

CHARLIE PICKETT

STORY BY
MICHAEL
HUNTER

will See you in Miami

The Club Downunder

in Tallahassee was a low-ceiling, dingy afterthought of a club below the cafeteria on the campus of Florida State University. It was also, in the early years of the '80s, the epicenter of rock 'n' roll for the teenaged dorm dwellers and campus misfits (myself included).

Particularly on any Friday night when Charlie Pickett and The Eggs had come from South Florida to deliver their mixture of garage rock, classic covers and slide-fueled originals. By set's end, Pickett and Eggs would have revved up Freddie Cannon's 1950s chestnut, "Tallahassee Lassie" and rocked "My Little Sister Rides A Motorbike" as consummate showman Charlie imitated a motorcycle engine throttling by tuning and de-tuning his low E string.

Best of all were the band's versions of Pickett's cousin Mark Markham's '60s singles: the "Louie Louie"-like stomper "Marlboro Country" and the sneering "If This Is Love (Can I Get My Money Back?). The crowd would depart, sweaty, tired and drunk on 75-cent draft and rock 'n' roll.

The Downunder would go on to host countless bands, from the Swimming Pool Q's to the Replacements on the Let It Be tour. Charlie Pickett, with the Eggs and on his own, would go on to tour the country hard for the next eight years, releasing three albums, 2 EPs and two singles. In 2008, Chicago's Bloodshot Records compiled Pickett's output on a 19-track CD, *Bar Band Americanus*.

The classic line-up of the Eggs featured John Salton on lead guitar, Dave Froshnider on bass and John Galway on drums.

That line-up was featured on Charlie's breakthrough debut LP, *Live at the Button*, recorded live over two nights in a Ft. Lauderdale nightclub. Along the way, Pickett would record *Route 33* for Minneapolis label Twin Tone, *The Wilderness* on

Safety Net, produced by Pete Buck in Athens, (oh yeah, R.E.M. would open for Pickett at the 40 Watt). Eggs came and went, but Pickett's commitment to honest rock 'n' roll never wavered. By 1988, it was over, and Pickett left the music business for law school.

Of those years, Pickett says, "From '80 to '88, we just had nine parts of fun for every one part of vinegar." That might have been that until Counselor Pickett wandered into his local tone vendor for that annual retail fantasia known as Record Store Day.

I talked to Charlie by phone from South Florida about the events that led up to the release of his excellent new *See You In Miami* album in August.

I'm kind of wondering if hearing Pete Buck's homage to Johnny Salton kind of kicked you in the pants a little bit?

It did. I went to Record Store Day the year that his first solo record came out – and I didn't know anything about his plans or anything – and I just went there and I thought, "Oh, Peter has a new solo album, how great," and I turned it over and go through the credits and I see "Dedicated to Johnny Salton and all the other Johnnies" and I just lost it. I called everybody sort of on the home team and just said, "It wasn't just us, it was it wasn't just us, we weren't fooling ourselves."

I couldn't listen to the song "So Long, Johnny" for a couple days – subconsciously I didn't want to listen to it. I guess on about the third day I listened to it and it was so obviously about Johnny. I talked to Peter – I texted him or something – and said "Thank you very much," and he told me he was just out one night, he came in and sat at the kitchen table and wrote the song.

So, that set you on the path to record "See You In Miami?"

We had this song, "What I

Pickett, onstage with Peter Buck and John Salton in the '80s



Photos/Jill Kahn



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THU OCT 4TH
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LANDT (EP RELEASE)
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FRI OCT 5TH
LA CHOLOTECA PRESENTS
EL STAR BARRIO
W/DJ NENA LINDA & ESME
SAT OCT 6TH
LEUCINE ZIPPER & THE ZINC FINGERS
(RECORD RELEASE PARTY)
with THE EL CAMINOS
WUSSY PILLOWS AND MORE

WED OCT 10th
SEND MEDICINE • SPECIAL GUESTS

FRI OCT 12th
RICHIE RAMONE
THE GUILLOTINES • PAINT FUMES
DUSTY BOOZE & THE BABY HATERS
BAD SPELL

SAT OCT 13th • Doors 5PM
DIE SLAUGHTERHAUS SHUTDOWN
NIGHT NUMBER 2
RMBLR • DIE ROTZZ
RAVAGERS (BALTIMORE)
NAG • WILFUL BOYS (NYC)
FEMUR • WASH • MONGO

WED OCT 17th
SOMEONE IN ATL LOVES YOU:
MR MOVE • DINOS BOYS
FRKO • FIXED FACES

THU OCT 18th
PINE & TOLLIVER RELEASE PARTY
WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

