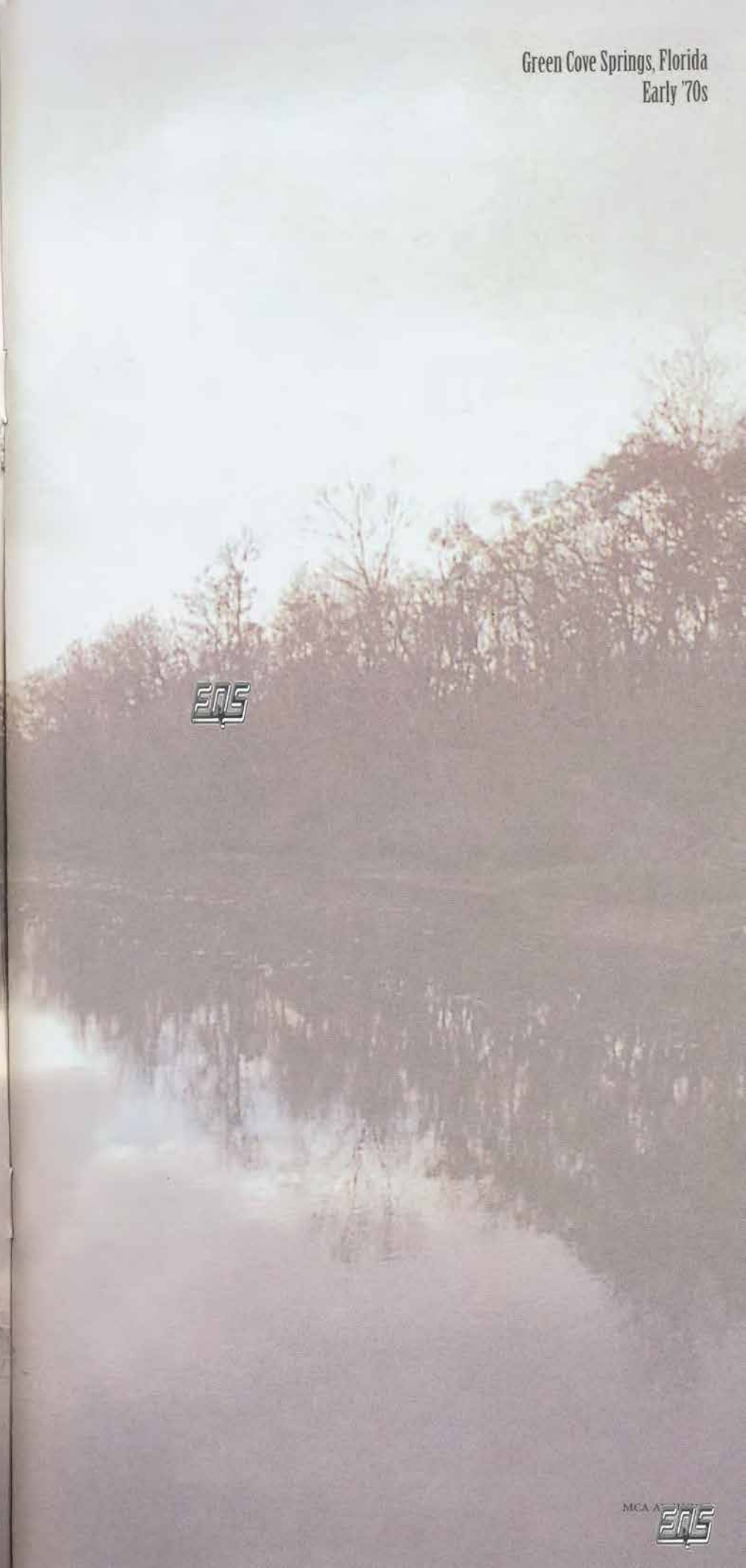


Green Cove Springs, Florida
Early '70s



ENS

AMERICAN BY BIRTH... (Southern by the Grace of God)

“Southern Rock’s a dead label,
a hype thing for the magazines to
blow out of proportion.
We don’t play like the Allmans did,
or like Wet Willie.
Southern groups are different.”¹

Ronnie Van Zant
October 1977



Rugged Northern Florida is different than its stepsister, the beach rimmed southern Florida peninsula, having more in common with wooded, swampy southern Georgia. Sprawling near the mouth of the St. John’s River is urban Jacksonville, one of the South’s major industrial seaports and home of Mayport Naval Station.

It was on the tough westside of Jacksonville that brawny ex-prizefighter-turned-truck driver Lacey Van Zant settled with his wife Marion to raise a close family of three girls and three boys. Eldest son Ronnie described the working class neighborhood:

“It was rough, particularly where I grew up. It was like the ghetto, black and white, and there was a lot of street fighting.”²

Lacey taught his son to box, and Ronnie grew up on the Shantytown streets getting into trouble, playing ball, and fishing in the nearby river. Another passion was music. As a youngster, he first sang in a holy roller church, with a choir of black women gospel singers.



Bob Burns, Ed King, Allen Collins, Billy Powell, Ronnie Van Zant, Leon Wilkeson, Gary Rossington.



Publicity Shoot, Jacksonville, Florida
Summer, 1973

MCA ARCHIVES

But there was another kind of music that attracted him. One of his Shantytown neighbors was an old former sharecropper from Georgia who played raucous “swamp country” blues on his porch. Young Ronnie would spend hours listening to Shorty Medlocke’s music and advice. “Don’t ever quit and you’ll have it made in the shade,”³ Shorty would tell the eager youngster.

Another musical influence was the radio in his father’s diesel truck. Occasionally Ronnie accompanied his father on runs up the Eastern seaboard, sometimes riding the highways as far north as New York. These journeys were accompanied by sounds from across the AM band, including Ronnie’s all-time favorite, country music’s Merle Haggard.

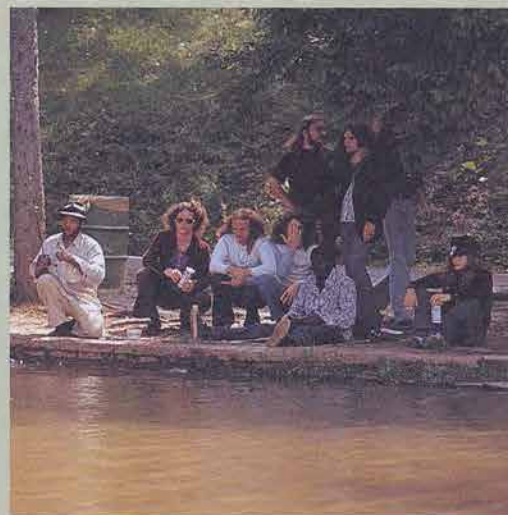
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By sixteen, Ronnie had approached a band called “Us,” asking them if they would like a lead singer to front their blend of black delta music and big city R&B. “Us” often competed in battles of the bands with other local school groups, including one from upscale rival Forrest High School, “The Mods,” that included 13-year-old self-taught guitarist Allen Collins. As their name would indicate, The Mods played British influenced rock ‘n’ roll.

After “Us” broke up, one of those British groups changed everything for Ronnie. This band had the same raw energy as “swamp country” music but had a passionate new fire, a faster more frenetic beat. The sound of their guitars was amplified to a roar matched by the teen fan’s screams. These tough looking, long haired rebels were the Rolling Stones, and Ronnie Van Zant would never forget the moment he first heard them. From then on, Ronnie harbored a dream to form a group who would be the American equivalent of the Rolling Stones.

“I hand-picked all these boys to play for me,”⁴ Ronnie said about assembling a band to fulfill his dream. He began with a neighbor who had a drum kit, Bob Burns. Ronnie asked Bob if he knew anyone who had a guitar, and he suggested his 13-year-old schoolfriend, Gary Rossington, who in turn suggested Larry

Junstrom, who owned a bass guitar. Now only two things were lacking: an amplifier... and the ability to play. One person who had both was “Mods” guitarist Allen Collins, whom they all knew.

The group became The Noble Five. They modeled themselves after the first wave of the Brit-rock invasion and The Yardbirds, Cream (with Eric Clapton), and Jimi Hendrix’s explosive Experience, all of whom played hard, intense rock filled with echo, feedback and distortion: the new metallic sound the media had christened “Psychedelic”.



Jacksonville, Florida
Summer, 1973

EMERSON-LOEW

The Noble Five practiced after school and occasionally performed at local parties and dances, loading everything into Ronnie’s car and playing for as much as they could drink plus gas money. The sound of the five plugged into the same battered amp was hardly overpowering. “When we started playing, we were just terrible,”⁵ Ronnie laughingly recalled.

Sometimes when they were rehearsing in Bob Burns’ parents’ carport, the five thought they heard a knock on the door, but no one was there. Burns would laugh, “Leonard was at the door.” Or the phone would ring, and nobody was on the other end; Bob would credit “Leonard” again. Soon this became the group’s running gag – eventually the embryo of their permanent name.

At Lee High School, where there was a strict dress code, Bob and Gary ran into problems with their new long-haired rock ‘n’ roll

look. They would grease their hair back for regular classes, but after the mandatory gym class shower, coach Leonard Skinner would often catch them with the forbidden hair style, and they'd be suspended. Weary of repeated suspensions, they dropped out at age sixteen.

The fivesome were broke, but resisted taking full-time jobs in order to commit themselves to the band. They were also constantly fighting off complaints about the loudness of their rehearsals, so the band searched for a rehearsal facility away from the city, finding what became known as "Hell House" on an isolated 99-acre farm 20 miles south of Jacksonville, near a town called Green Cove Springs. It was in this tiny hot-box-like cabin that Lynyrd Skynyrd's music was born. Ronnie thrived on the sweaty studio-like setting, and the band began to write songs with the immediate goal of making a record. Hell House was occupied sunrise to sundown, seven days a week. Song ideas would come during quiet moments such as when Gary and Ronnie would go fishing in a creek behind the House.

Ronnie: "I always look for the melody first, then think of the words as I go along... then take them to one of the guitar players and we arrange everythin'..."⁶

"I try to write about places I've seen, things that I've done, normal things... I think if you write it really simple, then you can reach more people."⁷

The counter-culture had come to Jacksonville, and clubs like The Woodstock and Forrest Inn sprang up. The latter was on the west edge of town and became a favorite for Ronnie, Allen and the group. They'd play under names taken from B movies, first "Conqueror Worm" from a Vincent Price horror flick,

1. Concert flyer, September, 1971. (Courtesy Judy Grondin)

2. Gary, 1969. (MCA Archives)

3. Ronnie, 1969. (MCA Archives)

4. Allan, Ronnie, Gary, Bob and Larry Junstrom, October, 1970. (Courtesy Reed Huenink)

5. Larry, Gary, 1970. (MCA Archives)

6. Invitation to *Sounds Of The South* press party, Richard's, Atlanta, GA. July 29, 1973. (Courtesy Ron O'Brien)

7. Jacksonville, 1973. (Emerson-Loew)

8. With Al Kooper (lower right), January 1974. (Emerson-Loew)



then “One Percent” from a Hell’s Angels movie. As a joke, one night they combined their running gag about the mysterious Leonard with their old gym coach’s name, introducing themselves as *Leonard Skinnerd*. Most of the audience knew Coach Skinner, and their enthusiastic response gave the group their new and final name, although the vowels were changed to y’s to protect the guilty.



Jacksonville soon became a hot-bed for the emerging Southern blues-rock scene. Duane Allman came down from Macon, Georgia to jam with Second Coming, featuring Dickie Betts and Berry Oakley, and the effect wasn’t lost on the new Skynyrd group. When the Allman Brothers’ first album was released, the blues-rock revival was in full force in Dixie. The next wave of British blues had also hit with Led Zeppelin in the fore. For Skynyrd, the group with the biggest impact was Free, a powerful quartet with a thick, stomping sound. Soulful Free vocalist Paul Rodgers instantly became one of Ronnie’s favorite singer/lyricists, while guitarist Paul Kossoff’s “bleeding tremolo” became the model for Gary’s distorted tones.

