

The saying “criminally overlooked” comes to mind whenever I think of Corky Laing. Coming to world-wide prominence as the drummer in Mountain immediately upon the release of their debut album *Climbing* in 1970, Corky pioneered rock double-bass drumming within the context of a musical arrangement, as opposed to just for fills or soloing. Corky contributed a signature style to the landscape of early 1970’s rock drumming as much as any of the other, more lauded giants of the day. Moon, Bonham, Ginger, Mitch, Charlie and Ringo—no one played like any of them or has ever since, and the same can be said of Corky Laing.

Even as a young teen I heard incredible confidence and bravado in Corky’s playing that almost scared me. Bombastic and powerful, he made rock history with his cowbell alone and created juggernaut double-bass drum rhythms that tore through songs like “Never In My Life” and “Sittin’ On A Rainbow,” in addition to navigating more subtle territories like Felix Papapalardi’s masterpiece “Theme For An Imaginary Western” [Mountain] and Jack Bruce’s “Out Into The Fields” [West, Bruce & Laing] with finesse, sensitivity and originality. Both bands, Mountain and West, Bruce & Laing (arguably the second great “supergroup” after Blind Faith), were much more versatile than the general public would have guessed, with Corky’s often non-stop, sixteenth-note, freight-train pulse, bass-drum attack pushing the songs to the edge; but he also built slippery, bouncing parts that grooved and occasionally bordered on funk, as well as blues-y, swampy or understated, delicate, sparse parts. He found the holy grail for any musician—playing for the music while also putting his own stamp on everything he played.

A great raconteur as much as a great musician, Corky is a survivor of the real rock wars and talking with him is like a trip through time into the studios, on to the stages and into the hotel rooms of ‘60s - ‘70s’ rock star decadence. Grab a cigar and get comfortable...

SS: Last time we talked you were in the process of putting a record together.

CL: Yes, we’ve just finished mastering it. It’s called, “Toledo Sessions,” and it will come out next month when we’re on the road doing four or five “Legends of Woodstock” shows. A lot of different cities are putting this on to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Woodstock, and they’re trying to get some of the same bands that played the original Woodstock and put them on the road; they’ve hired a bunch of people, me, Ten Years After, CCR, to go around

There’s a festival in North Carolina and in northern Florida, Chicago and apparently the big one is in Brooklyn. I was already doing this last time we spoke when I was doing shows called, “Corky Laing Plays Mountain,” and on that tour I wanted to play the songs exactly like they were recorded, because over the last 20, 30 years we just butchered the songs, you know, jamming and there wasn’t any detail or direction in any of the songs anymore. I wanted to play the songs for the Mountain fan base - whether there’s

five or five thousand or fifty thousand - I wanted them to hear the songs played properly.

SS: It seems you’ve got a lot of exciting things happening right now. A new book, and a new band.

CL: Yes, I’ve been working on a book called, “Letters To Sarah,” which has just been released. Over the years I would always write to my mother Sarah since 1963 until she passed away in 1998. It was my Zen thing and we used the letters as a catalyst for the book. It starts with me telling her about the plane crash with Mountain. I didn’t want to do just another frivolous rock book where we’re snorting ants off the sidewalk or something like that. It came out on Mother’s Day, sort of officially, and Amazon put it out, and we were on the road promoting it at various book festivals. We were over in Finland, in Porvoo, and we did another in-store in Helsinki, and then we came back and did the Nantucket Book Festival, which was very successful. I’m really thrilled that it’s being accepted. I’m proud of



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CORRY
MOVIE

Photo: Rainer Kerber



CORKY LAING RING MOUNTAINS

INTERVIEW BY SCOTT SOBOL



I FELT LIKE THE HENRY KISSINGER OF THE BAND TRYING TO KEEP THOSE GUYS TOGETHER.

it and I give most of the credit to Tuija (Takala - Corky's manager/partner); she's a professor and a professional editor in the academic world and she really gave it a credible twist. The reviews have been really terrific, just amazing. I'm not trying to hype it, I'm just very pleasantly surprised. We're going to continue to promote the book, we're probably going to hit some Barnes & Noble stores in upstate New York, Woodstock; we're trying to coordinate with book stores in cities where I have gigs, that would hopefully welcome me to come in and promote the book. We have a great PR guy, Jeff Albright, who's doing a great job. I'm very proud of the book; the response has been great. I was at iHeart radio in New York for two days hitting all the syndicated stations across the States and Canada. We went to London, did a couple of hits there, then to Oslo, then back to Helsinki, then Stockholm; we spent three weeks overseas doing gigs and also promoting the book.

