



LYNYRD SKYNYRD GIMME BACK MY BULLETS



Ronnie Van Zant was in jail again. Lynyrd Skynyrd's rowdy lead singer and his guitarist sidekick Gary Rossington had just been arrested for public intoxication. As the long-haired musicians were sitting in their cell, waiting to be bailed out, Van Zant began reflecting on his previous encounters with "those men that's dressed in blue."

"Gary," Van Zant asked, "how many times you been put in jail?" "Two or three times, I guess," Rossington replied. "You know what? I was countin' 'em up. This is eleven times I've been here," Van Zant said soberly. "You're just double trouble Ronnie," Rossington said, laughing. "There ya go!" Van Zant exclaimed, snapping his fingers. "We'll write a song about that!" So, quick as a flash, Skynyrd had the title of the first song for their new album.

"Double Trouble" was a true-to-life description of Skynyrd's hell-raising ways. The song was written in the midst of the band's relentless 90-day, 61-city "Torture Tour" promoting 1975's *Nuthin' Fancy*, which left a nightmarish trail of drunken performances, wrecked hotel rooms,

and fist-fights, ultimately costing the band the services of third guitarist Ed King, who left mid-tour, slipping away in the dead of night.

Following the "Torture Tour" fiasco, Skynyrd began to make major changes in both their personal and professional lives. Looking for a fresh start following the disappointing sales of *Nuthin' Fancy* and "Saturday Night Special," the follow-up single to their Top 10 bullet, "Sweet Home Alabama," the group ended their volatile relationship with the New York producer Al Kooper, who had helmed their first three albums. Whittled down to their original two-guitar format of Rossington and Allen Collins, the band prepared to record their fourth studio album with a new man in the studio control booth.

Legendary Atlantic Records producer Tom Dowd, another New Yorker, whose credits included Cream, Derek & The Dominoes and The Allman Brothers Band, was hand-picked by Skynyrd's manager Peter Rudge to produce their new LP. "Rudge and Ahmet Ertegun were buddy-buddy because the Stones were on Atlantic," Dowd remembered

not long ago. "I was in California on a project and Ahmet called and said, 'Why don't you go over and look at this band and see what you think of them,' I listened to them, I went backstage and I introduced myself. The next day they were free and we jumped into the studio, 'cause they wanted to play me two or three new songs. We had good communication right off the top musically. We were just breadboarding (experimenting) and it stuck."

"Of course, when we found out he did 'Layla' and Duane and Clapton, we just went head over heels for him," guitarist Gary Rossington recalls fondly. "We liked him personally, and he had a lotta great stories. And then of course in the studio, he helped the band, and helped Ronnie, and helped me and Allen. He would help Billy Powell with his piano parts. I mean, help by gettin' the best out of you. He knew when to let you play and when not to. He was just a great influence on us. We called him 'Father Dowd'."

Skynyrd ended up spending a week with Dowd at the Record Plant

in Los Angeles, recording four new songs. "Double Trouble" was a clear attempt to recapture the more commercial sound of their lone chart hit "Alabama," right down to the addition of three female background singers, "The Honnicutts." According to Rossington, "Every Mother's Son" was written "out at the 'Hell House'," the band's rehearsal cabin in the swamps outside Jacksonville, while J.J. Cale's "(I've Got The) Same Old Blues"—one of Ronnie's favorites—was an attempt to duplicate the success of another Cale cover, "Call Me The Breeze."

"Cry For The Bad Man" reflects the transition Skynyrd was making during this period, exorcising past demons and letting go of old resentments. "I won't give you his name, because he might make a suit," Van Zant said at the time about the song's subject. "He was a gentleman we did business with. He was a money miser, and he treated us really bad. We finally got out from under the contracts with him, so I figured I'd write a song about him." A live bonus track of the song is included in this reissue.

Skynyrd's first session with Dowd went so well that they mutually agreed to reconvene closer to home at Capricorn Studios in Macon, Georgia. "Everything was positive," Dowd remembered, "so it was, 'Let's do it again' and the next hole was during the holidays."

