

SIX OF THE BEST

EXCLUSIVE MICKY WALLER INTERVIEW BY JOHN GRAY



When checking out drummers Rod has worked with over the years, the three that immediately spring to mind are Kenny Jones, Carmine Appice and Tony Brock. Yet Micky Waller has played on more of Rod's solo albums than Carmine, just as many as Tony and played a much greater part in the making of the crucial Mercury albums than Kenny.

Micky Waller is one of the legends of the sixties British Rhythm 'n' Blues explosion. His career reads like a mini "Who's Who" of rock; over the years he has backed (among others) Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Marty Wilde, Georgie Fame, Cat Stevens, The Walker Brothers and most recently Billy Bragg. It was in 1965 that Micky first played alongside Rod in the Steampacket, a popular live band specialising in old blues and Motown. After Steampacket split, Micky went on to back Rod on his two EMI Columbia singles - 'The Day Will Come' and 'Shake'. However, he is probably most well known to Stewart fans for his work on Jeff Becks 'Truth' album and Rod's five Mercury albums. Arguably six of the best albums Rod has ever made!

On TOTP whilst The Faces mimed to Rod's hits 'Maggie May', 'You



Rare Steampacket ad 1966

player Pete Sears. Last time he saw Rod was when he played on the 'Foolish Behaviour' sessions in 1980, although none of the tracks he played on were used. However, despite losing contact it's good to see that Micky holds no grudges and has nothing but praise for his old mate Rod.....

SMILER: Were the Cyril Davies R&B All-Stars the first band you played in?

Yes they were really, although I didn't stay with them very long. I played with them for about two months, just after I'd left school back in 1963. I made one record with them called 'Sweet Mary'. After that I went on a big tour with Marty Wilde & The Wildcats. Then I worked with Little Richard for a while and Marty Wilde again, before the Brian Auger Trinity started.

SMILER: And that led to the formation of the Steampacket.

That's right, it developed into the Steampacket. Brian's manager was Giorgio Gomelsky and he had this singer called Julie Driscoll and she joined the band. Later Long John Baldry and Rod joined and the Steampacket was formed.

SMILER: Was the band a success?

Yes, it was very successful. We played quite a few gigs round Europe, but we never went to the States. It lasted about two years, but then Rod fell out with Brian Auger and left in 1966. After Rod left, I left and then Long John Baldry. The band eventually split mid 1966. Julie stayed with Brian and that's when they had their hit record.

SMILER: What did you do after the split?

Wear It Well' and 'Angel', it was Micky Waller and not Kenny Jones playing on the track. And on almost every pre-75 classic, it is Waller keeping the beat: 'Twistin' The Night Away', 'It's All Over Now', 'Cut Across Shorty', 'Sweet Little Rock 'n' Roller' and countless others.

Micky is now a long way from his days as a permanent part of Rod's studio band. He lives a humble lifestyle in Mortlake, Surrey, and spends his time playing in the De Luxe Blues Band and a ten piece called Otis Grand and The Dance Kings. He has now lost contact with everyone with the exception of Martin Quittenton (co writer of 'Maggie May') and bass

I played with loads of different bands; the Walker Brothers, John Mayall, Georgie Fame and Cat Stevens. Then I joined the Jeff Beck Group about a year later.

SMILER: How did that come about?

The original drummer was Aynsley Dunbar and he either left or got fired and Rod asked me to join. We toured the States and played the Fillmore East in New York, it was very successful. Rod kept quite a low profile in those days, although it's not true that he used to hide behind the amps. He used to walk behind them occasionally.

SMILER: The Beck Group paved the way for Led Zeppelin. Were you mates with any of them?

No not really. Peter Grant (Zeppelin manager) asked Ronnie Wood and I to join them, but we told him we were quite happy where we were. I always liked Jeff, I didn't have much to do with him but he was always very nice to me.

SMILER: Were there many tours of England?

Of course. I wouldn't have called them tours as such, more like an endless string of gigs. We played town halls, that sort of thing. I've got all the gigs I ever played written down in a diary - that's quite a few! We played mainly at weekends, at the weekend you can earn proper money. We also went to Scandinavia and France where we were very popular.

SMILER: The album 'Truth' sold very well. Any idea of the figures?

