

Gregg Allman - I'm No Angel - Live On Stage (2012)

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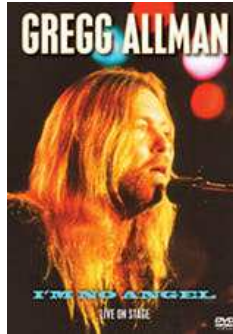
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The Cannery in Nashville, Tennessee is exactly what the venue's name says it is – a turn of the century former food factory that, most recently, manufactured Dale's brand mustard, pickles, and other condiments. Most of the equipment had long since been stripped out and moved to more modern facilities, but the cavernous building still held many secrets.

Sometime during the early 1980s, the building's owner (the beloved "Granny") decided that the empty, rotting shell would make a good rock 'n' roll venue, and a stage, spotlights, and rudimentary sound system were tucked into the corners of the century-old, multi-story building beside the railroad tracks. The Reverend worked security for a number of promoters who brought bands in to perform at The Cannery through the 1990s, but over the decade previous, I had been a consumer and critic, attending and covering shows by everybody from Mojo Nixon and the Replacements to the Pixies and, well, the Gregg Allman Band.



Gregg Allman's I'm No Angel
– Live On Stage

Photo courtesy MVD
Entertainment

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By the time that Gregg Allman brought his solo band to The Cannery in November 1988, the singer and leader of the [Allman Brothers Band](#) had already enjoyed a modicum of success based on a handful of albums like his 1973 solo debut *Laid Back*, and 1986's *I'm No Angel*. Allman had just released his *Just Before The Bullets Fly* album before returning to his hometown for this show, and the *I'm No Angel – Live On Stage* DVD captures the performance in its entirety, including four songs from the just-released album alongside a handful of Allman solo hits and a couple of ABB faves.

The show opens with "Don't Want You No More," an instrumental vamp that relies heavily on guitarist Dan Toler's fluid, slightly-jazzy but highly-rockin' fretwork. This lengthy intro leads into one of Allman's signature songs, the soulful "It's Not My Cross To Bear." His growly, blues-drenched vocals are accompanied by sparse, tasteful keyboards, an architecturally-sound bass line, and Toler's sophisticated guitar solos.

Just Before The Bullets Fly

"Sweet Feeling" is a Chi-town styled romp with spry keyboards, Gregg's best [Howlin' Wolf](#) vox, and a boogie-based rhythm. Pianist Tim Heding cuts loose on the ivories with a melodic solo that would have made ol' [Pinetop Perkins](#) smile, while Toler more or less stands out of the spotlight and leads from behind – except for one scorching, blues-edged solo. The title track of Allman's fourth studio album, "Just Before The Bullets Fly" is an old-school rock 'n' soul rave-up shaped from the same clay as his early hit "I'm No Angel." The band offers up an energetic performance, squalls of notes flying from Toler's guitar as Heding pounds his piano with reckless abandon, drummer David Toler rolling the cans like a back-alley mugging, his heavy shots and rumbling fills providing the thunder to brother Dan's lightning.

An otherwise underrated track from Allman's catalog, "Demons" is done no favors here. The song uses a Bruce Waibel walking bassline and Toler's steady drumbeats as a rhythmic foundation, but Allman's vocals are almost entirely lost in the storm (along with his keyboards), though Toler's guitar shines brightly with a red-hot solo that overwhelms an otherwise weak-kneed performance. Of course, Allman's big hit "I'm No Angel" is the reason why 1,000+ fans crammed into the sweat-lodge that was The Cannery even in late-autumn and the singer gives 'em what they came for, delivering an understated albeit graceful performance, his emotion-drenched vocals punctuated by Toler's elegant, too short solos.

Statesboro Blues

As long as there's a crowd, Allman must have figured "why not knock out a couple of Allman Brothers Band tunes?" G.A. and the gang offer up their take on a pair of longtime fan favorites – "Statesboro Blues" and "One Way Out." The former, a languid cover of the [Blind Willie McTell](#) classic, is performed just a notch beneath the well-worn ABB version (an 'A' here, instead of an 'A+', perhaps...). Allman's vocals sound more energetic than they have all evening, and while Dan Toler would never be mistaken for [Duane Allman](#), or even Dickie Betts, he acquits himself nicely with silky, nimble string-bending. The performance's lone weakness, as I see it, is Heding's shallow, uninspired piano-play, which pales in comparison to Allman's original (or, later, Chuck Leavell's) take.

"One Way Out," a [Sonny Boy Williamson](#) gem, is a crowd-satisfying closer, starting out slow with Allman's ethereal keyboards and Toler's six-string mystery before the instrumental intro builds to a tsunami-strength crescendo, blowing the doors open when Toler hits the first notes of the song's familiar opening. The band kicks in and kicks like a drunken mule, Allman singing the song like he has a thousand times before, with a loving cross of Southern twang and Mississippi Delta blues.

Heder bangs the keys like Jerry Lee Lewis on Ritalin, while largely-unseen bassist Bruce Waibel and drummer Toler drive the song with a locomotive rhythm. Toler delivers a sumptuous solo, equal parts Duane and Dickie, but with a style and tone all his own, speeding up to near-shred turf but keeping it blissfully based in the blues. The only drawback is the mid-song drum and percussion solo, Toler pounding out a perfunctory beat while percussionist Chaz Trippy (great name, that) clangs and bangs on various skins and wall-hangers. Shave a couple minutes off this part of the

performance and it would be a near-perfect mirror of the Allman Brothers' inspired cover.

The Reverend's Bottom Line

Gregg Allman's *I'm No Angel - Live On Stage* is an entertaining DVD highlighting a solid performance from the singer and his talented, frequently-underrated band. The visuals are clean, especially considering the rudimentary technology of the era, and the four (or five) camera shoot provides multiple viewpoints, including some timely close-ups on Allman and Toler, with only a few distracting spotlight flares. The sound is good, if a bit flat at times, but the overall song selection and delivery by the band offers almost an hour of great music that showcases Allman's bluesier side. (Cherry Red Films, released December 11, 2012)

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