Right after Thanksgiving Skynyrd met Dowd at Capricorn, where during another productive week, they quickly laid down the remaining tracks for the album. "We would rehearse with him two or three times," Rossington says. "He'd listen to 'em and when they got pretty tight, we'd put 'em down a couple of times. They were pretty much all live. I guess Ronnie would sing a couple over, not all of 'em, and Allen and I'd usually go back and do the solo. But everything else was live."

"Workin' with Tom Dowd, never once did I feel any pressure," Van Zant said at the time. "Doin' the album was just a great time. Several songs... 'Every Mother's Son,' 'I Got The Same Old Blues,' 'Roll Gypsy Roll,' I did that the first shot, just went in while the band was playin'. I just used any old hand mike... and Tom went with it, what we call the

pilot vocal, because he said it had a lotta feel. He said that I sang better while the whole group was playin', instead of goin' out there by myself, after everything was done."

With King, a gifted songwriter, now out of the band, the writing chores had fallen back to the founding trio of Van Zant, Collins, and Rossington, who shared credit "Roll, Gypsy, Roll" and "Trust," a tune originally recorded at Muscle Shoals in 1972 and re-arranged and re-recorded with Dowd at Capricorn. Only Van Zant and Collins were credited on "Searchin'." "Back then, we were always together," Rossington explains. "It was just whoever came up with the first idea. Like a lot of 'em, it'd be co-written. I mean, half the songs should be me, Ronnie, and Allen."

The most moving track from this session was the plaintive ballad, "All I Can Do Is Write About It," Van Zant's heartfelt plea for environmental awareness. "There is a masterpiece," Dowd stated, "a measure of the man's intellect. That was very sensitive to him. He was

deadly serious about that song. He just put the whole thing in a nutshell. He hit it on the head."

"Gimme Back My Bullets" was the last track recorded for the album. "That was just a riff I had," Rossington remembers. "Ronnie wrote that about bullets on the charts, not gun bullets. We were talkin' about *Billboard*, rise with a bullet, ten with a bullet. We had to quit doin' that song live 'cause people would throw bullets up when we'd play it, .22 cartridges and sometimes shotgun shells."

Gimme Back My Bullets became the name of the album, although Skynyrd originally had a different title in mind. "We were gonna call that record 'Ain't No "Dowd" About It,'" Rossington laughs.

The back of the album jacket contained an acknowledgement of Skynyrd's bonds with their Southern Rock brothers, Marshall Tucker and the Charlie Daniels Band. "Ronnie asked me to write the liner notes," drummer Artimus Pyle explains. "I dedicated the album to my father, who was killed in a plane crash. If you notice, in front of me on that back

picture, in the dirt, with my cowboy boots, I had etched 'C.D.B.'."

On February 2, 1976, *Gimme Back My Bullets* was released with high expectations, but the album would not prove to be the hit everyone was anticipating. Although it peaked at #20 on the *Billboard* album chart, which was actually higher than *Pronounced*, it dropped off after just 16 weeks, even faster than *Nuthin' Fancy*. The single release, "Double Trouble," fared even worse, lasting only three weeks on the chart, after peaking at #80. However, the song would become the subject of at least one more good story. "The week the album was due to come out, I received a phone call at 4 o'clock in the morning from Ronnie," Dowd remembered. "He says, 'You gotta stop the album, you gotta stop the album!' I'm like, 'What the hell are you talkin' about? Did we do something wrong?' He says, 'No man, in one of the songs, it says "eleven times I've been busted." Well, I'm callin' you from jail. I got busted again. We gotta change the record!'"