No, because I didn't have a royalty agreement or anything. I must admit, I didn't have a clue about the record business in those days. I know 'Truth' sold very well because it got into the American top twenty, It's a classic album.

SMILER: Tony Newman took over on drums after you. What happened?

I was fired, along with Ronnie Wood. I was pretty upset about that because I'd made a lot of friends in America that I couldn't get back to see. I wasn't upset about leaving though. I never worry about leaving bands or getting fired because I think I can make any band sound good!

SMILER: Did you keep in touch with Ronnie and Rod when the Beck Group split?



Micky with Beck 1967

SMILER

Yeah, that's how 'An Old Raincoat' came about, I'm on every track! I also played on 'Little Misunderstood'. I'm very proud of those albums I made with Rod, they were great to work on. I heard 'You Wear It Well', 'Maggie May' and 'Farewell' on the T.V. the other day and I was amazed at how good they sounded. Rod wrote them with Martin Quittenton who used to be in a band with me called Steamhammer. Rod came along to see us play and really liked Martin's guitar work and that's how he got involved.

SMILER: What does Martin Quittenton do nowadays?

He's just bought a farm in Wales, he's going to turn it into an animal sanctuary. He no longer plays the guitar, I still keep in contact with him and Pete Sears. I think Martin still lives off the royalties from the three singles, he's a very lucky man. I also keep in contact with Ronnie Wood through his ex wife Christine, I always ask her to say hello to Ronnie for me. I don't see many people nowadays, you need money.

SMILER: Was it obvious to you that Rod was destined to become a major star in those early days? Did he act the 'star'?

No, he was a really nice guy. I really do miss him. I've no hard feelings against him at all. I hope I get to meet him again one day, although when someone's such a big star like that, unless you move in the same circles, it's impossible to come into contact.

SMILER: How did it all come to an end after so long?

Basically it happens to any band, it gets stale. 'Smiler' was a bit of a struggle, I remember that. I was drinking too much and taking it for granted. Rod was having problems with the record company and getting fed up. And then he decided to move to America for tax reasons and Britt turned his head a bit from what I saw. It's natural, a band has only got a certain lifetime. Bands that stick together for years and years are only together for the money, like the Stones. I'm sure they'd all rather be playing with other people.

SMILER: When Rod started making his American albums, did you take an interest?

Yes, and I still do now.

SMILER: From 1975 Rod changed direction, temporarily picking up a MOR following with records like 'Sailing'. What did you think of that?

He'd been intending to do 'Sailing' for years. He was thinking of putting it on at least three albums before. He was always talking about it, and finally did it. So it wasn't really anything new.

SMILER: And what about 'Da Ya Think I'm Sexy'?

I think it's great, I love that record. It's one of my favourite



Micky 1964

rock records of all time. Especially the drum break; sometimes people ask me if I played on it and I say yes!

SMILER: Did you ever see Rod perform after you stopped working with him?

No, I didn't even go and see the Faces. I'm a pretty strange guy when it comes to going to gigs. I hate going if I'm not playing. It really winds me up to see another drummer playing. I can't stand it!

SMILER: How long did it used to take you to make the Mercury albums?

About six months. Rod used to work on a week to week basis and we'd record about one track a week. Rod would decide what number he wanted to do, and if Martin or Ronnie or I were involved, we'd go over to his house in Windsor and work it out. Then we'd go and record it. A week or two later we'd do another one. That's the way he made albums in those days - don't forget he was playing with the Faces as well, so it was difficult to fit in.

SMILER: Did you ever want to write songs or play live with Rod after you'd made the albums?

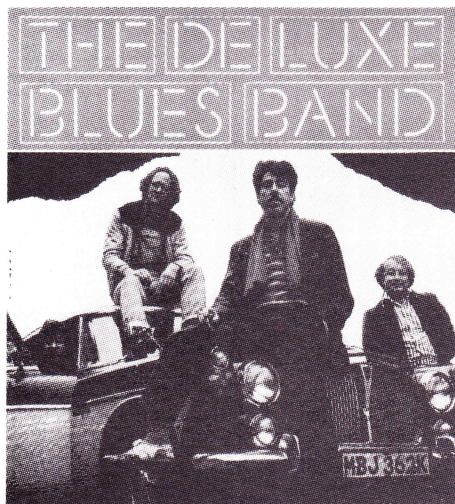
No I didn't. I did try to write some songs a few years ago, but I'm not very good at it. I can play the piano quite well but I couldn't write a hit song to save my life, I wish I could! As to writing lyrics, that would be a total waste of time, because I'm the most unromantic person you could ever wish to meet so I could never write a love song.