At the same time, I've got a new version of the band that is playing Mountain the way it was recorded in 1969, 70, "Mountain Climbing" and "Nantucket Sleighride." Of course, Felix is gone, Steve Knight has passed away, and Leslie is doing his own thing. I've also re-released Secret Sessions, an album I did with

Ian Hunter, Mick Ronson and others at the end of '70s under the name, Pompeii (Rouge Records, 2018). The digital download card that comes with the vinyl will have three of the songs re-recorded in December 2017 and a new original track that I wrote with Mark Mikel and Chris Shutters. We also recorded a live album of Mountain and West, Bruce & Laing material that will be released this year as part of a Corky Laing Box Set, which will also include a tour documentary of my North American tour in 2017 and other goodies.

SS: What's the plan for touring a band doing Mountain's material?

CL: I still have a multi-instrumentalist, Mark Mikel, on bass and vocals, who was in the band last time we talked, but Chris Shutters, who recorded with us on the sessions, brilliant recording guy, left to do his own band. So, we brought in Richie Scarlet, who plays Leslie's stuff really beautifully. You know he's a great performer, but he gets the tone that we needed for the Mountain songs. Chris Shutters is a really good singer, but he didn't have the tone that Leslie got on the Mountain songs, but Richie came in and nailed it. Richie actually played bass with Mountain in the '90s.

I just got the best musicians I could

find who understand the Mountain and West, Bruce & Laing attitude. You want to find players that live and breathe this stuff, not just know the songs. It's not just about volume or power and it's not easy to find guys that understand this stuff. There's a lot of subtleties in there and without being over dramatic, it's not easy to find guys that are still alive who can play the stuff right. I specifically play the songs I co-wrote, which fortunately are some of the best known of the catalog: "Mississippi Queen," "Nantucket Sleighride," "Don't Look Around" and a few others. When we recorded these songs back in the day, Felix didn't tell me what to play, he let me do what I wanted. They are very drum-oriented and Felix liked what I did so I'm able to show off to this day thanks to his giving me the space to do what I wanted. It's just a thrill to be able to still get calls to play and still get out there and it's all working out really great, so we'll be going out for the rest of the Summer in the States, and then we're going to Europe to do a full month in October. I'm thrilled. I mean, I'm 72 and feel like I'm playing harder and better than I ever did. For me it's like a meditation now, because I keep the chops up, which obviously you have to do, and I'm in good health, knock wood! The music business being what it is today, you've got to be on the road and you've got to be in good health to be on the road. That's the whole thing. And you can make a living and you can enjoy that passion of playing, without having to worry about promoting every little thing. The rock machine is like the Nantucket Sleighride - you get out there and you don't know if you're coming back alive. Gigs, PR, radio, you name it, you're doing all this shit, it takes a toll, I'm happy I've lived through it all because not everybody did. I think right now it's a bit purer. You've still got to go play, and you play as hard as you can and people love it, and then you move on. Like Dizzy Gillespie said, "You don't get paid to play, you get paid to travel."

SS: What made you decide to put a band together to tour?

CL: Warren Haynes invited me to play with Gov't Mule at the Beacon Theater on New Year's Eve back in 2010, and he brought it to my attention that we

had never really done the songs justice when we played them live. Maybe we didn't have millions of fans coming out to see us live, but the ones that were there—the real Mountain fans—were starting to complain because the songs were all over the place; even “Mississippi Queen” was barely recognizable. I ended up leaving Leslie about ten years ago because we did not see eye to eye about this. I wanted to do the songs properly rather than rework them constantly, and if I'm going to do that, I need the proper instruments and players; so, I began putting a band together. There's a lot of subtleties in those songs and I wanted guys that could get it all together with me. The first tour I did was several years ago; we got called over to the U.K. to do some festivals and they still love classic rock in the U.K.—they are really very loyal to the bands they like and a lot of people came out for us. A lot of people don't even know who Mountain was, but they know the songs. Then we did a tour of Germany and ended up going back and forth to Europe a few times. Then, Bill Ward turned me on to this kid Nate who started booking us and had us going all across North America, and it's just great being back on the road touring the way we used to tour.