Lynyrd Skynyrd began to coalesce musically and otherwise. They won a battle of the bands in Jacksonville and landed their first tour – as warmup for a Strawberry Alarm Clock milking the last echoes of their ‘67 hit “Incense And Peppermints.” The \$50 a week they made on that tour was double what they earned playing in Jacksonville, and the group began to assemble a road crew for such jaunts, beginning with original roadies Dean Kilpatrick and Kevin Elson (who would later produce Journey and mix Lynyrd Skynyrd 1991).

By October, 1970, Lynyrd Skynyrd were together five years and had played nearly a thousand gigs. They had a manager, Alan Walden, brother of Capricorn Records’ president Phil. Alan managed mostly soul groups, and he arranged for Skynyrd to record demos at Quinvy Studios just outside of the upcoming “other” Soul Music capital, Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

“Free Bird” was one of the songs recorded at Quinvy, and the rock epic had already begun to come together. Allen actually had the music for six months prior to playing it for the band, but Ronnie initially resisted adding words to so many chords. Finally, when Ronnie came up with the “Free Bird” lyrics, he asked Allen to play his melody. However, the initial version of “Free Bird” fell flat with audiences. It wasn’t until Allen added the soaring uptempo changes accentuating “Can’t chan-a-ang-ange...” that the song took off. The first time they played this new arrangement was at Jacksonville’s Art Museum, and the response was overwhelming.

Jimmy Johnson of Muscle Shoals Sound Studios was especially taken with the guitars and Ronnie’s voice on the Quinvy demos. Johnson believed enough to produce an album’s worth of material for nothing but a producer’s percentage, if and when the recording was sold.



MCA ARCHIVES

1974

So Skynyrd borrowed money and drove to the tiny northern Alabama hamlet of Sheffield to record at Muscle Shoals Sound. Eight members of the crew stayed in two rooms at Blue’s truckstop. The drummer and sometime lead vocalist on the first Muscle Shoals go-round was Ricky Medlocke, later of Blackfoot, and bassist Leon Wilkeson joined towards the end of the second series of sessions. The first sessions took place in the Spring of 1971, the second in the Fall.

Jimmy Johnson and production partner Tim Smith virtually taught the band how to record – showing them how to put the bass and drums together in a rhythm section and how to retain the original feeling of songs throughout the recording process. Skynyrd taught the engineers about endurance during all night sessions. The band would have to record whenever there was leftover studio time, sometimes in the middle of the night, but they were finally recording. Beginning with “One More Time,” they laid down the original multi-track versions of “Free Bird,” “I Ain’t The One,” “Trust,” “Gimme Three Steps,” and twelve other songs. Ronnie would later emphasize the group’s debt to the Muscle Shoals crew for everything they learned, affectionately dubbing them “The Swampers” on “Sweet Home Alabama.”

Manager Walden shopped the Muscle Shoals tapes around, and found no takers. Only brother Phil’s Capricorn label showed interest, but Ronnie nixed that, feeling that the group would have been lost amidst the label’s Southern rock explosion of the Allmans, Marshall Tucker Band, and Wet Willie.

Skynyrd was discouraged and returned to Jacksonville but found homecooking none-too-appetizing. Their maverick sound had become unwelcome to local bookers, so the group migrated to Atlanta, where they located an off-and-on home at Funochio’s, notorious as the most dangerous bar in the city. Shootings and stabbings were nightly occurrences, but the group would commute regularly from Jacksonville to play the club. Money would be borrowed from Ronnie’s new wife, Judy, for the trip up, and she would be repaid upon their return.

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Producer-performer Al Kooper had been visiting Atlanta since he played the first Atlanta Pop Festival in 1969. The southern rock scene was exploding, and Kooper had noticed the abundance of talent in and about Atlanta. With the backing of MCA Records, he launched the Sounds Of The South label with the initial deal calling for four new artists — three of which turned out to be Los Angeles funk band Elijah, Kooper’s own reformed Blues Project, and the

Atlanta bar band Mose Jones. It was on Mose Jones’ recommendation that the final spot was filled by Skynyrd. Kooper jammed with the group at Funochio’s, and after some initial hesitancy, Lynyrd Skynyrd signed on.

Young bassist Leon Wilkeson, unsure of his ability to handle the imminent success, bolted the band. Needing a replacement, Ronnie remembered Ed King from their Strawberry Alarm Clock touring days. Somehow Van Zant located King working at a small bar in North Carolina and brought him to Hell House for the rehearsals for the Al Kooper-produced demos. Recorded at Studio One in Atlanta in one live session that lasted until 3:00 a.m., the demos produced five songs that appear on this anthology. However, the still-unreleased version of “Free Bird” from that night demonstrates the haste of those recordings. Allen Collins broke a string during his solo, but there was no time to go back and fix the recording. Hence, there still exists a lengthy gap in the renowned guitar ending. The arrangement, though, reveals the song was fully grown.

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Skinnyrd had a catalog of almost 20 songs when they approached recording their debut album, (**pronounced** ‘leh-nerd skin’-nerd), and deciding which songs to perform and adapting to their new-found producer Al Kooper caused the sessions to be considerably tumultuous. A powerful and a headstrong personality, Kooper would clash with the group over changing established arrangements on songs like “I Ain’t The One,” but his knowledge of modern recording techniques allowed the group to graft onto songs new embellishments. One overdubbed track that stands out is “Free Bird,” where Allen added a second guitar part slightly behind his solo to create the famed dual guitar sound that climaxes the album.

Wilkeson returned after the recording of (**pronounced**), and King moved to guitar, allowing the band to duplicate the album’s multiple guitar sound live. Once the band worked out the new division of labor, they found that Allen’s stabbing Gibson Firebird, Gary’s whining Les Paul, and Ed’s metallic Strat chops complemented each other amazingly well. The new format also caused an immediate

In Front of Hell House
Spring, 1975



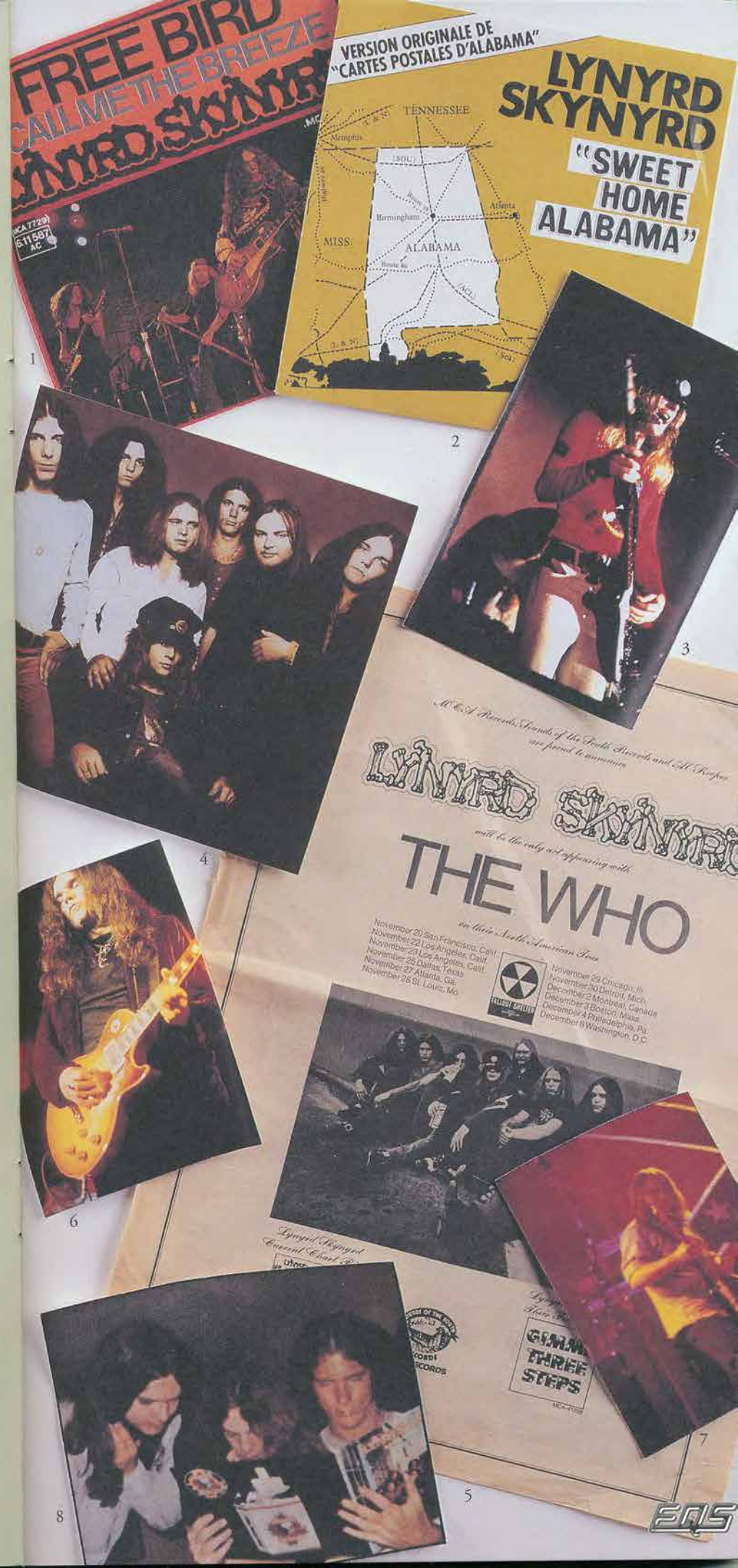
burst of creativity, resulting in the writing of “Sweet Home Alabama” even before (pronounced) was released.

“Sweet Home Alabama” was Ronnie’s rebuttal to Neil Young, who had included a critical song called “Alabama” on his then-recent *Harvest* album and had earlier recorded the regionally derogatory “Southern Man.”

Ronnie: “We wrote (‘Alabama’) as a joke. We didn’t even think about it – the words just came out that way. We just laughed like hell, and said ‘Ain’t that funny’... We love Neil Young, we love his music...”⁸

Immediately following the recording of “Sweet Home Alabama,” Lynyrd Skynyrd was introduced at a special Sounds Of The South press party at Richard’s club in Atlanta on Sunday, July 29, 1973. When Skynyrd hit the stage with a roaring version of “Workin’ For MCA,” written especially for the event, the party stopped while 500 hardened industry vets stood on chairs to get a glimpse of this unknown band.

The manager of another MCA act, The Who’s Peter Rudge, signed them to open for The Who’s fall, 1973 *Quadrophenia* tour. On opening night, at San Francisco’s Cow Palace on November 20, 1973, a terrified Lynyrd Skynyrd, who had never played anything larger than tiny barrooms and clubs, tried to recreate the barroom ambience on the cavernous Cow Palace stage by getting as drunk as possible, then tearing through a five song set in a state of virtual panic. The crowd loved them.



1. Free Bird - German single cover, 1974. (Courtesy Ron O'Bräen)

2. Sweet Home Alabama - French single cover, 1974. (Courtesy Reed Huenink)

3. Leon Wilkeson, 1973. (Tom Hill)

4. 1973. (Emerson-Loew)

5. Advertisement, Fall, 1973. (Courtesy Reed Huenink)

6. Gary Rossington, 1973. (Tom Hill)

7. Ed King, 1974. (MCA Archives)

8. Gary, Allen, Billy checking out debut LP, 1973. (MCA Archives)

Skynyrd was not a choreographed act – the focus of attention being Ronnie, who strode the stage barefoot, brandishing his mike stand like a fishing pole, moving only when he'd coax more out of one of the guitarists. Van Zant's motionless style of singing in his husky baritone was punctuated by piercing "wolf whistles," which let crowds know it was time for another burning solo.

Despite "Free Bird" dominating FM radio, the critical success of the first album and their corresponding success on The Who tour, neither (**pronounced**) nor its single "Gimme Three Steps" made any impression on the charts. As the group and producer Kooper went into the Record Plant studio in Los Angeles in January of '74, they were feeling pressure to produce the breakthrough Top 40 hit. Ronnie felt that that could be "Sweet Home Alabama," but Kooper and MCA thought that "Alabama" would be too regional and opted for "Don't Ask Me No Questions."

Ronnie: "I made a deal that if the single they wanted to release didn't make it, they'd... put out 'Sweet Home Alabama'. I just had this feeling about it. We got it down real fast... It's always the ones that you get down fast that make it."