SMILER: In 1978 you sued Rod for unpaid royalties from 'Smiler', and you told the press that you never wanted to see him again. Yet two years later you were back in the studio with him.



Well that's great, isn't it? Rod must be used to people suing him anyway! I really hope he doesn't hold it against me, it was a long time ago. I didn't actually sue Rod, I sued Billy Gaff and the accountant. But because they were working for Rod, the writs had to be in his name. It was a very unhappy time for me, and it was a very complicated legal case, we went to court for a day although Rod wasn't there. We eventually settled out of court. It was horrible, I was hoping you wouldn't bring this up.

SMILER: Do you still get



Micky far right 1987

royalties from the albums you made with Rod?

No, that was part of the settlement. I don't get a penny. I only had royalties from one album anyway, that was 'Smiler'. But Rod did pay me very well.

SMILER: So where do the royalties go?

Just Rod, I think and the record company. Obviously the songwriting royalties are distributed between whoever wrote the songs. I never had a penny from the Beck album either, nor did Rod. We were all very naive in those days. I can't mention any names but Micky Most, who produced the Beck albums, is a very shrewd man. At the time I was only

24 and I was more interested in playing and pulling birds!

SMILER: How did you get involved with the 'Foolish Behaviour' sessions in 1980?

I just called up Jim Cregan, I had his phone number. I said, "Say hello to Rod for me" and a few weeks later they asked me to do some sessions at Olympic. I knew Phil Chen from years back, but I'd never met Jim Cregan or Gary Grainger, they were smashing guys. Unfortunately it wasn't very successful, I had just split up with my girlfriend and I was drinking too much.

SMILER: Wasn't Carmine Appice a bit pissed off with you going along to the sessions?

He didn't seem too worried, and he turned up a few times while I was there. None of the tracks I played on made the album anyway, although it wasn't my fault, it was the studios.

SMILER: Why was that? Most of the Mercury albums were made at Olympic.

In the five years that Rod had spent in America, his standards had risen an incredible amount. I noticed this, he was much more professional. I thought I could go along to the session and have a few drinks, but it wasn't like that anymore. To be honest, I found it very stressful. It was something I hadn't been used to for a few years. I was very pissed off with myself because they were obviously looking for a new drummer. We did plan to go to Trident and Rod wanted me to use Carmine's kit. But it never happened. After that I never heard another thing, I just spoke to Rod a few times on the phone and went to say goodbye to him at the airport. Maybe if we'd gone to Trident we'd have made a decent track, and I would have been on the album.

SMILER: Are you surprised at Rod's continuing success?

No; Rod is a very shrewd man and always has been. He's got a hell of a lot of business sense, which I don't have. I'm very intelligent, I've got an IQ of 153, but when it comes to business sense I'm an absolute loser. Also, don't forget Rod's got a great voice. I remember being at his house in Windsor and he said to me, "It's alright for you being a drummer, you can go on until you're seventy, but I can't." But look what's happened, I've blown it, I can't see me going on for another ten years but I'm sure Rod will. One thing I remember from the early days with Steampacket was that he always used to pull hundreds of birds, we could never work out how he did it. He obviously had sex appeal, and probably still has.

SMILER: How do you see the future for yourself?

I don't know, I've had a great time playing in Europe and I really want to go back. I don't like my life over here and I don't like the English rock scene at all. It's very grotty and you get treated very badly. Over on the continent you get treated very well. I haven't been to America since 1975 and I doubt if I'll ever go back there. I'd really like to have my own blues band, but I'm not really a band leader. I'm too lazy, much too lazy, that's my problem in life. I know I'm very well known, but my problems have always been the same, I'm always in money troubles. If I get a thousand pounds, I stop working until it runs out! But we all make our own beds, don't we?



MICKY WALLER WAS INTERVIEWED ON APRIL 17 1989

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