SS: You've done some other pretty cool things in recent years as well, haven't you?

CL: Yes, I got to play at the tribute to Jack Bruce with Mick Taylor and Dennis Chambers. Malcolm Bruce had put together this show for his dad at the Empire Shepherd's Bush and it was packed. All the songs were done by an array of brilliant musicians. Everyone who ever played with Jack was invited. Then I got invited to come back and play another festival in the U.K.

SS: Let's go back to the beginning. You played with the Ink Spots in 1961. What got you to that point?

CL: I'm a little bit older than a lot of the classic rockers out there. Rock music started to happen when guitars and drums started coming to the front. I loved Gene Krupa, Art Blakey and a lot of what was going on with jazz drumming; and growing up in my home we had records from Cuba that

my mother would play, so I would hear a lot of Latin rhythms. My mom and dad loved to dance, so a lot of it was dance music.

The first thing I got was a pair of bongos for my bar mitzvah and at the time, Del Shannon's “Runaway” was a hit and I used to play to that. Bongos brought everybody together and they were also a chick magnet and I just loved the idea that there was an attraction. During the Summer I was working as a bus boy as this club outside Montreal and the Ink Spots came up. All these acts would come up to Montreal and be the evening entertainment—Jackie Carter, Don Rickles, they would all come up from the Catskills and play and there was a period where the musicians were all on strike. I ended up getting to play a whole set with them, just with brushes, nothing much, just me and a guitar player. They were like the Temptations of their day. There were these five beautiful black guys with this little Jewish drummer behind them. It was amazing and I was very fortunate. You know how it is, you get a chance to play on stage and you get hooked. All of a sudden you get that attention. I grew up in a big house and my brothers were triplets so they got all the attention, and my sister was beautiful so she got all the attention. The only way I was going to get any attention was if I played the drums. I fell in love with Buddy Rich and Louis Bellson. I saw the drum battles and saw Louis with his double bass drums, so it wasn't hard to fall in love with the drums at that time. There was a venue called Montreal Forum; it was the Madison Square Garden of Montreal and they had a British Invasion show come in—when British bands came over, they would stop in Montreal to get their work visas and they usually did a show at the Forum.

SS: Was that your way in to the big time?

CL: It started to be, yes. My band got to open for the Stones, James Brown, and for The Who's first show. I was right there watching Keith Moon and I'm sure I don't have to say much more about that, but it blew me away. It was like a riot. I walked behind the stage to get my kit after the show and I see Keith

Moon's jacket on the floor. I picked it up, assuming he didn't want it, and went back to the dressing room and in the room next door I hear this shouting and screaming and I look out and it's Keith in his underwear trying to get to the stage but security guys are trying to hold him back, and he's yelling, “I have to get me jacket!” and they won't let him through. I yelled to him and he wouldn't talk to me because he was trying to explain to these security guys that his grandmother had made the jacket for him just for this tour and he was very upset. I pull out the jacket and he looked at me; I'm thinking, “He's going to fucking kill me,” but his eyes got real wide and he came over and grabbed me and said, “You got my f*ck*n'g jacket man, I'll never forget you mate!” I felt guilty and as he was walking away I said, “Keith, I was going to steal it,” and he turns around and rushes back over to me and grabs me again and kisses me, a big wet kiss, and he says, “But you didn't, did ya, mate. You didn't f*ck'n' steal it and I'll never forget ya for it.” So, we actually remained friends and he ended up years later coming to the Whiskey to see me play.

Growing up in that atmosphere—still in my teens—I was so lucky. You know, the Zombies came through and they had a big hit record at the time, and then Cream came to play. This is like '66 or '67 and they'd had a review in Rolling Stone which was still just a rag, and they dissed Disraeli Gears [Cream] and said all kinds of negative things. Cream was not huge yet over here and Jack OD'd on pills when Cream was supposed to play Montreal. They had to cancel and wait for Jack, so Eric is stuck in the Windsor Hotel in Montreal and Felix called me and gave me Eric's number: “Do me a favor, go hang out with Eric because he's got no one to hang out with in Montreal.” Of course, I said no problem. I called him and asked him if he needed anything and he said he'd love some hash. I found some and brought two adorable girls with me, so we became friends and he also never forgot.