"Don't Ask Me No Questions" didn't make it, so in late June, "Sweet Home Alabama" was released as a last ditch effort to revive a faltering **Second Helping**. The references to Neil Young and Watergate sparked instant controversy, and as the record rose up the charts, President Richard M. Nixon quite coincidentally fell as a result of the Watergate scandal. By September 20, "Alabama" and **Second Helping** were certified gold records, to be followed in December by (**pronounced**).



The success of "Sweet Home Alabama" was double-edged. The title, the retort to Neil Young's "Southern Man," and the "Watergate don't bother me" contents instantly branded this rugged looking t-shirts 'n' jeans band from Florida as "A Southern Band." Then MCA added to Skynyrd's live stage a Confederate stars 'n' bars

backdrop, and the imagery was fully developed, whether the group realized it or really wanted it.

Skynyrd toured continuously in support of their first two albums, and the endless one-nighters took their toll. After a tour of Europe, North Carolina drummer Artimus Pyle replaced founding member Bob Burns, who left the group suffering from exhaustion, and Ronnie would write "Am I Losin'?" partially about his departure.



COURTESY REED HUENINK

Allen, Ronnie, and Gary
Torture Tour, Summer, 1975

Bob Burns did record "Saturday Night Special" with the group prior to the European tour, but when Skynyrd returned to Webb IV Studios in Atlanta in January, '75 with Artimus on skins, they had nothing else prepared for recording. It was a matter of being in the studio up to 16 hours a day for 21 straight days to crank out the seven songs being added to "Special" for the obligatory album. With sarcastic understatement, Ronnie dubbed the LP **Nuthin' Fancy**, and the group hit the road for a 90 day, 61-date "Torture Tour" (as the members called it). Despite its ultimate success, the tour left a trail of fistfights, wrecked hotel rooms, sloppy performances, and canceled shows. Halfway through the tour, the band awoke to find that Ed King, unable to cope with the lifestyle and other personal problems, had packed up and left during the night. Allen and Gary divided up his parts for the remaining six weeks of "Torture Tour."

Ronnie Van Zant: "We were doing bottles of Dom Perignon, fifths of whiskey, wine and beer... We couldn't even remember the order of

the songs. Some guy crouched behind an amp and shouted them to us. We made the Who look like church boys on Sunday. We done things only fools'd do."¹⁰

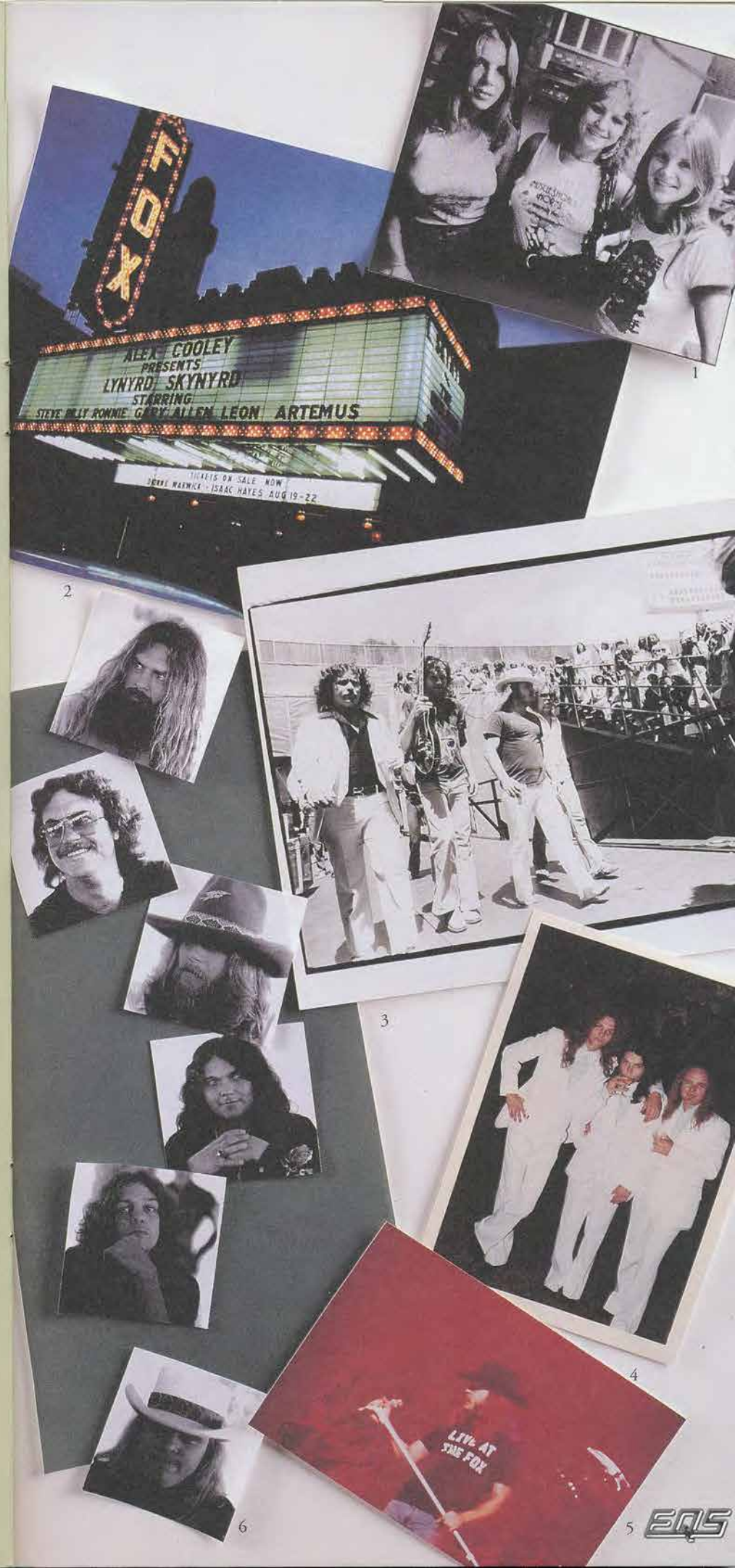
Ronnie again: "We get a lot of publicity about busting up places or being really mean... but you just get really tired... really nervous... just about to flip out and go over the deep end, just say the hell with it, I quit. Well, instead of doin' that we're just liable to knock a hole in the wall."¹¹

Though it was successful commercially, Skynyrd was not completely satisfied with *Nuthin' Fancy*, so for their fourth album, new manager Peter Rudge arranged for Tom Dowd, producer of *Layla* and the *Allman's Live At The Fillmore East*, to take over the controls. Dowd's approach involved a disciplined method of arranging and rehearsing each song, then recording the basic instrumental tracks with the band as a unit in the studio. This contrasted with Al Kooper's approach which relied heavily on overdubbing.

Four numbers for the new album were recorded in late September at the Record Plant in Los Angeles, then the band hit the road, returning to Capricorn Studios in Macon, Georgia in November to finish the recording. The title track of the new album was yet another misunderstood Skynyrd statement, *Gimme Back My Bullets*.

Ronnie: "We quit doin' the song... because almost every audience... would throw a handful of bullets, you know, like .38 slugs... I'd say, 'Gimme Back My Bullets,' and they'd let me have it... There are two types of bullets (in the music business). There's bullets from a

1. The Honkettes (left to right): Cassie Gaines, Jo Jo Billingsley, Leslie Hawkins, 1976. (MCA Archives)
2. Fox Theater Marquee for recording of live album, Atlanta, GA, July, 1976. (Neal Preston)
3. Entering Oakland Coliseum, *Day On The Green*, July, 1977. (MCA Archives)
4. Allen, Gary, Ronnie at Gary's wedding, September, 1977. (Courtesy Judy Grondin)
5. Allen, Ronnie, Fox Theater, Atlanta, July, 1976. (Neal Preston)
6. Florida promotion, 1977: (top to bottom) Artimus Pyle, Billy Powell, Leon Wilkeson, Gary Rossington, Allen Collins, and Ronnie Van Zant. (Charles Odum)



gun, and there's a bullet on the trade magazines. I wish you'd listen to the song that (second) way – that's the way it was meant."¹²

By the time of the *Bullets* album, the "Outlaw" movement was taking hold in country music, and songs like "All I Can Do Is Write About It" on the album and "T For Texas," which was added to their shows, reflected an increasing emphasis on hardcore country music. The "Outlaw" movement was a return to the roots of country, a movement against the slick Nashville sound, and was spearheaded by Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, and Tompall Glaser, among others. In fact, the addition of "T For Texas" was prompted by Ronnie hearing Glaser's version of the classic Jimmie Rodgers' yodel.

Riding the success of both their tours and albums, Skynyrd set July, 1976 for the live recordings that would be their fifth album, eventually titled *One More From The Road*. This would give the band time to find a new third guitarist, and for several months, they auditioned players including Leslie West, formerly of Mountain, and Southern studio guitar wiz, Wayne Perkins. However, the guitarist turned out to be closer than they imagined.

Subsequent to *Bullets*, the group began touring with a trio of gospel-style female backup singers – Jo Jo Billingsley, Leslie Hawkins, and Cassie Gaines. Cassie was a torrid throated Memphis State University grad who landed the Skynyrd gig after five years of session work. When she realized the band was searching for a new picker, she told them about her younger brother.

Steve Gaines was familiar enough with Skynyrd that his band, *Crawdaddy*, played "Saturday Night Special" as part of their regular set. However, when he drove from his home in Seneca, Missouri to a Skynyrd show in Kansas City at his sister's request, he had no idea that Cassie had arranged for him to play with the group. Once he stepped on the stage to jam on "T For Texas," though, it was the band's turn to be shocked at Cassie's kid brother's ability.

At 26, Steve Gaines already had as much professional experience as the Skynyrd. Since 1971, he had been in a variety of groups, including one with Mitch Ryder, and had recording experience both in Memphis and Macon. But as he drove home after the Kansas City show, Steve's career appeared stalled. No one in Skynyrd said anything about the performance until about two weeks later when Steve got a call from Ronnie asking him to join Skynyrd in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

Ronnie said: "I expect we'll all be in Steve's shadow one day. This kid is a writing and playing fool. He's already scared everybody (in the band) into playing their best in years."¹³

Steve's positive attitude and energy had a tremendous impact on the band, especially on Allen Collins, whose raves about the Kansas City performance were mainly responsible for landing the younger Gaines the third guitar spot. With the recording of the live album only a month away, Steve spent June in marathon cramming and jamming sessions. The month of rehearsals was the first time since (pronounced) that the group had extensive time to prepare for a recording.

Unlike some of the arenas Skynyrd were playing, the ornate Fox Theatre in Atlanta was a small venue, chosen for its sound. With the addition of Gaines and the needed rehearsal time, the band was primed for a classic performance, and that they gave.

Skynyrd's live reputation had elevated them critically into the rare stratosphere otherwise occupied by such as The Rolling Stones and the by-now shattered Allman Brothers Band. At the Gator Bowl benefit for Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter in July, it was Skynyrd who were the main attraction, and in August, their performance at Britain's Knebworth Festival garnered raves at the expense of the headlining Stones (according to the *New Music Express*, *Sounds*, and other Brit-rock weeklies).

The burgeoning Skynyrd live rep also reflected a number of extra-musical changes before and subsequent to the live recording. Ronnie had grown tired of the press accounts that dwelled on the

band's rowdy, drunken, redneck image. The group struck the confederate colors as backdrop and stopped using "Dixie" as their intro. Ronnie also began to take care of his person on and off-stage, including weaning himself off the whiskey bottle. (The birth of his daughter, Melody, certainly had something to do with this.)

