-time feel.

*You're my blue sky, you're my sunny day
Lord, you make me high when you turn your love my way
Turn your love my way*

Blue Sky is a very simple love song, written by Betts for his girlfriend of the time Sandy 'Bluesky' Wabegijig. It kicks off with a catchy guitar riff that perfectly sets up a joyful, country-esque groove – a complete change from what was then the Allmans' staple of jazzily improvised blues/rock – with a chorus that dissolves into a dynamic and flowingly melodic Duane Allman solo played over just two simple chords, E and A.

Listen and try not to smile. Impossible.

LAYLA **Derek and the Dominos**

Launched into the stratosphere with arguably (in my humble opinion, indisputably) the greatest opening riff in the history of rock, Layla is Eric Clapton's masterpiece. A proclamation of unrequited love to Pattie Boyd, the song urgently lays bare the agony of his frustration at falling for the wife of his best friend, George Harrison.

The song was inspired by a book given to the guitarist – The Story of Layla and Majnum by the Persian poet Nizami, about a man who had fallen in love with a woman who is unattainable. Seeing the obvious parallel in his own life, Clapton wrote his version and in the summer of 1970 he recorded it with his band, Derek And The Dominos, in Miami, Florida.

*What'll you do when you get lonely
And nobody's waiting by your side?
You've been running and hiding much too long
You know it's just your foolish pride*

*I tried to give you consolation
When your old man had let you down
Like a fool, I fell in love with you
You turned my whole world upside down*

*Layla, you've got me on my knees
Layla, I'm begging, darling please
Layla, darling won't you ease my worried mind*

It is astonishing to think that Boyd inspired not only Layla but also Harrison's Something as well as Clapton's later Wonderful Tonight (penned during the requited phase of their relationship) and Old Love. Indeed, all of the songs Clapton wrote for the Layla album contain desperate messages in music to Boyd. One of them was Bell Bottom Blues, so titled because Clapton rather prosaically had promised to buy her a pair of Landlubber jeans while he was in Miami:

*Bell bottom blues, you made me cry
I don't want to lose this feeling
And if I could choose a place to die
It would be in your arms*

*Do you want to see me crawl across the floor to you?
Do you want to hear me beg you to take me back?
I'd gladly do it because
I don't want to fade away
Give me one more day, please
I don't want to fade away
In your heart I want to stay*

And then there's I Looked Away:

*And if it seemed a sin
To love another man's woman, baby,
I guess I'll keep on sinning
Loving her, Lord, till my very last day
But I looked away
And she ran away from me today;
I'm such a lonely man*

And It's Too Late:

*It's too late, she's gone
It's too late, my baby's gone
Wish I had told her she was my only one
It's too late, she's gone*

*She's gone, yes she's gone
She's gone, my baby's gone
She's gone, yes she's gone
Where can my baby be?*

*And I wonder does she know
When she left me, it hurt me so
I need your love babe, please don't make me wait
Tell me it's not too late*

The finished album is testimony to the extraordinary burst of creativity that Clapton's passion for Pattie had inspired, both in his writing and guitar playing, and its crowning glory is undoubtedly the title track. However, Layla isn't just about Clapton and the love he had lost; it was also about discovering the musical brother he had always wanted but until then had never found.

When the Dominos – Clapton, keyboard player Bobby Whitlock, bassist Carl Radle and drummer Jim Gordon – first started work on the album, the combination of Clapton's personal anguish and the copious amount of drugs the band were imbibing meant that very little musical progress had been made until one night the producer, Tom Dowd, urged Clapton to check out a gig by one of his other artists, The Allman Brothers Band, in nearby Coconut Grove.

When Clapton walked by the front of the stage as the band were playing, their lead guitarist Duane Allman was so shocked when he recognised him that he momentarily stopped playing. 'I loved them,' wrote Clapton in his 2007 autobiography, 'but what blew me away was Duane Allman's guitar playing. I was mesmerised by him.' So much so that after a lengthy jam with the Allmans he invited Duane to join him for the Layla sessions.