Back then, things weren't full of shit, people were pretty cool and people remembered each other and it had nothing to do with celebrity. The guys I was playing with, we had our own

rehearsal space and so whenever these guys came to Montreal, they'd come after their show to our rehearsal place, because they were all on speed and wanted to stay up. The English guys just never slept. Back then all anybody wanted to do was play. We had Hendrix and Noel Redding and The Troggs—all these amazing people come hang with us and play. When the Stones came to play there was a huge snow storm and they couldn't get out.

So, when you ask what my influence was, it's hard to point to one thing. Everything going on was my influence. There was also a great R&B station that played Otis Redding and Stevie Wonder so there was a lot of influences. There was a place called The Esquire Ballroom that was strictly a black hangout and I remember going to see Wilson Pickett and Otis Redding. The band actually played on the bar and I was able to watch the drummers easily and I learned a great deal watching these incredible funky drummers close up. Tony Williams came to town also, to play The Black Bottom; I think he was with Miles but I know it was Larry Young on keys and John McLaughlin on guitar. My band got to open, playing before Tony Williams, and when they played, I got to sit behind him and watch. It was amazing and he and I became friends. Coincidentally, when West, Bruce & Laing got together, I felt a little insecure and asked Jack if he was okay with me as a player and he said Tony Williams had told him I could play, so talk about being at the right place at the right time, good god.

I think the brotherhood of drummers and musicians—the ones that are secure about themselves—are really good people, and if you're lucky enough to get into that loop, then you're part of a great community.

SS: You mentioned meeting Jack and Eric, but this is all before Mountain. How did you know Felix?

CL: Felix produced the Youngbloods in the mid '60s and their manager Bud Prager said to Felix, "Go hang around at Atlantic" because Atlantic was really starting to happen; Aretha Franklin, The Rascals, they were all up at Atlantic. Felix met Ahmet Ertegun [Atlantic president and co-founder] and told him how much he wanted

to produce. Ahmet gave him a test... he told him he loved Nat King Cole's version of "When I Fall In Love" and said, "If you can come up with a great pop version of that song, we'll consider you." Felix needed a pop band to work with to record that song, and at the time, Robert Stigwood had come in because Ahmet wanted to sign the Bee Gees. Cream was also trying to get a deal with Atlantic, so Stigwood told Ahmet he wouldn't give him the Bee Gees unless he also took Cream. Ahmet was not aware of Cream at all but my band and Felix had the same manager, Bud Prager, who told Felix about my band, Energy, and how we were up in Montreal and had a singer that sounded like Gene Pitney. So, Felix came to Montreal, heard us play and said he'd bring us to New York to record, that Tom Dowd would engineer, and we'd record "When I Fall In Love" and bring it to Atlantic. Felix pulled out all the stops—he got a string section and he even played piccolo; it was a beautiful production, but it did nothing. Thanks to that track though, Felix got the job producing Cream. Felix was also talking to Leslie West about producing his record and coincidentally we were in New York at the same time as The Vagrants and that's how I met Leslie. The Vagrants were getting fired from a club on Long Island and my band was being hired. This is the Summer of '69 and Leslie had already had a hit on his record called Mountain, so when Leslie asked Felix to play at Woodstock with him, Felix joined up and they called it Mountain. Felix liked one of my band's songs and wanted to cover it with Leslie, so they played it at Woodstock.

Back in New York, we started to get together as a band with Felix and Steve Knight, and we were in the studio while they were mixing the Woodstock soundtrack next door at the Record Plant. It turned out that Ric Lee, the drummer from Ten Years After, the mic's that were on his kit at Woodstock failed during their set, so the producer came over and asked if they could "borrow me" to put some drums on the track. I went next door and I played drums on "I'm Going Home," I tried to follow Ric Lee. I knew Felix and when he was doing Disraeli Gears [Cream] I ran into Jack in the Village. Felix was

one brilliant m*th*rf*ck*r. Playing with Felix and Jack, you know, these are guys that don't even need drummers. They have more time in their left testicle than most drummers have in their entire body. All I did was play along. I did not have to do the job of a regular drummer when playing with either of those guys.