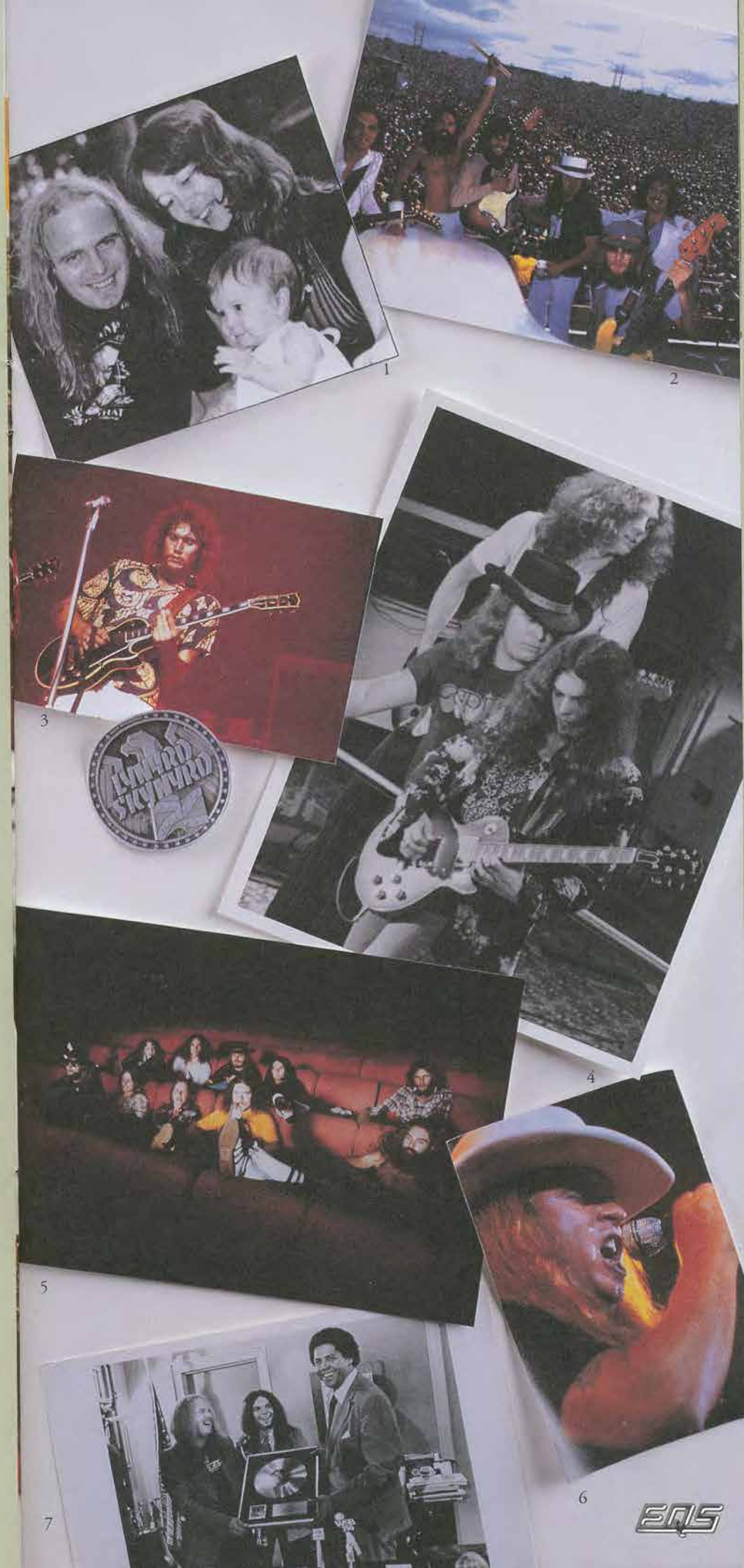
Some of the other band members, though, had not learned from past experiences. On Labor Day weekend, as the band took some time off before the upcoming tour, both Allen Collins and Gary Rossington crashed their cars in separate incidents. While the law came down on them with hefty fines for Driving Under The Influence, this was nothing compared to Ronnie Van Zant's public wrath. Ronnie called the incidents "just plain stupid"¹⁴ in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Circus Magazine* and anywhere else he was interviewed. His railings would culminate in the lyrics to the epochal "That Smell," written and performed during the tour that followed the release of **One More From The Road**.

As a result of the accidents, the band was forced to delay the start of the tour, and the resulting publicity virtually mocked the new calmer image Ronnie was attempting to engender.

Irregardless, **One More From The Road** quickly entered the Top 10, achieving gold, then platinum status, and with this success came such fringe benefits as trading their tour bus for a private plane and even more time to prepare for their next studio album.

Skynyrd entered Criteria Studios in Miami with producer Tom Dowd in April, 1977 with enough material to complete an album. However, once the sessions were done, disagreements broke out during the mixing process, and the group hit the road to fulfill touring commitments none-too-thrilled with the recordings thus far.

1. Ronnie, Judy, and Melody Van Zant, 1977. (MCA Archives)
2. Chicago Stadium, July, 1977. (Tom Hill)
3. Steve Gaines, Fox Theater, July, 1976. (Neal Preston)
4. Allen, Ronnie, Gary, 1976. (Courtesy Reed Huenink)
5. Fox Theater, July, 1976. (Neal Preston)
6. Ronnie, 1977. (Marti C. Griffin)
7. Ronnie and Gary present Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson with Platinum Record for Live Album, April 15, 1977. (Tom Hill - Courtesy Ron O'Brien)



Skynyrd then spent the Summer of '77 on their most impressive tour to date, doing a series of outdoor stadium concerts across America. Introduced to the strains of "Theme From The Magnificent Seven," a revitalized, confident Lynyrd Skynyrd "overpowered most of the other acts,"¹⁵ said the *San Francisco Examiner*. "A tidy mixture of country standards, hard-rocking originals and unconcerned euphoria gained for Skynyrd what none of the other bands were able to match: a straight forward triumph."¹⁶ The other artists on the bill were Santana, Peter Frampton and group, and The Outlaws. The critical praise and overwhelming crowd response was repeated at every stop on the tour.

The band then booked themselves into Doraville's Studio One to finish the album begun at Criteria. When they arrived they found engineer Rodney Mills, but Tom Dowd was still committed to a Rod Stewart project in Toronto. Dowd asked Los Angeles engineer Barry Rudolph to go to Atlanta to be "his representative"¹⁷ for at least the projected week Dowd would be away, and subsequently the producer gave the engineer the green light to record a song.

Rudolph had engineered Waylon Jennings' classic album *Are You Ready For The Country*, and this not only made him welcome in the studio with Skynyrd, but a bull session with Ronnie regarding Jennings and fellow C&W hero Merle Haggard resulted in the group recording Haggard's "Honky Tonk Night Time Man." This went so well that, before Rudolph left at the end of the week, the group had re-recorded "You Got That Right" and "That Smell" (both initially recorded at Criteria).

As it turned out, Tom Dowd was not asked to return to the project, and Ronnie, engineers Rodney Mills and former roadie/now Skynyrd soundman Kevin Elson put the finishing touches on the recordings, mixing both the Studio One and remixing the Criteria tracks used for the album. No producer credit was listed on the released LP.

Ronnie had often said that Lynyrd Skynyrd were "just street people,"¹⁸ trying to write "common songs for the common people."¹⁹ Combine that with the turbulence the group had been through

since inception, and they had the title of the new album, *Street Survivors*, complete with a cover photo showing the group standing tall while everything around them is in flames.

By the fall of 1977, the momentum of twelve years of touring, rehearsing, and recording had brought Skynyrd a maturity and musical excellence to match a new level of popularity. *Street Survivors* was the first Skynyrd album to be certified gold (over 500,000 copies sold) upon release, and all indications were that it would easily become the band's most popular ever. Skynyrd was to headline New York's Madison Square Garden in November as part of their most ambitious headline tour ever, "Tour Of The Survivors," and this was going to symbolize the fulfillment of Ronnie and band's long-time dream. But it was not to be.

Street Survivors was released October 17, 1977, and on October 20, during the first week of a projected three month tour, Lynyrd Skynyrd's private 1947 Convair 240 turbo prop plane ran out of gas due to "an engine malfunction of undetermined nature,"²⁰ causing it to crash in a forest near McComb, Mississippi while attempting to land. Steve Gaines, Cassie Gaines, assistant road manager Dean Kilpatrick, and Ronnie Van Zant were all killed instantly upon impact. The rest of the band and entourage all suffered serious injuries that, in some instances, caused permanent physical damage.

The irony of the plane crash is that it brought Lynyrd Skynyrd more national publicity than ever before, tragically branding the group with the reckless image their *Survivors* tour was designed to change.

That the accident happened just as Lynyrd Skynyrd appeared to be receiving broad-based acceptance and only shortly after Steve Gaines was fully integrated is one of the saddest tragedies in rock 'n' roll. The "legend" of Lynyrd Skynyrd is what the band had yet to achieve when they boarded that plane. While we celebrate their musical legacy, we can only imagine what was yet to be.

— Ron O'Brien with Andy McKaie

April, 1975

LYNYRD SKYNYRD

SWAMP SWAMP MUSIC

It was mid-July, 1973 and rain soaked the half-million people assembled in the rolling hills of upstate New York to hear the Allman Brothers, Grateful Dead and the Band perform at Watkins Glen. The people were drawn there by the glittering promise that had been glimpsed four years earlier at the Woodstock festival, the promise of a world guided by the rock and roll spirit into a better future. It was a myth whose power was shaken almost immediately by the debacle at Altamont, and taken apart piece by piece in the ensuing years of political repression.

The Watkins Glen gathering was one of the few to come off relatively smoothly in the wake of Woodstock, but the ensuing years had turned the innocence of Woodstock Nation into a hackneyed set of rituals. The uninspired performances at the Glen, particularly by an Allman Brothers band left emotionally shattered by the deaths of Duane Allman and Berry Oakley, left no doubt that the event marked the end of an era.

The following day I flew down to Atlanta for the party Al Kooper was throwing to kick off his new MCA-sponsored custom record label, Sounds of the South.

Kooper had been at several key crossroads in rock and roll history already, playing with Bob Dylan's first electric band on *Bringing It All Back Home*, as keyboardist and frontman for the groundbreaking New York band the Blues Project, then as the conceptualist who coined a commercial formula by meshing jazz and R&B horn charts with a rock band in *Blood Sweat and Tears*. So when Kooper boasted that he was sitting on a band that was going to be the next Rolling Stones, it was not hard to build up at least some curiosity to see what he was talking about.

JIM MCCRARY

ERS

The party was at one of Atlanta's hottest clubs at the time, a place called Richard's that was sardine-deep with 500 plus chili and fried chicken-eating, beer and whiskey-drinking music business people. The buzz of conversation fairly drowned out the first band, Elijah, and dimmed only slightly during Mose Jones' set.

Lynyrd Skynyrd, though, was about to put the down payment on a legend.

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No amount of hype on Kooper's part could have prepared the audience for what they heard next. Lynyrd Skynyrd music roared through the room, riveting listeners with blood-curdling intensity. Guitar lines hung in the air like massive steel Calder mobiles propelled by the flailing rhythms. The set opened with "Workin' For MCA," which sounded more like a threat than a celebration.

The Stones were an interesting analogy, but there was something else about this band. Not two guitarists, but three – Gary Rossington, the anchor, was definitely out of the Keith Richards mode; the electric-haired Allen Collins ripped out one Cream-era Eric Clapton solo after another; Ed King, the most technically polished of the three, tossed in deft fills and soloed in some impossible cross between flat picking and psychedelia.

Despite the roaring guitars, all eyes were riveted on the short, sandy-haired vocalist who whipped the crowd into a frenzy without moving from the center-stage spot from which he hurled his astonishingly menacing words. Though these guys clearly took their immediate inspiration from the British blues bands of the 1960s, lead singer Ronnie Van Zant's delivery had none of the formalized, classicist distance from the material that characterized the British blues process. Van Zant sang songs like "Gimme Three Steps," "I Ain't The One," "Things Goin' On" and "Poison Whiskey" with an innate familiarity with treachery and horror, the venomous warning and knife-twisting fury of Howlin' Wolf's scariest recordings. My depression at seeing the end of an era at Watkins

Glen was washed away by the certainty that Lynyrd Skynyrd represented a whole new era.

It was not going to be an era of peace and love this time around, that was immediately clear. Lynyrd Skynyrd played music that fed on anger and transcended to some warrior's reward. Many of Van Zant's lyrics were about betrayal, paranoia and the certainty of evil, balanced against his devotion to an innocent past and redeemed only by the moral courage of the band-against-the-world. He articulated the never-forgotten rage of a beaten South, a vision of rural America slowly being eaten up by concrete developments and pencil-pushing Washington bureaucrats.