FRI OCT 19TH
TURBOJUGEND ATLANTA PRESENTS
"ALL HALLOWS E.C.F.U." NO. 10!
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SAT OCT 20th
LITTLE 5 POINTS HALLOWEEN PARADE
MUSIC STARTS AT 1PM
RUMOURS • VALKYRIE
SOUTHERN SKA SYNDICATE
MAMMABEAR • SASH THE BASH
BABY BABY • SLACK SABBATH
THE DIRTY DOORS • RUNNIN DOWN
A DREAM • NAMELESS NAMELESS
AND MUCH MUCH MORE

WED OCT 24th
THE STOPLIGHT ROSES
SPECIAL GUESTS

THU OCT 25th
TWISTY CATS
RUDE DUDE & THE CREEK FREAKS
SPECIAL GUESTS

FRI OCT 26
SLACK SABBATH • SMITHSONIAN
SPECIAL GUESTS

SAT OCT 27th • Doors 8PM
THE FABULOUS THRILLBILLIES
ELZIG • AM GOLD
HALLOWEEN COSTUME CONTEST
HOSTED BY DOCTOR CREPULA
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ROTKNEE PRESENTS MONDAY NIGHT COMEDY!
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Like About Miami" and that was just something I thought, "Wow, I need to get season tickets for the Marlins out of this." I don't work on making commercial songs but I kind of realized this had some potential so I deliberately left all the curse words out of it and stuff like that out of it. Then I thought the real marriage to this song, the B-side, is "So Long Johnny" and so we cut those two and we were very happy with them.

[Rock critic and Pickett pal] Holly Gleason said, "Well, you know you can't do anything with a single." Not that I know how to make money on music but I damn sure know how to lose money on music. So I said "Well, you got it, you got a new full-length."

You co-produced the record with Holly?

Lady Goodman, that's her nom de plume. She co-wrote two or three songs and her eye and a thought process inform a lot of them. She understands music more than I do. I mean, I can sit there with my CD player in my car listening to *Let It Bleed* for a month and nothing else.

Was the recording process different this time compared to the earlier records?

Not much. All the people I play with know the type of music that hits in the heart. Sort of a post-Delta, post-blues, post-punk blues. It's that thread running from Son House through Fred McDowell through Albert King through Jeffrey Lee Pierce down to us. You don't want to ever imitate, you don't want to ever be derivative, but you know your roots are gonna come through and so you just try to create a different flower. I mean, I don't hear what I want to hear, particularly, so I figure why not make it?

I hear a lot of Stones influence on this record, particularly on "Miami Interlude..."

That's exactly right. I mean frankly, it's like Steve Wynn said about *Days of Wine and Roses* "I was just trying to create Get Your Yaya's Out." I mean, to me, the height of rock 'n' roll has always been the Mick Taylor years from '69 to '74. I don't try to cop that, but that's what I like and I like to think that we try to honor and expand on it. "Miami Interlude"

is a[n Ampeg] VT40 from that era with P-90s on a stick whether it's a Les Paul or not and it's just me and [drummer Mike] Vullo and we're stepping on the gas.

Speaking of Steve Wynn, the song "Four-Chambered Heart" has a basic riff that is very reminiscent of the Dream Syndicate's "Still Holding On To You"...

I believe that we had seen the Dream Syndicate live on the *Days of Wine & Roses* tour and then Johnny Salton came up with that riff and I think John, subconsciously or consciously ripped it. The fact of the matter is, for years we called it on setlists "Dream Syndicate song." I very deliberately said "Steve, do you want credit on this?" He just graciously said "No, it's not it's not quite the same thing."

I love the instrumental version of "Marquee Moon" you insert in the middle of the song...

Well, again that was Salton's idea. Johnny just threw that in one night and we liked it so much that... you know we weren't a jam band, but if somebody did something everybody would follow and Johnny just felt one night, just throwing that in and so we did, and from then on we just liked it so much we played it that way.

Pete Buck plays on three tracks on the record?

Peter used a either used a Les Paul Jr. or he used an SG, like John and he used the Deluxe Reverb wide open with no toys. He deliberately said he he was going for Johnny's sound and approach and he did it. I hear it most on "Bullshit is Going On" because he's got more room to to riff off of me and in-between the lyrics and that was one of Johnny's main things.

Half of the songs on the record are credited to "the spirit of Johnny Salton." Do you feel like you accomplished what you set out to do?

Peter Gabriel's the first person I ever heard to say it and then later, I found out that really it's a rip-off of Leonardo da Vinci: "You never finish an album, you just abandon it." I think we accomplished what we wanted to, which was really to to say something about our scene that has meant so much to us. And still does. It's still a going thing down here.