It was amazing because I was able to do what I wanted to do. Keith Moon experienced that, John Bonham, Ginger, guys that got to play with such amazing players and were allowed to do almost anything they wanted to do. No click-track back then obviously; you played what came to you and you played your ass off, and if it worked out, great. When the click-track came along, music lost that live thing it had before then. I've never been a journeyman drummer because of that. In those days you didn't have to know too much to just feel it. It was your tempo that drove the whole thing. It was a wonderful feeling and it's the best place to be when you're playing rock. It was about the freedom of those days; it was the freedom that generation had. To be a teenager in the '50s was to be a nobody, but to be a teenager in the '60s was to be an everybody. To have the pulse of a rocker in that day and age was a wonderful way of life. Most drummers who are off the click track live that way too.

SS: For me, you were one of the pioneers. I've still never heard anyone play like you, just as I've never heard anyone like Ginger, or Keith Moon, or Mitch Mitchell. You were the first guy who really drove songs with double-bass drum patterns and I think you brought the cowbell out way more than anyone before you, certainly in rock drum-set playing.

CL: As I told you, I grew up listening to a lot of Cuban music thanks to my mother. She'd play it in the kitchen and my brother and I had bunk beds that were right next to the kitchen so I'd be lulled to sleep by those rhythms. Specifically, with Mountain, Leslie and Felix had those use amp stacks and I had to play really hard to be heard; mic's on drums back then was minimal. When we would record, instead of counting out loud to start off a song, I'd count it in on the cowbell.

"Mississippi Queen" I counted in with the cowbell as always, just figuring that Felix would cut it out and we'd come in on those flams, but Felix said "No, no, let's keep the cowbell, it's kind of cool." We never anticipated it would do what it did. After that, a lot of rock drummers started using the cowbell. In all truth, I went through a few cowbells during those sessions. Peter Criss told me that the reason he uses cowbell on so many Kiss songs is me. That just blew me away.

SS: *Flowers Of Evil was also huge for me.*

CL: That was on the dark side of the mountain, so to speak. That's when things started going left and go off the rails. We did that and then went on tour and things began to happen. We went to England and Felix was having problems with his ears and that's how we ended up hooking up with Jack [Bruce]. Mountain was just getting on its way and was starting to do good things, but this was the '70s—whatever happened in the rock and roll lifestyle affected us. Felix and Leslie were extremely different personalities and both very talented and dynamic and I felt like the Henry Kissinger of the band trying to keep those guys together. The ladies really broke up the band. Felix's wife Gail and Leslie's wife would both tell them what they thought they ought to be doing and it affected the band. When you get guys, who were as tight as Felix and Leslie were, it's hard on any other relationships outside of that to survive, so the girls were always jealous and they got in the way. There are certain aspects of being in a band that you really have to be able to negotiate to get to the next level. I give credit to Def Leppard. When Rick [Allen] lost his arm, they waited for him to find a way back into the band. And they were a platinum band at the time; they lost millions of dollars waiting for him. That, to me, is a real band.

Going back to Eric [Clapton], in Canada there was a band called The Crackers, who eventually became The Band. Eric was coming from Toronto and he met Robbie [Robertson] and Levon [Helm]. Eric really wanted a band just like The Band; Cream was not a "band"—it was three great players playing together, but they never hung

out or anything, and Eric wanted that kind of situation which was why he joined up with Delaney & Bonnie. Levon even told me, "We didn't need a good-looking Englishman!" [Laughs] Robbie wanted to bring Eric in, but they didn't go for it. Eric was not "Americana" and they were.

My biggest influence overall was Levon Helm, not in terms of style, but in terms of who he was as a drummer. The way he drums and the way he feels about music; we became really good friends. When you start talking about drummers, really great drummers, they are the glue that holds the band together.

SS: *Regarding West, Bruce & Laing, my sense was at the time that Jack wanted to do other things than rock music and that's why there were no albums after the second one; because he was doing solo albums that were branching out in terms of musical styles.*

CL: It was a pity because we never really had the time to write the songs. Jack is a great writer but not a lyricist, and Leslie is a great interpreter, but not necessarily a great songwriter. Pete

Brown, who Jack worked with, was a great lyricist. West, Bruce & Laing never really had the chance to become a band. As soon as Leslie and I jammed with Jack, we had Robert Stigwood and our management saying, "Okay, let's put 'em on the road!" We got together with Jack in February to start playing and they'd already sold out a tour in America for April; we had two months to put together a record and a tour. We got in the studio and just jammed and the energy worked, but we never got down to really writing and recording together—there was so much pressure. I'm not complaining, I had a great time and I was very lucky, but as soon as that got going, all the drugs came in and all the parasites came in and we just never had a chance to do music the way it's meant to be done. We missed that and we missed it for a lot of reasons.