MCA ARCHIVES

Ronnie, 1973

Violence and death walked constantly through his writing, from the earliest demos to his final songs, as if he knew that the battles he was fighting had already been lost, and all that was left was to voice blind outrage at the result.

The Richard's show was one of those turning point events that swelled in significance with passing time. The depth of experience suggested by Van Zant's writing and the spring-tight, maniacal intensity of the band's performance was the stuff of legend, more of a piece with Robert Johnson's fabled deal with the devil than the kind of rags-to-riches stories that clutter the standard pop biography.

August, 1977

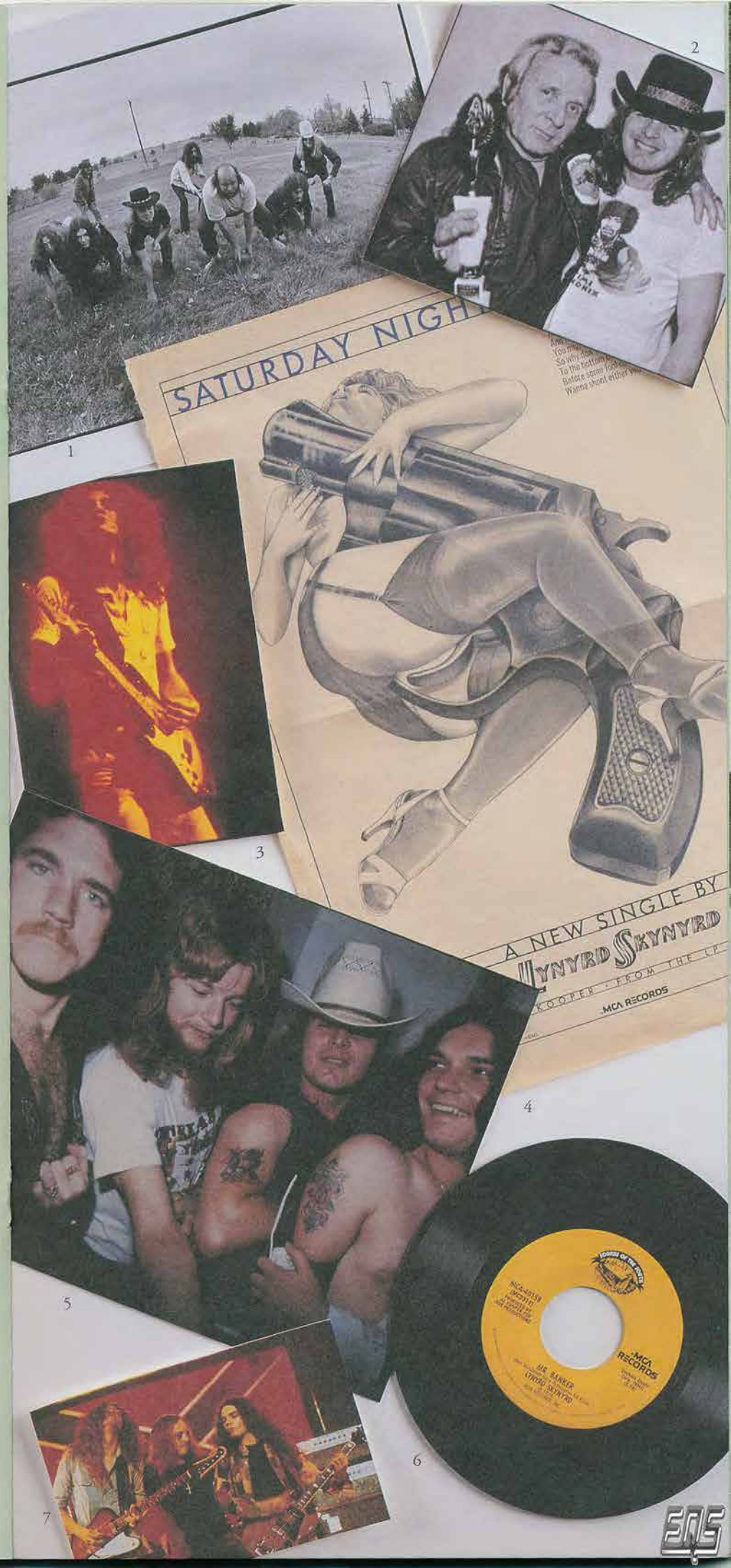


The songs from the set weren't the whole story, either. The next day Kooper took some of us up to his house and played a series of demos that didn't make it to the first album. One song in particular was more frightening than anything the band had played the night before. "Was I Right Or Wrong" capsulized Van Zant's muse in one chilling statement. The moral ambivalence of the title represents the war that raged in Van Zant's soul throughout his life, a struggle between adherence to the settled values of family life that he was raised on and the realization that his only way out of the dead-end prospects offered to him was to take to the outlawed world of the rock and roller.

The speaker in "Was I Right Or Wrong" leaves home to join a rock and roll band against the wishes of his parents. When he finally becomes a success after years of struggling, he returns home to show his parents that he had chosen the right path even though they didn't approve. But when he reaches his destination, he finds that his parents are dead and the old house is gone. He is left to sing his song to their tombstones. The imagery is as old and as powerful as human language itself; the inspiration clearly autobiographical. "We tried to be right about what we were doing," said Rossington years later in trying to explain this song.

Their determination to play rock and roll against all odds provided the inspiration for much of the music released during the little more than four years that elapsed between their debut album and the plane crash that ended the era as dramatically as it had begun. This set starts off with a series of rediscovered demo tapes made during the band's formative years, and offers a number of clues to understanding the tumultuous forces at work during that formation.

1. Playing football, 1974. (MCA Archives)
2. Lacey and Ronnie Van Zant, Spring, 1976. (MCA Archives)
3. Allen, 1973 (MCA Archives)
4. Trade ad, April, 1975. (Courtesy Reed Huenink)
5. Billy, Leon, Ronnie, and Gary, Summer, 1975. (Courtesy Reed Huenink)
6. B-side first single, November, 1973. (Courtesy Ron O'Brien)
7. Gary, Ronnie, Allen, 1974. (MCA Archives)



The first three tracks on the set are some of the earliest known recordings by the band, a series of demos recorded by Quin Ivy when the band was still trying to find its own voice after several years of playing a steady diet of Yardbirds and Cream in local clubs. We begin appropriately enough with the band's signature song, "Free Bird," a cornerstone composition that squarely addresses the conflicting currents in Van Zant's writing. The singer sadly takes his leave, from what first appears to be a lover but what would soon become very apparently life itself, ironically professing his freedom while at the same time admitting that his nature is predestined. Even here, years before the song grew to be the larger-than-life statement it became, when Van Zant sings "Lord knows I can't change," it's hard not to feel a shiver up your spine.

♦♦♦

The band had already heard the Allman Brothers playing local Jacksonville bars, an experience that at once discouraged them when they realized how far advanced the Allman Brothers were musically and inspired them to take their best shot at catching up. Echoes of Duane Allman's slide guitar technique are obvious here, and while the demo arrangement shows that the final guitar raveup coda was still being worked out, you can hear the direction they were headed in. This transitional version shows how key an influence Jeff Beck was on the band – the resolution of the instrumental passage is lifted right off of "Beck's Bolero". Before the song was finished, the transitional influence of Duane Allman would be complete. In live performances the song was always dedicated to the ultimate "Free Bird," Allman – until it became a tribute to Van Zant himself.

The original idea for "Free Bird," like most of Van Zant's early writing, was put together at the band's rehearsal studio in Green Cove Springs dubbed "Hell House". "Junkie," another track from this first demo, is strongly influenced by Clapton's Cream playing and features extended guitar interplay between Collins and Rossington, with Collins flashing "White Room"-style wah wah a la Clapton. The subject matter, like another early song, "Wino," was taken from the band's experiences hanging out on Jacksonville's

skid row. "He's Alive," the third of the Quinvy demos, is another of Van Zant's ruminations about death and redemption. He sings longingly of a father figure who helped him through hard times and told him to place his faith in God.

"But now you have gone, and I'm on my own," Van Zant laments. "I wish that you were here, right by my side. I would love to tell you, That I know he's alive." The tension between faith and despair, between the search for rocking liberation and the security of a settled life, between sinner and saved, would remain a central theme in Van Zant's writing for the rest of his life. It was a dilemma he never solved, maybe because he knew there would never be a definitive answer.

Muscle Shoals Sound Studios producer Jimmy Johnson heard the earlier demos and was impressed enough to front the group enough studio time to make an album's worth of material they were extremely proud of. But the album was passed on by every record company in the industry, although a number of the tracks were eventually released as Skynyrd's *First And... Last* after the plane crash.

The version of "One More Time" here is an alternate mix from the Muscle Shoals sessions, more intense than the one which appeared on *Street Survivors*. "Gimme Three Steps" and "Trust" are also previously unreleased versions from the Muscle Shoals recordings. Both songs emanate from the bleaker side of the scuffling rockers' existence, but "Trust" was the most paranoid of Van Zant's early songs. The stark guitar scrapings add dramatic impact to his warning chorus: "You can't always trust your woman. You can't always trust your best friend. Beware of the ones that you need, 'cause they might be the ones that do you in."

"Comin' Home," taken from *First And... Last*, offers the flip side of the sentiment expressed in "Trust," the weary traveler's gratitude at returning to familiar surroundings after the rigors of life on the road. Here Van Zant looks to the succor of his wife and friends to restore his flagging spirit.

This was the last track recorded at Muscle Shoals, and the intricacy of the arrangement shows how much Skynyrd learned about songwriting and studio work from Jimmy Johnson and the Swampers. Though the Muscle Shoals sessions began with a new rhythm section and only the two original guitarists, by this time the new bassist and drummer had completely integrated themselves into the band.

Ed King entered the picture later, but in 1975 overdubbed enough parts to be part of this music's legacy. The three guitars are used for a wide range of textures, from the country-style playing behind the vocal in the verses to the delicate slide figures, screeching feedback harmonies and blazing individual solos that power the song's instrumental momentum, highlighted by Rossington's exultant, jazz-influenced final run. The Billy Powell piano solo was overdubbed for the song's inclusion on *First And... Last* but fits so well it's hard to believe it wasn't part of the original plan.

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When Al Kooper signed the band, he was impressed with the Muscle Shoals demos but wanted to record Skynyrd his own way. Unlike the student-teacher relationship the band developed with Jimmy Johnson, Lynyrd Skynyrd's dealings with Al Kooper were an explosive mixture of creative ferment and outright hostility from the very beginning. Johnson helped the band realize itself as a recording group; he was far from interested in playing this kind of music himself. To add to his status as a father figure, he gave them free studio time at a point where nobody else in the business would offer a helping hand. Kooper was everything Johnson wasn't – a Yankee, a music industry wheeler-dealer, and a hotshot rock and roller to boot. Kooper knew how to work with a rock band's public image and direction. Where Johnson taught them how to record a rhythm section properly, Kooper was interested in making them the world's greatest rock band.

"Kooper had a vision of the band," Ed King recalls, "that even the band didn't have." Kooper was well aware that he had a tiger by the

tail as the fierce MCA demos he produced attest. "Down South Jukin'" is as joyous a song as the band ever recorded, the kind of party anthem its fans seized on in later years as emblematic of its spirit. "Truck Driving Man" is a delightful honky tonk strut. The reason it did not appear on the first album is probably that it was seen as too "country" for a band being marketed to rock audiences in the early '70s.



MICHAEL PUTLAND

Allen, Gary, 1974

On the stark "Mr. Banker," we get a glimpse of Van Zant as a country blues singer. Once again the plea is given a macabre twist – the singer admits he owns nothing of value except a 1950 Les Paul guitar, but begs the banker to take it and give him the money "to bury my papa."

The fire-breathing demo version of "I Ain't The One" sounds like it could have been the deal-maker of the bunch. The crunching guitars and Van Zant's possessed vocal boiled down the group's gut appeal to a simple package. "Poison Whiskey," with its majestic, James Gang-inspired guitar arrangement, could only have added fuel to MCA's fires.