The pair clicked immediately and the energy generated by the interplay between Clapton's Fender Stratocaster and Allman's Gibson Les Paul Goldtop (recently sold at auction for \$1.25m) lifted the Dominos to new heights. 'There were very few words exchanged,' remembered Dowd. 'Just complete musical dialogue among them. They just looked at each other and said 'Hey man', and the magic happened.' According to Clapton: 'Duane and I became inseparable during the time we were in Florida. He was like the musical brother that I never had. More so than Jimi [Hendrix] who was essentially a loner. Duane was a family man, a brother. Unfortunately for me he had a family, but I loved it while it lasted. Those kind of experiences don't happen every day and I knew enough by then to cherish it while I could.'

Initially Layla was intended to be more of a slow ballad, along the lines of the version Clapton performed years later on his Unplugged album, but Allman had other ideas. Taking a vocal melody from the Albert King song As The Years Go Passing By and speeding it up, he composed the now immortal 12-note opening riff and the song really began to soar.

Now it was time for Dowd – one of the most unsung heroes of modern music – to add his brand of magic to the song. Originally a physicist, Dowd had worked on the Manhattan Project, the US atomic bomb programme during the second world war. His subsequent career, as a music producer and recording engineer, spanned just about the complete history of modern music, from his work in 1950 on If I Knew You Were Coming I'd Have Baked a Cake by Eileen Barton, through, among countless others, to John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and Ray Charles via Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, Cream and The Allman Brothers, right up to Joe Bonamassa's 2000 debut album A New Day Yesterday.

Dowd, who died in 2002, pioneered the art of multi-track recording, and was a huge influence on the sound of late 20th century music. It is worth remembering that when he recorded Layla in 1970 it was only a couple of years earlier that George Martin had recorded The Beatles' Sgt Pepper album across just four tracks – the most available in Britain at the time. By contrast, Layla has six guitar tracks alone and is still arguably the finest piece of multi-tracking.

The final piece of the jigsaw was applied to Layla three weeks later when the majestic piano coda was added to the end of the song. Credited to the Dominos' drummer Jim Gordon, who had been repeatedly playing the piece during breaks in the sessions, it later emerged that he had actually co-written it with his girlfriend at the time, Rita Coolidge, who was not credited.

'I was infuriated,' wrote Coolidge in her 2016 autobiography *Delta Lady*. 'What they'd clearly done was take the song Jim and I had written, jettisoned the lyrics, and tacked it on to the end of Eric's song. It was almost the same arrangement. I have to admit it sounded stunning.'

However, the Layla album was not initially a success when it was released on 9 November 1970 (few people at the time realised that Derek was in fact Eric) but it has subsequently become one of the best-loved guitar recordings of all time and is still revered today.

Indeed, in August 2019 The Tedeschi Trucks Band – one of the most exciting contemporary live bands – played their version of the entire Layla album at the Lockn' Festival in Arrington, Virginia. Their take on Layla thrillingly captures the dynamism of the original. Not that surprising perhaps, given the pedigree of the band's guitarist Derek Trucks: named after the Dominos, a latter-day member of The Allman Brothers Band, a nephew of their original drummer Butch Trucks, as well as having also played for a while in Clapton's touring band.

At its core Layla is a desperate plea for love and back in 1970 after Clapton had finished recording the album he returned home to England and sought out Pattie to play her a cassette of the title song.

'He played it two or three times,' wrote Pattie in her 2007 autobiography *Wonderful Today*. 'Each time watching my face intently for my reaction. My first thought was: 'Oh God, everybody's going to know who this is about.' I felt uncomfortable that he was pushing me in a direction I wasn't certain I wanted to go. But the song got the better of me, with the realisation that I had inspired such passion and such creativity. I could resist no longer.'

Despite creating such a fabulous album, Derek And The Dominos soon split up and Clapton all but disappeared for the next two years. Duane Allman had been invited to join the band full time but decided to stay with The Allman Brothers, only to be killed in a motorcycle accident in 1971. Jim Gordon was jailed in 1983 after killing his mother.

He was suffering from schizophrenia having being misdiagnosed and treated for alcohol addiction instead. He was still behind bars when he died in March 2023.

Eric Clapton and Pattie Boyd finally married in 1979 but would divorce in 1989.

Me? I love Layla so much the riff doubles as the ringtone on my mobile.

Diddle-iddle, diddle-eee, dee, dee, dee, dee, dee...

COWBOY

Please Be With Me

Anniversaries are days of remembrance, reflection and wondering what might have been. On October 29, 1971, the great Duane Allman was killed in a motorcycle accident in Macon, Georgia. He was 24 years old and only just beginning his journey.