Then, Jack didn't want to tour because in America he couldn't get the heroin he wanted. You know in England you just sign up. The first tour we did, too much pressure and too much greed. Two different managers trying to screw each other and so of course the band got screwed and Jack

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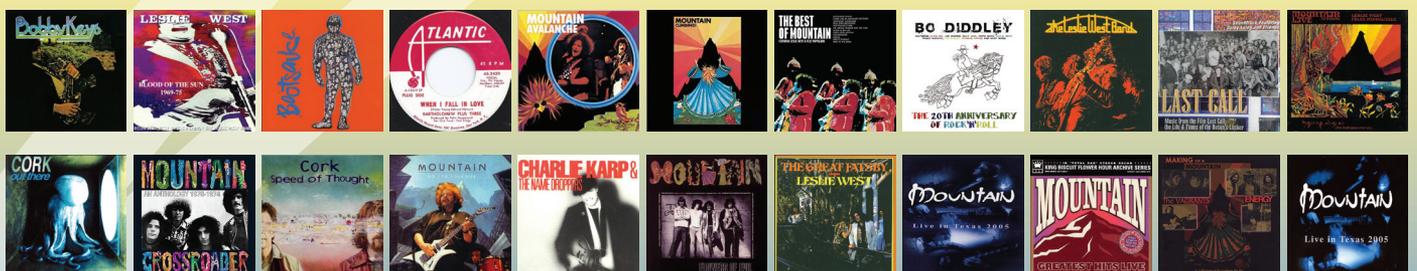
Photo: Rainer Kerber

was very unhappy because he felt like the odd-man-out. Leslie and I had our manager and he had his. I did everything I could to stick with Jack—weeks in the studio doing basic tracks, working together, trying to get all the time signatures Jack was writing in—but Leslie didn't have the patience for it and would leave. It was kind of awkward and it hurts a bit to think about because of what it could have been. It was really everything you hate about the world of rock and roll getting in the way of what should have been a very wonderful and successful band. We just could not do what we wanted. So, in '74 we were contracted to play these big shows but Jack refused to tour so Leslie and I had to put together "The Wild West Show" to salvage a band and it was a nightmare. West, Bruce & Laing was together for about two years, '72 to early '74. For me, it was just going to the University of Jack Bruce, and that's after going to the University of Pappalardi. I was very fortunate.

SS: After West, Bruce & Laing you did a couple of albums with the Leslie West Band. Was that moving away from what you'd done with those previous two bands?

CL: We brought in Mick Jones from Spooky Tooth, but I was in a very bad way personally. I did the first record but I was burnt and went through a dark period and then I quit. I went back to Nantucket and continued writing, which I'd been doing a lot of. I took these songs and made a demo and brought it to my lawyer to try to get a publishing deal and he brought them to Electra/Asylum and they put together a record deal for me. I'd been collaborating with a friend of mine who was a novelist named Frank Conroy and those songs became Making It On The Street. I had this amazing record deal with an amazing company and Mick Jones, who had also left Leslie, believed in the material and told me I really needed a singer. He was off trying to get his own band together and of course eventually he got Foreigner. I ended up doing the lead singing which at the time I really was not ready for back then. The record company then suggested I put something together with Ian Hunter, who said he could bring in Mick Ronson. I suggested bringing in Felix, who wasn't busy at the time and we got Todd Rundgren to produce and we made an album called Secret Sessions, which wasn't released until 1999, and actually will be re-released again on vinyl in 2018.

SS: In 1980 you worked with a band called The Mix.
CL: Jack Douglas [producer] had this guy Stu Daye



and he put us together, and Leber/Krebs managed us. We brought in a guy who was the bass player in Beatlemania. It was a good little band.

SS: You also played on Bobby Keys solo album?

CL: Yes, we did that in England but it was in 1971 or '72, so it was before a lot of this. Bobby Keys—God bless him, he's not with us anymore—was an amazing guy. He played with everybody.

SS: What did you do with Bo Diddley?

CL: The people that were doing a [Bo Diddley] compilation album came into the Record Plant while I was doing a record with a folk singer named David Rea. Carmine [Appice] was playing on the compilation and I played congas as a special guest.

SS: How about Meatloaf.