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Bassist Leon Wilkeson, who composed most of the bass parts on the first album, (pronounced 'leh-nerd' skin'-nerd), left the band shortly before Kooper brought them into the studio. King, who the group had befriended when they met him on a tour with the

Strawberry Alarm Clock, came in to play the bass parts as well as a guitar solo. The band convinced Wilkeson to rejoin after the record was finished and King assumed his role as third guitarist.

(pronounced) is a turning point for Southern rock, a moment when virtually all of the significant post-Allman Brothers advances in the music coalesced. Not only was it the powerful debut of one of the genre's greatest bands, it was also recorded at Studio One in Doraville, Georgia, home base for the only challenger to Skynyrd's position, the Atlanta Rhythm Section. Its house engineer was the brilliant Rodney Mills, who was involved in all the ARS recordings as well as some by 38 Special, the band fronted by Ronnie's brother Donnie. Mills specialized in getting guitars to speak for themselves, and he never got a better opportunity to apply that skill than with Lynyrd Skynyrd, beginning with "Simple Man" on *(pronounced)* and throughout the remainder of their career.

Kooper was a virtual working member of the group on *(pronounced)*, and no song on the album bears his stamp more than "Tuesday's Gone". Under the pseudonym Roosevelt Gook, Kooper played bass, mellotron and sang backup harmony on the track, which in fact did not use the Skynyrd rhythm section at all – Robert Nix of the Atlanta Rhythm Section played drums. Kooper's dramatic mellotron part adds an almost cinematic quality to the elegiac ballad, which is ostensibly about leaving a woman behind, but by the time Van Zant's powerful vocal finishes becomes a song about loss and loneliness too vast to hold any single referent.

In "Things Goin' On," Van Zant articulates his loathing of politicians in a slashing indictment. Though he expressed himself in only populist terms his political awareness was far more sophisticated than many analysts have realized. He simply did not fit



1. Steve, Gary, and Allen backstage at the Fox Theater, July, 1976. (Neal Preston)

2. Artimus Pyle, 1977. (Michael Zagaris)

3. Florida, 1975. (David Gabr)

4. Ronnie, 1977. (MCA Archives)

5. Logo, 1977.

6. Allen, Japan, 1977. (MCA Archives)

7. Fox Theater dressing room, July 1976. (Neal Preston)

8. 1977. (Michael Zagaris)

in any easily defined conservative or liberal mode. The common misconception is that he was some kind of Dixie reactionary, but in this song, his outrage is directed against a government that would rather wage war and send a man to the moon than feed its poor, hardly a position espoused by the conservatives of the era.

“Sweet Home Alabama,” the opening track on **Second Helping**, is the song that most people use to define Van Zant’s politics, but those sands are just as shifty. Van Zant’s impassioned defense of the South, the bottom-line point of the song, has nothing to do with partisan politics. George Wallace is defended here out of sheer regional pride, just as Neil Young is attacked for the same motive.

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Second Helping and its followup, **Nuthin’ Fancy**, represent crests of Skynyrd’s popularity and creative enthusiasm. The three-guitar attack was cooking on a magnificent level as new material piled on the wealth of songs that band has already stashed away from previous years. No sooner did King take over as third guitarist than the songwriting hit a new peak. King remembers co-writing “Sweet Home Alabama” the day he joined in on guitar.

“I went home that night and dreamed the solo, note for note, in my sleep,” he recalls. “The fingering techniques, chord changes, everything. I woke up right away and played it, and it worked. The first song I ever wrote, ‘Incense And Peppermints,’ was stolen from me, so I looked at this as a kind of payback.”

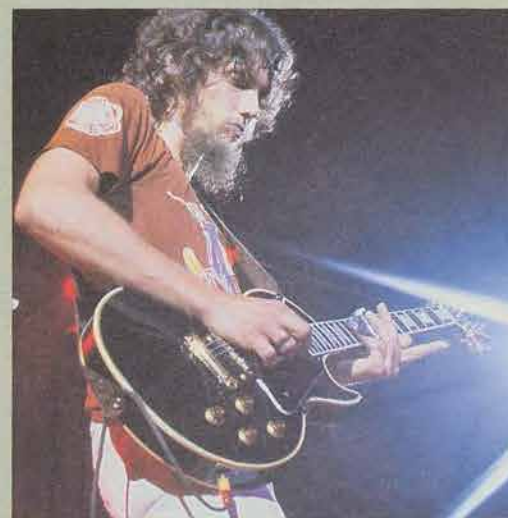
“Sweet Home Alabama” was recorded at Studio One; the rest of **Second Helping** at the Record Plant in Los Angeles. “Workin’ For MCA” turns on a killer double guitar lead from Collins and Rossington. Rossington’s solo on J.J. Cale’s “Call Me The Breeze” is another high point.

J.J. Cale wasn’t the only influence the band paid tribute to on **Second Helping**. On “Swamp Music” Van Zant likens the howling of a hound to the blues moans of Son House. His ultimate tribute, though, is reserved for “The Ballad Of Curtis Lowe,” a song about a

black country store owner who used to redeem the deposit bottles the band often collected to support themselves. After they’d had their refreshments, a neighborhood bluesman would take out his guitar and play it for the boys, a gesture Van Zant never forgot and finally found an appropriate response to.

If there was any wonder why yet another song about the perils of heroin use, “The Needle And The Spoon,” appeared on **Second Helping**, Van Zant’s eerie statement “I know, I know” toward the end indicates how personal an issue this must have really been. Collins offers his own observations on the subject with a vicious Claptonesque solo.

This set includes the previously unreleased studio version of “Was I Right Or Wrong” recorded during the **Second Helping** sessions. Why it was never finished for the original record is anyone’s guess, but contemporary remixing techniques have allowed this version to be completed, and its presence provides one of the best moments on this compilation.



Steve Gaines, 1977

MARTI C. GRIFFIN

Van Zant explored a parallel issue in “Don’t Ask Me No Questions,” a song that expressed his irritation with the way friends back home treated him now that he had become a rock and roll star. His ambivalence with the results of stardom would gnaw at his writing until the end.

Nuthin' Fancy opens with another powerful rocker built around an Ed King riff, "Saturday Night Special". Like "Sweet Home Alabama," the song was the only track on the album recorded at Studio One and stands out dramatically from the rest of the material. Recorded in a single night with Rodney Mills at the board, "Saturday Night Special" is the hardest-riffing single track the band ever cut.

Despite Van Zant's reputation for hell raising and the same mistaken notions regarding his politics, "Saturday Night Special" took on a subject sacred to good old boys from coast to coast – gun control. No one has ever developed a more persuasive artistic argument against hand guns than Van Zant does here in several gripping verses about senseless killings followed by the suggestion that all hand guns be thrown to the bottom of the sea.

"On The Hunt" and "Whiskey Rock-A-Roller" represent the new direction in Van Zant's writing that took place about this time.

"The last five years the band was together, Ronnie seemed to write more... about us, or things that happened on the road," said Rossington. "On The Hunt" is a frank description of the band's post-show practice of sizing up the inevitable array of women who hung around to party; "Whiskey Rock-A-Roller" a heady celebration of the sheer exhilaration a hot rock band can feel as it heads from town to town. The live version of this track, taken from a performance at the Knebworth Festival in England in 1976, depicts Van Zant in full strut.

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Everywhere the band went thousands of kids flocked to the shows to party with Skynyrd. In the South, not even the Allman Brothers inspired the kind of intense loyalty that Van Zant and his hard-rocking cronies got from their followers. Van Zant was a charismatic leader to millions of disaffected kids who rebelled against every authority figure pitched against them, including the rock and roll establishment. He articulated the frustrations and aspirations, not just of those from the South, but the downtrodden everywhere.

Unlike Bruce Springsteen, who writes about the mythic desires of suburban American teenagers, Van Zant expressed the bitter rage of a working class seething at the betrayal of broken utopian promises. For that reason, Van Zant was the true voice of 1970s rock, a music and a lifestyle that was walking its last mile before the neat execution performed by the video revolution of the 1980s.

Van Zant was aware enough to realize exactly what he was doing, but he also recognized that by setting himself up as a totem for his followers across the country he was losing touch with the simple human experiences left behind. Chief among his disappointments at the change in his life was the loss of good friends who treated him differently now that he returned home as a celebrity. Ostensibly inspired by the departure of Bob Burns, "Am I Losin'?" also works as a metaphor for Van Zant's personal life.

The loss of friends made the band's internal bonds even tighter, and many hours on and off the road were spent jamming together and in the company of other close musician friends like the members of 38 Special. "Made In The Shade" approximates the feeling of these after-hours hoots. Played on acoustic instruments and a milk crate for percussion, the side evokes a backporch country feel and even induces Van Zant to try a little yodelling. Jeff Carlisi, one of the guitarists with 38 Special and a close companion of Van Zant's, would often jam with Van Zant into the wee hours and work on song ideas. One of the most moving products of their collaboration, "Four Walls Of Raiford," is included here for the first time in its powerful demo form, with Carlisi providing the only accompaniment to Van Zant's singing.

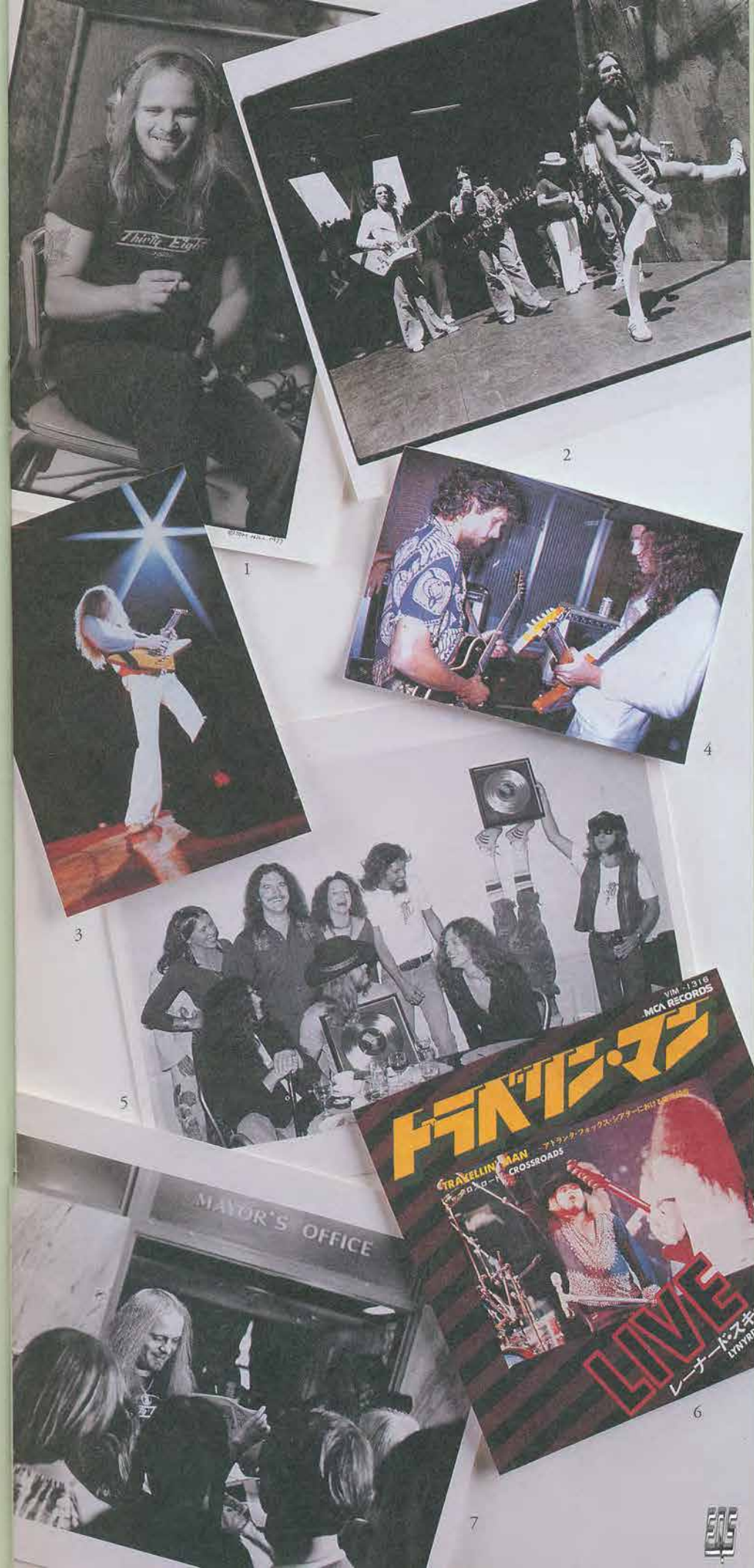
◆◆◆
By the time *Gimme Back My Bullets* came out in 1976 the band had spent nearly a decade on the road and was physically and psychologically beat up from the ravages of no-holds-barred rock and rolling. Ed King left after *Nuthin' Fancy*, forcing the band back to its two-guitar format. Drummer Bob Burns also quit, and Skynyrd parted ways with Al Kooper, who was replaced by Tom Dowd.