—Ron O'Brien

1 Gimme Back My Bullets

(Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Sunday, November 30, 1975
 Capricorn Studios, Macon, Georgia
 Gary: Solo & Fills
 Billy: Organ & Clavinette

2 Every Mother's Son

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Tuesday, September 9, 1975
 Record Plant, Los Angeles, California
 Gary & Allen: Acoustic Guitars
 Leon: Background Vocal
 Billy: Piano Solos
 Allen: End Solo

3 Trust

(Allen Collins–Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Sunday, November 30, 1975
 Capricorn Studios, Macon, Georgia
 Allen: Solo & Fills

4 I Got The Same Old Blues

(J.J. Cale)
 Recorded Monday, September 8, 1975
 Record Plant, Los Angeles, California
 Gary: Slide Solo
 Lee Freeman: Harp Solo

5 Double Trouble

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Monday, September 8, 1975
 Record Plant, Los Angeles, California
 The Honnicutts: Background Vocals

6 Roll Gypsy Roll

(Allen Collins–Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Friday, November 28, 1975
 Capricorn Studios, Macon, Georgia
 Allen: 12 String
 Billy: Organ
 Gary: Solo & Ending
 Artimus: Tambourine

7 Searching

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Tuesday, November 25, 1975
 Capricorn Studios, Macon, Georgia
 Gary: Lead Guitar
 Gary & Allen: End Solos

8 Cry For The Bad Man

(Gary Rossington–Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Sunday, September 7, 1975
 Record Plant, Los Angeles, California
 Gary: Solo & Fills
 Billy: Organ
 The Honnicutts: Background Vocals

9 All I Can Do Is Write About It

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Saturday, November 29, 1975
 Capricorn Studios, Macon, Georgia
 Gary & Allen: Acoustic Guitars
 Billy: Piano Solo & Organ
 Leon: Background Vocals
 Barry Harwood: Dobro & Mandolin
 Violin: Unidentified

BONUS TRACKS:**10 Double Trouble (live)**

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded live November 4, 1975
 Capital Theatre, Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom
 Produced by Bob Meyrowitz for the King Biscuit Flower Hour
 Originally released on Lynyrd Skynyrd box set,
 MCAD3-10390, November 12, 1991

11 I Got The Same Old Blues (live)

(J.J. Cale)
 Recorded live November 4, 1975
 Capital Theatre, Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom
 Produced by Bob Meyrowitz for the King Biscuit Flower Hour
 Previously unreleased commercially

12 Gimme Back My Bullets (live)

(Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Sunday, March 7, 1976
 Bill Graham's Winterland, San Francisco, California
 Courtesy Bill Graham Archives LLC

13 Cry For The Bad Man (live)

(Gary Rossington–Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded Sunday, March 7, 1976
 Bill Graham's Winterland, San Francisco, California
 Courtesy Bill Graham Archives LLC

14 All I Can Do Is Write About It (acoustic)

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded November 29, 1975
 Capricorn Studios, Macon, Georgia
 Originally released on Lynyrd Skynyrd box set,
 MCAD3-10390, November 12, 1991

15 Double Trouble (alternate)

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)
 Recorded September 8, 1975
 Record Plant, Los Angeles, California
 The Honnicutts: Background Vocals
 Originally released on *Skynyrd's Innards*, MCA 42293, 1989

Produced by Tom Dowd

(all tracks except as noted)

Lynyrd Skynyrd:

Ronnie Van Zant – Lead Vocals, Lyrics

Allen Collins – Gibson Firebird

Gary Rossington – Gibson Les Paul

Leon Wilkeson – Fender Bass

Billy Powell – Keyboards

Artimus Pyle – Drums & Percussion

A very special thank you to Tom Dowd (& sons)

Thank you for puttin' up with us: Stella, Bernice Rossington, Judy, Patricia, Teresa & Kathy

Thank you for puttin' us up: Craig Reed, Joe Barnes, Kevin Elson, Chuck Flowers, Dean Kilpatrick, Johnny "Bitchin'" Butler.

Peter Rudge (a gentleman); Jane, New York; Sally, London, Paris

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People you should also know:

Sammie Ammons, Bob O'Neal, Mike Lancaster, Truckin' Dan, Carl Parker, Player Brothers, Barry Harwood, Kenny Watson, Al McDonald, The Honnicuts

Amplifiers by Peavey Electronics

And don't forget Scott Parsons...