CL: Meatloaf was great but I suspect [Jim] Steinman hated drummers. Meatloaf wanted all the tempos exactly as they are on the record. I knew I wasn't a journeyman drummer, but he liked the fact that I played hard and we got along well, also because we both played golf, but after a while I just couldn't do it anymore. Maybe you can relate to this but I'm used to playing in trios, or with a four-piece and Meatloaf had like a ten-piece band with background singers and all these guys. I didn't feel it was right for me. I left and Chuck Burgi came in; he's a great, solid session guy.

SS: Didn't you cross paths with John Lennon at some point also?

CL: Yes, a couple of times. Way back when he and Yoko were doing the "Bed-Ins For Peace," where they'd go to different cities and do interviews from their bed. At the time, I was in college in Montreal and I heard they were doing this and receiving the press in their hotel room, so I went and got a fake I.D. for a college newspaper. I got in the hotel and onto their floor and a guy let me in and there they are in bed with a bunch of people in chairs in front of them. You'd get called on to go sit in front of them and be able to ask them questions for five minutes. Derek Taylor was there controlling the whole thing. John was upset with the guy who went before me and then Derek picks me to come up next. I'm freaking out, seeing John is still fuming from the guy before me, a French reporter I believe, so when I sat down, I told John it was a fake I.D. and that I was just a huge fan who wanted to talk to him. He said, "It's alright mate, have a seat." I sit down and he asks me what the name of my band is and I



Photo: Tuija



say, "Energy." He says, "Energy—wow, that's f*ck*ng cool." Fast forward a few years and I'm at the Record Plant in New York and I find out that John is in another studio doing the Rock & Roll album. It was the album he owed Allen Klein to get out of his contract with him. I'm next door with Felix recording doing overdubs and May Pang comes over and says, "Hey we need some people for background vocals." Alice Cooper was there and a bunch of other people, and we do some vocals and as I'm leaving, John says to me, "Hey I remember you. Where do I know you from?" I said, "I'm in Mountain and we're recording next door." He doesn't even know who Mountain is and says, "No, that's not it," and I say, "Oh, it's from Energy. You signed a poster for me in your hotel room at the Bed-In in Montreal!" [Laughs]

SS: You did a tour a while back with one band backing two drummers—you and Kofi Baker. I know Richie Scarlet played with you for a while doing that. Kofi would do a set of Cream covers and you would do a set of Mountain songs with the same band.

CL: Yeah, it's all about the repertoire. We used a few different guitar players. We had Godfrey Townsend, a New

York guy, and yes, we had Richie Scarlet, who's out playing with Ace Frehley right now. And there were some other guys whose names escape me right now, all great players. That went over pretty well, and then Kofi brought his own guys in for the last couple of dates we did, including Chris Sutter who's playing with me now, so I got a great guitar player out of playing with Kofi. He is a really great drummer and has his thing really down pat. He's out there with Malcolm [Bruce] right now doing a 50 Years of Cream tour and I think they are doing really well. I wish him well. The trouble with it is, it's not their own stuff, that they have to play the music of their dads, that is what they have to draw a crowd. Malcolm wanted nothing more than to stay away from that, but I told him, "Hey, that's your legacy too and you do what you have to do." They actually were calling it Sons of Cream, I believe. Malcolm is a really good guitar player, but he's playing bass, which I guess he feels he has to do being Jack's son. Several years ago, we had a scumbag manager that wanted us to put together, West, Bruce Jr. and Laing. These poor guys, their fathers were really mean, really mean.

SS: It's a rare thing to find a rock star who's also a great parent, though I'm sure they are out there. It's a hard life when you're on top to also balance that with being around for your kids to give them what they need.

CL: I never wanted a family for that reason. I knew it was a bad match, but my wife at that time wanted a child and we adopted before we split up. I'm lucky because I think my son sort of understands, but you can't go back and fix what you did wrong. The first year or so I was around a lot because I was out of work, so I did put in a little time as Mr. Mom, so that was cool.

SS: You're one of the veterans of the golden age of rock and roll, and other than Ringo and Charlie, I don't know who's left from the drumming world to talk about it but you. Any philosophy or major take-away from it all?

CL: If I had one it would be that you have to be lucky but you also have to have the talent to back it up. Music is a special life. There's a joy to playing music, and a joy to the privilege of playing music. You just go out there and play, I mean, that's what it's all about, right? Playing.*

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