

Butch Trucks

A year and a half after the Allman Brothers Band's final show, the group's founding drummer returns to the road with two new bands and a recently unearthed archival release **BY MIKE GREENHAUS**

BROTHERS & SISTERS (& SONS)

The Freight Train Band started about a year ago when I was playing a little club outside of Tallahassee, Fla. It wasn't a gig I was particularly proud of, but somebody came up and said, "There's this girl, Heather Gillis, who wants to sit in," and she blew us away. Berry Duane Oakley—Berry's son who plays bass and sings with us—and I were thinking of putting something together, so he brought in his friend Damon Fowler on guitar and I called Heather and my son Vaylor, who's the kid on the cover of *Brothers & Sisters*. He's not that cute anymore, but he's a hell of a guitar player. So, before we knew it, we had three guitarists. It sounded huge. I also called Bruce Katz—who has played with Gregg and played with the Allman Brothers a ton of times at the Beacon when there was an Allman Brothers—and Tad Isch is helping me out hauling drums around and playing a second kit on songs like "Hot Lanta" and "Elizabeth Reed." We do about four Allman Brothers songs a night with three-part harmonies, but we do a lot of other things, too—Jeff Beck's "Freeway Jam," John Scofield's "Jeep on 35" and I even sang for the first time in 45 years on Bob Dylan's "Highway 61."

I've been flying back and forth from France—where my wife and I live for part of the year—to play these shows and have spent a lot of time driving between gigs in a car with Vaylor. He's taken all his vacation time to play with us, so he's only going to join us for festivals and weekend gigs for now, but Heather has stepped up to play his parts. She's turned into a monster on guitar.

THE ALLMAN-LESS BROTHERS
Les Brers is five former members of the Allman Brothers—the

entire rhythm section of me, Oteil Burbridge, Marc Quiñones and Jaimoe, as well as Jack Pearson, who played guitar with us from '97-'99. Jack brought his friend Pat Bergeson on in second guitar, and we have Bruce Katz again on keys and Lamar Williams Jr. singing. We also have Bill Evans, who played with Miles Davis, with us when he's available. I tried to get him to join the Allman Brothers Band [when Warren Haynes and Derek Trucks announced their departure], but I was voted down. We just played these shows in Macon, Ga., in order to come up with some new material—Pat and Jack are writing some songs just for Les Brers. So we'll play our original material, new covers and some of the classic Allman Brothers songs. But mostly, we want to keep up that improvisational spirit that the Allman Brothers had because nobody else is doing it. Gregg, Derek and Warren are all out doing what they want and it's all great—I love what they are doing—but nobody is playing one song for 15 or 30 minutes. I feel the need to do that because I love playing that kind of music and I think this next generation is picking up on it—people like Taz [Brandon Niederauer]. He was the star of our Roots Rock Revival [master class and jam session] and now he is starring in *School of Rock* on Broadway.

FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND

What was really special about the show we are releasing [*Live from A&R Studios: New York, August 26, 1971*] is that Duane had just flown back from playing King Curtis' funeral. Duane had actually played with him before he formed the Allman Brothers, when he was recording at Muscle Shoals, and continued to work with him. They became best friends. King Curtis was stabbed in front of his apartment right



after Duane recorded with him. I remember picking up Duane at the airport—this was when you had to check your guitar before getting on a flight—and when he opened up the case, the head of his cherry Les Paul Firebird [was broken] and I thought he was going to rip that airport apart. Luckily, he found a very good luthier who put the head back on and now that guitar is in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. When Duane went to that funeral, that was the first time in quite a long time that the six of us weren't together. We were reeling from the loss of King Curtis and happy to have Duane back with us. It was such an emotional night.

Duane actually missed a few shows around then when he was off playing with Derek and the Dominos. I'll always remember the time we played a show in Miami and Clapton was sitting in the front row with Tom Dowd and the Dominos. They came backstage and later we all jammed. They had good songs and were great players, but they were also too heavy into the booze and the drugs, and Duane walked into that whole lineup like a stick of dynamite. Of course, for our 40th anniversary, Clapton played with us for two nights at the Beacon. He didn't say

anything, but he played his butt off and leaned over to Derek Trucks at one point and said, "That is the most fun I've had in 25 years."

SOUL SERENADE

There were about 100 people in the audience at this A&R Studios show, which was broadcast through WPLG. Partway through the show, Duane stepped up to the mic and started talking about King Curtis before "You Don't Love Me." We didn't know what was going to happen. It was the most I ever heard him speak onstage—he would occasionally step up and say a few things, like the introduction to "Stormy Monday" on *At Fillmore East*, but he never spoke like this. He told everyone how special King Curtis was and how Stevie Wonder and Aretha Franklin had played "Soul Serenade" at his funeral. Then, as we were playing "You Don't Love Me" and getting to the jam at the end, Duane started "Soul Serenade" for King Curtis and we all just climbed onboard. It was three or four minutes of pure intensity, with Duane playing as only he could. It was so emotional. We had no damn idea that two months later Duane would be dead. 🕯