On Behalf of Lynyrd Skynyrd let me acknowledge our kinship to the likes of the Marshall Tucker & Charlie Daniels Bands.

Furthermore, in agreeance with all concerned, the energy set forth in our fashion of music is dedicated to Del Pyle (and thank God),

—Thomas D. Pyle

Gimme Back My Bullets LP was originally released as MCA-2170, February 2, 1976.

Special Thanks to: Gary Rossington, Billy Powell, Leon Wilkeson, Artimus Pyle, Tom Dowd, Kevin Elson, Judy Van Zant Jenness, Larkin Collins, Craig Reed, Rick Howe at Alliance Artists, Randy Aronson and everyone at the Universal vault, Eric Zohn, Reed Huenink, Scott Bucholtz, "Toronto Mike" O'Hara, and Troy Kathleen Corley.

For more information about Lynyrd Skynyrd, please visit the Freebird Foundation website at www.skynyrd.com and the band's official website at www.lynyrdskynyrd.com

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Original LP photos: Moshe Brakha

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Reissue Production Manager: Beth Stempel

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Also Available by Lynyrd Skynyrd:

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Skynyrd's First (Remastered)

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What's Your Name



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Lynyrd Skynyrd: The Old Grey Whistle Test

In 1975, Lynyrd Skynyrd was NOT ready for prime time television. The rough and rowdy Southern rock band from the streets of Jacksonville, Florida was considered far too underground an act for American network airtime: too unpolished, too uncouth and frankly too unknown.

In the mid-Seventies there were just three major American television networks. Cable TV was in its infancy. It was still years before MTV and the music video would emerge. *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the first program to showcase live Rock 'n' Roll to a nationwide American television audience since the days of Elvis and The Beatles, had long been cancelled. NBC's *Saturday Night Live*, which featured hip pop acts between comedy sketches, had just debuted. The only other place that any Rock 'n' Roll could be found regularly on American TV was on the taped late night rock showcases *The Midnight Special* and *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert*.

Though Skynyrd had one Top 10 AM radio hit "Sweet Home Alabama" and one FM radio hit "Free Bird" to their credit, the band's main conduit to audiences was through their raucous live concert appearances. On American television Skynyrd was still outside the mainstream of American TV culture.

But by the fall of 1975, Skynyrd had finally attained concert headliner status in America, so they were top-billed for a string of major European concert dates, including their first-ever headlining tour of Great Britain. The band's appearance on the BBC2's *The Old Grey Whistle Test* was a part of the frontal assault on the mother island masterminded by the group's manager, Peter Rudge, a Brit who helped guide the careers of The Who and The Rolling Stones.

The Old Grey Whistle Test was the unique rock showcase of its era, especially by BBC standards. First airing in 1971, it was the only BBC show that featured live performances by new rock acts, many of which had never before appeared on television. The program focused on

serious musicians rather than chart-toppers. It was broadcast live with no audience from a tiny studio on the fourth floor of London's BBC Television complex, airing just before the network signed off in the wee hours of Friday night. With nothing following its time slot, the show's running time was open-ended, lasting anywhere from a half hour to an hour and a half if a performer was in a groove. The miniscule production budget of just 500 British pounds sterling per show included a 15-pound fee for the artist's performance.

The name *The Old Grey Whistle Test* came from an old British Tin Pan Alley phrase referring to the office cleaners in grey suits at the music publishing houses on London's Denmark Street, who started work at 5pm as the office staff was leaving. Publishers often played test pressings of new songs for the "old greys" and the tunes they could whistle from memory after having heard them only once or twice were considered to have passed "the old grey whistle test."