I remember vividly the moment when I first heard his stunning guitar playing when the late-night Radio 1 DJ Mike Raven spun the Allman Brothers Band's Stormy Monday by way of a tribute. It was a bittersweet moment for me: I discovered a wonderful new guitar player and then lost him, all in the eight and a half short minutes of that sublime track.

Today, barely a week goes by without listening to at least one track from the Allmans' classic Live At Fillmore East album, indisputably one of the best live rock albums out there, to marvel once again at his absolute mastery of the electric slide guitar. Allman, of course, also illuminated Eric Clapton's Derek And The Dominos' Layla album and his reputation as one of the finest guitarists in the history of rock stands firm to this day.

But Allman's legacy is also to be heard in his less heralded work as a session musician. For a brief period between 1969 and 1971 he was a regular at the Muscle Shoals Sound Studios in Alabama, featuring on records by such artists as Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Clarence Carter, King Curtis and even our very own Lulu, who somehow found her way to Muscle Shoals to record a Southern-tinged album New Routes in 1969.

For me, though, one of the best examples of Duane Allman's work can be heard on Cowboy's Please Be With Me, from their second album 5'll Getcha Ten, which was coincidentally released in the same month that Duane died.

Cowboy were a Southern rock band formed in 1969 in Jacksonville, Florida, by singer-songwriters Scott Boyer and Tommy Talton and also originally featured pianist Bill Pillmore, bassist George Clark, guitarist Pete Kowalke, and drummer Tom Wynn. They made four albums in the 1970s and Boyer and Talton, the driving force of the band, made periodic reunions together before Boyer died in February 2018. According to Talton: 'No one could write a more beautiful ballad than Scott Boyer. I love him and I miss him more than anything that can be said.'

In an interview with AL.com in 2015 Boyer described how Please Be With Me came about: 'I was sitting in this motel room all by myself and I grabbed a pad and pencil and started writing freeform. Whatever popped into my head. About 10 minutes later and I had like 10 verses and three choruses, but nothing rhymed and nothing made any sense.

'It was just right out of my head and on to the paper. So I started connecting things. Put the third line from the third verse with the fourth line in the eighth verse. Not necessarily because they made sense but because they rhymed. And I put together like three verses and a chorus and I put the pad down and I rolled over and went to sleep.

'Duane came into town the next day and said: I want to play on this record with ya'll but I want to play something brand new. We started tossing things around. And I said: Well, I wrote this thing last night. There's nothing much to it. And I played the song for Duane and [producer] Johnny Sandlin was also in the room and when I finished it they both went: Wow, you wrote that last night, man? That's beautiful.'

The song has become Cowboy's best-known and much-loved song. It is a beautifully sung, poignant and haunting love song, embellished by an unforgettable acoustic Dobro part by Allman.

'I loved what Duane played on it,' said Boyer. 'That Dobro he played on it just comes to life when that thing comes on, man.' It sure does.

*Upon my word what does it mean?
Is it love or is it me
That makes me change so suddenly
From looking out to feeling free?*

*I sit here lying in my bed
Wondering what it was I said
That made me think I lost my head
When I knew I lost my heart instead*

*So won't you please read my signs?
Be a gypsy
Tell me what I hope to find deep within me
And because you can find my mind
Please be with me*

*And of all the better things I've heard
Loving you has made the words
And all the rest seem so absurd
'Cause in the end it all comes out I'm sure*

*So won't you please read my signs?
Be a gypsy*

*Tell me what I hope to find deep within me
And because you can find my mind
Please be with me*

Duane's performance is so exquisite it's almost as if he is pulling on heart strings rather than the steel-strung ones of his Dobro. Quite simply it's superb.

The song had a profound effect on the late Allman Brothers Band drummer Butch Trucks. In an interview with Alan Paul for his book *One Way Out*, Trucks said: 'A few weeks after Duane died, when I still hadn't really let loose or accepted it, I put on Please Be With Me and the dam burst and I started crying and crying, just racked with grief. I was sitting there listening to the song over and over and crying. To this day I can't hear it without getting choked up.'

A few years later Eric Clapton covered Please Be With Me on his 1974 album *461 Ocean Boulevard*. That he plays Duane's part almost note for note says it all.

RIP Duane Allman: November 20, 1946-October 29, 1971