Van Zant's songwriting on this album reflects the turmoil Skynyrd was undergoing. The title track sums up this feeling with its plea for a return to the headier days of commercial success before the band had spent itself with the shotgun blasts of life on the road. "Don't wanna see no more damage done," Van Zant admits in the lyric.

There was, of course, no talk of giving up, but the devil-may-care attitude of previous albums was replaced by an admission of world-weariness. The Van Zant who warned he would watch every nickel in "Workin' For MCA" now confessed in "Roll Gypsy Roll" that he knew he was making money but had no idea how much, and furthermore that most of the money had gone "up my nose," a common phrase referring to snorting cocaine. Touring was described as a grim job for a determined gypsy rather than the life-affirming blast it had once seemed.

"All I Can Do Is Write About It," presented here for the first time in a stark early acoustic form (take 3 of an eventual 6) with Van Zant's singing striking a dramatic note, is his most compelling piece of writing about the warring themes in his life. Here Van Zant sums up his philosophy, extolling the beauties of nature while warning that he sees them disappearing. But now he comes to terms with the futility of his once-furious reaction to this process. "Lord, I can't make any changes," he admits, "All I can do is write it in a song." Then, in one of the most powerful images he ever penned, Van Zant wrote one of several phrases that could well serve as his epitaph: "I can see the concrete slowly creeping, Lord take me and mine before that comes."

The turmoil surrounding Skynyrd during this period began to affect the quality of the live shows, and the band looked to add a third



1. Ronnie at Studio One, August, 1977. (Tom Hill-Courtesy Judy Grondin)
2. In runway before taking stage, Oakland Coliseum, July, 1977. (Michael Zagaris)
3. Allen, 1977. (Marti C. Griffin)
4. Steve, Allen, 1977. (MCA Archives)
5. Platinum Record Party, 1977, for "One More From The Road." (MCA Archives)
6. Japanese single sleeve, 1977. (Courtesy Ron O'Brien)
7. Ronnie signing autographs, Atlanta City Hall, July 15, 1977. (Tom Hill-Courtesy Reed Huenink)

guitarist again. After considering several big-name options, they settled on a relatively unknown picker named Steve Gaines.



Gaines was just the tonic Skynyrd needed. He provided Skynyrd with a dynamic boost, carrying live shows on the strength of his effortless soloing strength and eye-catching technique. Gaines virtually remade the band by adding its most versatile instrumental voice ever. Though his greatest strength was as a blues player, Gaines was also an awesome flat-picking stylist and knew enough jazz theory to apply some very modern concepts to what had become a fairly traditional approach to live arrangements.

One More From The Road, recorded in early July, 1976, just three years after the Richard's show, introduced Gaines on record. He hadn't had time to fully integrate his style into the arrangements, yet he still stole the show, as the several tracks from the set included here attest. On "T For Texas," he whips the band into such a blues-rock frenzy that you might swear you were listening to the Allmans' **Live At Fillmore East** at several points.

Gaines became a major creative force in Lynyrd Skynyrd without changing its identity. His writing and playing fit perfectly into the Skynyrd ethos, making the one album he recorded with the group before the 1977 plane crash, **Street Survivors**, a musical high point in the band's career.

Gaines contributed two of the best songs on **Street Survivors**, the raucous guitar boogie "I Know A Little" and the soulful blues "Ain't No Good Life," and powered the band through an outstanding cover of Merle Haggard's "Honky Tonk Night Time Man". Van Zant can be heard complimenting Gaines' stinging soloing with the phrase "Sounds like Roy," comparing Gaines to the great country guitarist Roy Clark.

Van Zant wrote the last and most personal of his anti-heroin songs for this session, "That Smell," penned with Collins and very obviously aimed at one of the other members of the band. This

goes down with Neil Young's "Tonight's The Night" as the most poignant anti-smack anthem in rock history. It took on a macabre reading when Van Zant and Gaines were killed in the plane crash that occurred while they were on tour in support of **Street Survivors**, but a careful listening reveals its true meaning and the ironic fate of both author and subject.

Gaines became Van Zant's principal songwriting partner on **Street Survivors** sessions, co-authoring three numbers including "Georgia Peaches," which was released later as part of the **Legend** package. "I Never Dreamed" revealed a side of Van Zant's writing that had never surfaced before and a possible indication of one of the directions he was heading in. Here the singer adopts a new attitude toward love, casting aside the cynical use-em-and-lose-em philosophy of his previous work and admitting his dependence on a longstanding love relationship. He begs a lover who's left him to come back in the song, admitting that he finally understands the meaning of love.

But Van Zant was not all introspection this time around. He responded to the creative boost he got from Gaines by regaining his lust for the road and the rocker's lifestyle. The exultant Skynyrd stood for one last time, a defiant sign-off from a band that seemed poised for its greatest moments just as it was tragically snuffed out.

— John Swenson

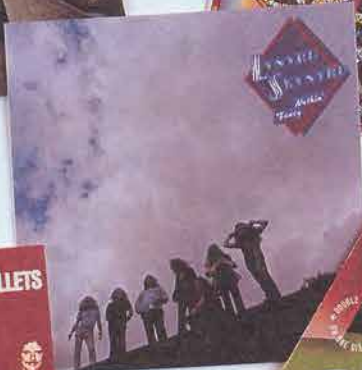




1973



1974



1975



1976



1976



1977



1978



1982



1979



1987



1989

LYNYRD SKYNYRD 1

Ronnie Van Zant - vocals
Allen Collins - guitars
Gary Rossington - guitars
Larry Junstrom - bass
Bob Burns - drums

Disc One/Cassette One - Side A

Free Bird (demo)

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded October, 1970, Quinvy Studios, Sheffield, Alabama
Produced by David Johnson & Quin Ivy
Previously unreleased

Junkie (demo)

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded October, 1970, Quinvy Studios
Produced by David Johnson & Quin Ivy
Previously unreleased

He's Alive (demo)

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded October, 1970, Quinvy Studios
Produced by David Johnson & Quin Ivy
Previously unreleased

LYNYRD SKYNYRD 2

Ronnie Van Zant - vocals
Allen Collins - guitars
Gary Rossington - guitars

One More Time (original version)

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded 1971, Muscle Shoals Sound Studios, Sheffield, Alabama
Greg Walker - bass
Ricky Medlocke - drums, background vocals
Tim Smith - background vocals
Produced by Jimmy Johnson & Tim Smith
Previously unreleased

Gimme Three Steps (original version)

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded 1971, Muscle Shoals Sound Studios
Leon Wilkeson - bass
Bob Burns - drums
Produced by Jimmy Johnson & Tim Smith
Previously unreleased

Trust (original version)

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded 1971, Muscle Shoals Sound Studios
Leon Wilkeson - bass
Bob Burns - drums
Produced by Jimmy Johnson & Tim Smith
Previously unreleased

Comin' Home

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded 1971, Muscle Shoals Sound Studios
Ronnie - vocal (overdubbed 1975)
Greg Walker - bass
Ricky Medlocke - drums
Billy Powell - piano (overdubbed 1975)
Ed King - guitar (overdubbed 1975)
Produced by Jimmy Johnson & Tim Smith
from "Skynyrd's First And... Last" (9/78)

LYNYRD SKYNYRD 3

Ronnie Van Zant - vocals
Allen Collins - guitars
Gary Rossington - guitars
Ed King - bass (all tracks except "Mr. Banker" and
"Tuesday's Gone")
Bob Burns - drums (except "Tuesday's Gone")
Billy Powell - piano

Mr. Banker (demo)

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant-Ed King)

Recorded early 1973, Studio One, Doraville, Georgia
Van Zant, Rossington and King (guitar) only
Produced by Al Kooper
Originally "B" side "Gimme Three Steps" single (11/73)

Cassette One - Side B

Down South Jukin' (demo)

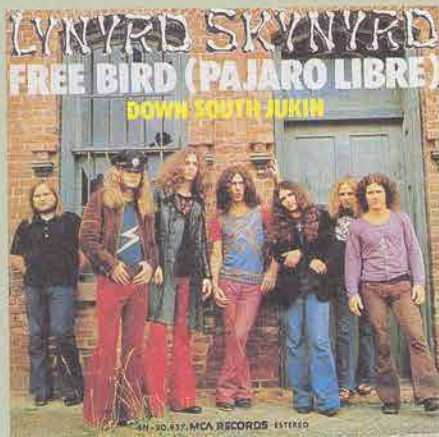
(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded early 1973, Studio One
Produced by Al Kooper
Previously unreleased on album
Originally "B" side "Free Bird"
single (11/74)

Truck Drivin' Man (demo)

(Ed King-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded early 1973, Studio One
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Legend" (9/87)



Spanish picture sleeve, 1974

I Ain't The One (demo)

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded early 1973, Studio One
Produced by Al Kooper
Previously unreleased

Poison Whiskey (demo)

(Ed King-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded early 1973, Studio One
Produced by Al Kooper
Previously unreleased

Tuesday's Gone

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded April, 1973, Studio One
Roosevelt Gook (Al Kooper) - bass,
mellotron, backup harmony
Robert Nix - drums
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Pronounced" (8/73)



Allen at Studio One, May, 1973

TOM HILL

Things Goin' On

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded April, 1973, Studio One
Bobbie Hall - percussion
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Pronounced" (8/73)

Free Bird

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded April, 1973, Studio One
Roosevelt Gook (Al Kooper) - organ
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Pronounced" (8/73)

LYNYRD SKYNYRD 4

Ronnie Van Zant - vocals
Allen Collins - guitars
Gary Rossington - guitars
Ed King - guitars
Billy Powell - keyboards
Leon Wilkeson - bass
Bob Burns - drums

Disc Two/Cassette Two - Side A

Sweet Home Alabama

(Ed King-Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded June-July, 1973, Studio One
Background vocals - Clydie King (Courtesy Chelsea Records),
Merry Clayton (Courtesy Ode Records), & Friends
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Second Helping" (4/74)



Was I Right Or Wrong?

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded January, 1974, Record Plant, Los Angeles, CA
Mixed June, 1991, Kingsound, No. Hollywood, CA
Original Session Produced by Al Kooper
Final Production by Ron O'Brien and Andy McKaie
Engineer: Rob Ruscoe assisted by Steve Cormier
Previously unreleased

Workin' For MCA

(Edward King-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded January, 1974, Record Plant, Los Angeles
Background vocals - Leon
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Second Helping" (4/74)

Don't Ask Me No Questions

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded January, 1974, Record Plant, Los Angeles
Al Kooper - piano & horn arrangement
Horns - Bobby Key, Trevor Lawrence, Steve Madio
Background vocals - Leon and Ronnie
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Second Helping" (4/74)

Swamp Music

(Edward King-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded January, 1974, Record Plant, Los Angeles
Background vocal - Leon
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Second Helping" (4/74)

The Ballad Of Curtis Lowe

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded January, 1974, Record Plant, Los Angeles
Al Kooper - piano, acoustic guitar, and background vocal
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Second Helping" (4/74)

The Needle And The Spoon

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded January, 1974, Record Plant, Los Angeles
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Second Helping" (4/74)

Call Me The Breeze

(J.J. Cale)

Recorded January, 1974, Record Plant, Los Angeles
Horn Arrangement by Al Kooper
Horns - Bobby Keys, Trevor Lawrence, and Steve Madio
Background vocal - Leon
Handclapping by Wicker, Toby, Cockroad, Moochie, Punnel,
Wolfman, Kooder, Mr. Feedback, and Gooshie
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Second Helping" (4/74)

Cassette Two - Side B

Saturday Night Special

(Edward King-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded October, 1974, Studio One, Doraville, Georgia
Al Kooper - Moog synthesizers
Background vocal - Leon
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Nuthin' Fancy" (3/75)



EMERSON-LOEW (COURTESY REED HUENINK)

Ronnie's birthday party,
Record Plant, Los Angeles,
January 15, 1974.