By the time Skynyrd hit *The Old Grey Whistle Test* stage at the

BBC Television Center on the night of November 11, 1975, to face a nationwide British audience, they were battered and exhausted. Their whirlwind tour of Europe had started three weeks earlier in Hamburg, Germany, home of the infamous red-light district The Reeperbahn, where The Beatles had honed their legend in the early '60s. For Skynyrd the Reeperbahn lived up to its reputation. The band's leader Ronnie Van Zant, normally a soft-spoken Southern gentleman, "tied one on" with a bottle of German schnapps, resulting in a fist fight that left Van Zant with a busted right hand and a bruised windpipe, a roadie with a cracked skull, and guitarist Gary Rossington with two slashed wrists. Nevertheless, with their hands swathed in bandages like boxers, the following night Skynyrd was reconciled on stage for the opening show of the tour. They never missed a gig over the next few weeks as they worked their way through Holland, Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom, playing a grueling total of 19 gigs in 25 days. Heavy demand for tickets to their London show at the

Hammersmith Odeon caused tour promoter Harvey Goldsmith to add a second Odeon show at the end of the tour, the Wednesday night before the BBC broadcast, so their *Whistle Test* performance was scheduled for the end of the tour following their final show that weekend at the Olympia in Paris, France.

London's *New Musical Express* described Skynyrd's first performance at the Odeon as "a torrent of musical beer cans." Evidently the band's live reputation preceded them, causing the BBC to move their show from the small studio where they normally broadcast, which had barely enough room for the band and their instruments, to a larger Shepherd's Bush studio, which had ample stage room for Van Zant and his guitarists to prowl. The venue also had seating enough to hold about 100 or so of Skynyrd's most rabid fans, which the NME described at the Odeon as "predominantly male, large of belly, head and biceps and most especially—mouth."

Skynyrd's performance on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* is a snapshot

of the band's 1975 tour, exhibiting the rough-edged power that made them irresistible to European concert audiences. It is their only live TV concert appearance in Europe or America during the 1970's. The BBC camera crew does a masterful job of capturing the group in concert, detailing every nuance of each member's performance with precise close-ups of their facial expressions and extended instrumental breaks, while capturing the overall feel of the band's tight musical interplay. It's all there: Van Zant's rowdy magnetism, Rossington and Allen Collins fiery guitar work, keyboardist Billy Powell's dazzling piano technique, the relentless fury of Artimus Pyle's drumming and the steady, subtle power of bassist Leon Wilkeson. Their performance is



summed up in the show's finale, an extended show-stopping version of the band's guitar opus "Free Bird," which has never been more beautifully captured in any medium.

Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Old Grey Whistle Test* appearance demarcates the halfway point in the original band's meteoric four-year odyssey. It was two years since they first burst on the rock scene, hailed by many as "the world's next super group." In the following two years they were to fulfill that promise, achieving their greatest triumphs and experiencing their darkest tragedies. Skynyrd gave better performances than *The Old Grey Whistle Test* and they gave worse. But one thing you could say about this band: no matter what the situation, whether it was an on-day or an off-day, no matter what the adversity, they always took pride in giving audiences their best shot. Perhaps that is what makes them the quintessential American Rock 'n' Roll Band and why their legacy has endured and grown for over three decades.

—Ron O'Brien

THE OLD GREY WHISTLE TEST

Live from The Television Theatre
Shepherds Bush Studio
London, England, BBC2
Tuesday, November 11, 1975

Double Trouble

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

I Ain't The One

(Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Call Me The Breeze

(J.J. Cale)

I Got The Same Old Blues

(J.J. Cale)

Every Mother's Son

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

Sweet Home Alabama

(Edward King-Gary Rossington-Ronnie Van Zant)

Free Bird

(Allen Collins-Ronnie Van Zant)

© 1975 BBC

Introduced by Bob Harris
Lighting: Don Babbage
Designer: Tony Lawrence
Sound: Peter Rose
Directed by Tom Corcoran
Produced by Michael Appleton

Lynyrd Skynyrd:

Ronnie Van Zant – Lead Vocals

Allen Collins – Guitars

Gary Rossington – Guitars

Billy Powell – Keyboards

Leon Wilkeson – Bass Guitar, Vocals

Artimus Pyle – Drums, Vocals

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DVD Menu Design: Kelly McFadden

DVD Authoring: Chris Barragan

Special Thanks to: Jason Blain, Chris Holden,
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