Gary (left), Al Kooper
(in sunglasses), Ronnie
(blowing out candles),
Allen (standing behind
Ronnie).

LYNYRD SKYNYRD 5

Ronnie Van Zant - vocals
Allen Collins - guitars
Gary Rossington - guitars
Ed King - guitars
Billy Powell - keyboards
Leon Wilkeson - bass
Artimus Pyle - drums, percussion

Made In The Shade

(Ronnie Van Zant)

Ronnie, Ed, Gary, Al Kooper - background vocal, and Billy and
David Foster - piano only
Recorded January, 1975, Webb IV Studios, Atlanta, Georgia
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Nuthin' Fancy" (3/75)

Am I Losin'

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded January, 1975, Webb IV Studios, Atlanta, Georgia
Background vocal - Al Kooper
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Nuthin' Fancy" (3/75)

On The Hunt

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded January, 1975, Webb IV Studios, Atlanta, Georgia
Produced by Al Kooper
from "Nuthin' Fancy" (3/75)

LYNYRD SKYNYRD 6

Ronnie Van Zant - vocals
Allen Collins - guitars
Gary Rossington - guitars
Leon Wilkeson - bass
Billy Powell - keyboards
Artimus Pyle - drums, percussion

(I Got The) Same Old Blues

(J.F. Cale)
Recorded September, 1975,
Record Plant, Los Angeles
Produced by Tom Dowd
from "Gimme Back My Bullets"
(2/76)

Double Trouble (live)

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)
Recorded November 4, 1975,
Capital Theatre, Cardiff, Wales, U.K.
Produced by Bob Meyrowitz
Originally recorded for King Biscuit
Flower Hour
Previously unavailable commercially

Roll Gypsy Roll

(Allen Collins-Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)
Recorded November 28, 1975,
Capricorn Studios, Macon, Georgia
Produced by Tom Dowd
from "Gimme Back My Bullets" (2/76)

All I Can Do Is Write About It (acoustic)

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)
Recorded November 28, 1975, Capricorn Studios
Mixed June, 1991, Kingsound Studios, No. Hollywood, CA
Original Session Produced by Tom Dowd
Final Production by Ron O'Brien and Andy McKaie
Engineer: Rob Ruscoe
Previously unreleased

Four Walls Of Raiford (undubbed demo)

(Jeff Carlisi-Ronnie Van Zant)
Ronnie and Jeff Carlisi (guitar)
Recorded April, 1976, Lynyrd Skynyrd Rehearsal Studios,
Jacksonville, Florida
Previously unreleased/Overdubbed version on "Legend" (9/87)



Billy, 1973
MCA ARCHIVES

LYNYRD SKYNYRD 7

Ronnie Van Zant - vocals
Allen Collins - guitars
Gary Rossington - guitars
Steve Gaines - guitars
Leon Wilkeson - bass
Billy Powell - keyboards
Artimus Pyle - drums, percussion

Disc Three/Cassette Three - Side A

Gimme Back My Bullets (live)

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)
Recorded live July, 1976, Fox Theatre, Atlanta, Georgia
Produced by Tom Dowd
Previously unreleased commercially/Released on promo single (8/77)

Searchin' (live)

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)
Recorded July, 1976, Fox Theatre, Atlanta, Georgia
Produced by Tom Dowd
from "One More From The Road" (9/76)

Simple Man (live)

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)
Recorded July, 1976, Fox Theatre, Atlanta, Georgia
Produced by Tom Dowd
from "Legend" (9/87)

Crossroads (live)

(Robert Johnson)
Recorded July, 1976, Fox Theatre, Atlanta, Georgia
Produced by Tom Dowd
from "One More For The Road" (9/76)

T For Texas (live)

(Jimmie Rodgers)
Recorded July, 1976, Fox Theatre, Atlanta, Georgia
Produced by Tom Dowd
from "One More For The Road" (9/76)

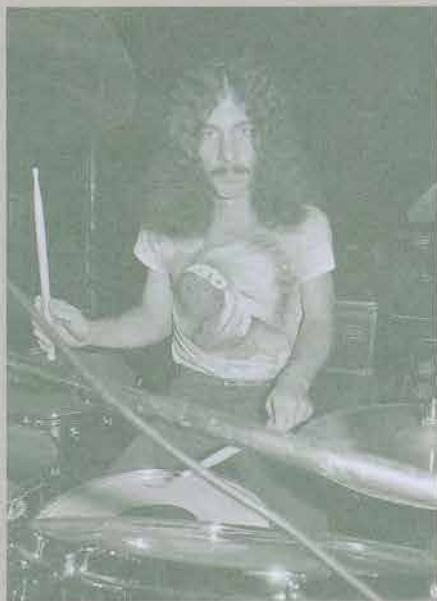
Whiskey Rock-A-Roller (live)

(Billy Powell-Ed King-Ronnie Van Zant)
Recorded August 21, 1976, Knebworth Festival, Knebworth, England
Backup vocals: "The Honkettes" (Cassie Gaines, Jo Jo Billingsley, Leslie Hawkins)
Mixed June, 1991, Kingsound Studios, No. Hollywood, CA
Original live recording by Rolling Stones Mobile Unit
Final production by Ron O'Brien and Andy McKaie
Engineer: Rob Ruscoe
Previously unreleased

Ain't No Good Life

(Steve Gaines)

Recorded April, 1977, Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida
Steve - lead vocal
from "Street Survivors" (10/77)



Bob Burns, 1973

MCA ARCHIVES

Cassette Three - Side B

What's Your Name (alternate mix)

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded April, 1977, Criteria Studios
Horn overdubs July-August, 1977, Studio One, Doraville, Georgia
Previously unreleased

Georgia Peaches

(Steve Gaines-Ronnie Van Zant)

Originally recorded April, 1977, Criteria Studios
Overdubs 1987, Criteria Studios
Original performers: Ronnie, Steve, and Artimus
Overdubs by Gary, Leon, and Billy
Produced by Tom Dowd
from "Legend" (9/87)

What's Your Name

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded April, 1977, Criteria Studios
Horn overdubs July-August, 1977, Studio One, Doraville, Georgia
from "Street Survivors" (10/77)

I Never Dreamed

(Steve Gaines-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded April, 1977, Criteria Studios
from "Street Survivors" (10/77)
Vocal and lead guitar overdubbed, July-August 1977, Studio One,
Doraville, Georgia

I Know A Little

(Steve Gaines)

Recorded July-August, 1977, Studio One
from "Street Survivors" (10/77)

Honky Tonk Night Time Man

(Merle Haggard)

Recorded July-August, 1977, Studio One
from "Street Survivors" (10/77)

That Smell

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded July-August, 1977, Studio One
Backup vocals - "The Honkettes" (Cassie Gaines, Jo Billingsley,
and Leslie Hawkins)
from "Street Survivors" (10/77)

You Got That Right

(Steve Gaines-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded July-August, 1977, Studio One
Steve and Ronnie - vocals
from "Street Survivors" (10/77)



HOWARD BRAINEN

San Francisco, 1975



Reissue Compiled and Produced by
Ron O'Brien and Andy McKaie

Reissue Engineer:
Doug Schwartz, MCA Studios, North Hollywood

Art Direction: Vartan
Design: Cimarron/Bacon/O'Brien
Illustration: Steve Meyers
Scrapbook Photography: Michael Hashimoto

"Whiskey Rock-A-Roller (live)"
appears courtesy of Lynyrd Skynyrd.

"Double Trouble (live)"
appears courtesy of Bob Meyrowitz.

Special Thanks: Larkin Collins, Judy Grondin,
Ed King, Tom Dowd, and Jimmy Johnson

Also thanks to: Mick Brigden, Bob Carlton, Steve Cormier, Reed Huenink,
Eddie "Kingsound" King, Jim Ladd, Denis McNamara, Rodney Mills,
Rob Ruscoe, Teresa Rapp, Barry Rudolph, Allen Shalleck, Jon Sutherland,
Eric Zohn, Ken Batchelor, Randy Aronson, Michael Ostroff, Matt Tunia,
and Barbara Kauffman

All tracks were mixed and/or re-mastered from original master tapes.
Quin Ivy and Muscle Shoals masters courtesy of Jimmy Johnson and
Muscle Shoals Sound Productions.

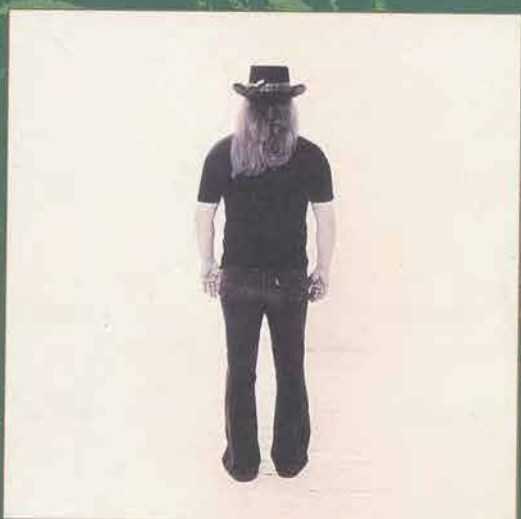
Footnote Key For *American By Birth* Liner Notes

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2. Scott Cohen, "Lynyrd Skynyrd in Turmoil..." *Circus Raves New York*. Sept. 1975, Pp. 26-30.
3. Ran Henry, "Deep Roots, Old Memories Nourish Lynyrd Skynyrd." *Miami Herald*, May 28, 1988 sec. B, p. 3.
4. Tony Stewart, "I See The Bloodbath That Was Hamburg." *New Musical Express*, London. November 23, 1974.
5. Brian Harrigan, "One, Two, Three, Four, and We're Rockin'." *Melody Maker*, London. November 23, 1974. P. 8.
6. Andy McConnell, "Ronnie Van Zant Kicked His Scotch Habit..." *Sounds*, May 31, 1975. P. 10.
7. Denis McNamara, Interview with Ronnie Van Zant *WLIR-FM*, Long Island, New York. February, 1976.
8. Jim Ladd, Interview with Ronnie Van Zant, *INNERVIEW* radio show, Los Angeles, California. September, 1975.
9. Joanne Jeri Russo, "Hospitable, Not Hostile, Rock and Rollers." *Teen Magazine*, New York. April 1977. Pp. 69-71.
10. Jim Jerome, "The Rock Road Claims Another Victim: Ronnie Van Zant of The Lynyrd Skynyrd Band." *People*, New York. November, 1977. Pp. 38-41.
11. McNamara, *ibid*.
12. Ladd, *ibid*.
13. Cameron Crowe, "Lynyrd Skynyrd: Hell on Wheels Puts On the Brakes." *Los Angeles Times*, Calendar, October 24, 1976. P. 68.
14. Crowe, *ibid*.
15. James Kelton, "Rebel Band Wows 40,000." *San Francisco Examiner*, July 3, 1977.
16. Kelton, *ibid*.
17. Ron O'Brien, Interview with Barry Rudolph, Los Angeles, CA. June 1991.
18. Jim Ladd, Interview with Ronnie Van Zant. *INNERVIEW* radio show, Los Angeles, CA. January 1977.
19. Ladd, *ibid*.
20. Bob Carlton, "The Night They Drove Ol' Dixie Down: The Last Flight of Lynyrd Skynyrd." *The Birmingham News*, Section D, October 16, 1987. Pp. 1, 9.

*This anthology is dedicated
to the memory of
Allen Collins, Kathy Collins,
Steve Gaines, Cassie Gaines,
Dean Kilpatrick, and
Ronnie Van Zant.*



Original "Street Survivors" album cover. Recalled and replaced after plane crash.



Ronnie

MCA

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