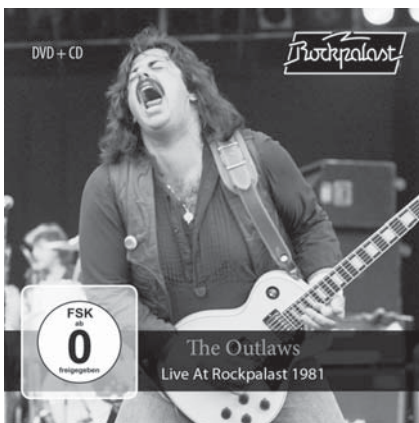




WITH A NEWLY
RELEASED ARCHIVAL
CONCERT ALBUM, **THE
OUTLAWS** RIDE AGAIN.

BY LEE ZIMMERMAN

Southern Rockers Reborn



In the annals of Southern Rock — that particular genre defined as much by the grit, growl and sheer verbosity of its music as much as by its native origins — the Outlaws were destined to be a minor-league team for the most part, often overshadowed by A-players like The Allman Brothers Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Marshall Tucker Band, 38 Special and Molly Hatchet. Nevertheless, they did manage to make an imprint on the mainstream market courtesy of a series of album rock standbys, “There Goes Another Love

Song,” “(Ghost) Riders in the Sky” and “Green Grass and High Tides,” as well as the fact they were the first signing to Clive Davis’ Arista Records label. Given Davis’ reputation as a credible hitmaker during his fabled ’60s tenure as president of Columbia Records, the band should have excelled to a greater degree. (According to legend, Davis first spied them opening for Lynyrd Skynyrd and was subsequently told by the band’s Ronnie Van Zant, “If you don’t sign the Outlaws, you’re the dumbest music person I’ve ever met — and I know you’re not.”)



The Outlaws performing in Los Angeles, California, during the early 1980s. Vocalist/guitarist Freddie Salem, shown at far right.

Indeed, as the band's recently released *Live at Rockpalast*, a memento of an exceptional performance in Germany circa 1981, attests, any failing to achieve higher heights couldn't be attributed to their lack of either energy or enthusiasm. Utilizing the prerequisite elements of their stated style of dual lead guitars and high harmonies, the lineup (vocalist/guitarist Hughie Thomasson, guitarist/vocalist Billy Jones, bassist Rick Cua, drummer David Dix, and later recruit, guitarist Freddie Salem) reflects a legacy initially established with the group's

three most essential albums: *Outlaws* (1975), *Lady in Waiting* (1976) and *Hurry Sundown* (1977). Despite a shifting series of players that drifted in and out of their ranks, the band continued to record well into the '80s — with a belated reunion album *It's About Pride* released in 2012 — and, with one configuration or another, still toured incessantly as well. The death of founding member Thomasson in 2007 impacted their progress, but there's reason to believe that this belated live release might spark renewed interest and allow the Outlaws'

legacy to live on a little longer.

Salem, who continues to work as a session player in Los Angeles, is understandably enthusiastic about the album's delayed appearance. Following a brief solo career, he met the Outlaws in L.A. following the release of their first three albums. "They called me a year later and asked me if I wanted to fly to Tampa because the guys wanted to jam," he recalls. "I had no idea what was going on and that they had an outgoing member (founder Henry Paul) or this or that, so I said, yeah, I would love that. So I went

down there and had the greatest time. We rehearsed for a week and then played our first gig, which was at Boston Garden. I felt that energy and combustion from day one. Considering all I had done before, that was definitely a high point of my career. We became quite a headlining band after a couple of years, and that was definitely a wonderful time.”

Salem says he was contacted by the German independent label MIG for permission to release the Rockpalast record, but that it subsequently took him a year to put the pieces in place since two of the players of that performance — Thomasson and Jones — had passed away, leaving Dix as the only other member able and available to put the project together. “We flew to Frankfurt, rehearsed for a day and then drove to Lorelei through the Rhine Valley,” Salem says of the experience leading up to the show. “We passed numerous little German villages on the banks of the Rhine. It looks like an absolute painting, a tapestry. We had a couple of The Who’s road crew taking care of us, and we had borrowed some of their equipment and it was absolutely exhilarating. I fell in love with the whole situation. Lorelei is one of the most beautiful, natural amphitheaters in the world, just a gorgeous facility right on the banks of the Rhine River. We were greeted by our good friends Thin Lizzy, who were on the bill as well, and it was an absolutely memorable show. There were some

hiccups but it was an absolutely wonderful show, one of those gigs you’ll always recall. Energy-wise, it was tremendous.”

Salem still remembers the huge crowd in attendance, which he reckons numbered up to 18,000 people. “We were surprised to see some Confederate flags in the audience, but then we remembered that there were some U.S. servicemen that were stationed in Germany and opted to attend that show. It was a huge success, and that gig became etched in my mind. It still is.”

Despite a few glitches, Salem says he’s also pleased with production. The package — which consists of both a CD and DVD — sounds remarkably crisp and clear, even nearly 40 years removed. “Leave it to the German technology,” Salem says. “They did a really good job.”

Salem has reason to celebrate other successes as well. His participation pushed the Outlaws to a new peak. “My first album with them was called *Bring It Back Alive* (1978) and it went gold real quick, and then it pushed the first album gold, which I thought would have been platinum since day one due to the huge airplay success of ‘Green Grass and High Tides’ and ‘There Goes Another Love Song.’ But who knows what’s happening with the music industry machine. We kind of changed the template. The genre of country rock seemed to be diminishing a bit, so we hardened the whole presentation and got different amplifiers



OUTLAWS SELECTED ALBUM DISCOGRAPHY

ARISTA

- A2L8300 *Bring It Back Alive* 1978 \$15
- AL9542 *Ghost Riders* 1980 \$12
- AL9614 *Greatest Hits of the Outlaws/High Tides Forever* 1982 \$12
- AL4135 *Hurry Sundown* 1977 \$12
- AL9507 *In the Eye of the Storm* 1979 \$12
- AL4070 *Lady in Waiting* 1976 \$12
- A04070 [Quadraphonic] *Lady in Waiting* 1976 \$20
- AL9584 *Los Hombres Malo* 1982 \$12
- AL4042 *Outlaws* 1975 \$12
- AB4205 *Playin' to Win* 1978 \$12
- SP-132 [EP] *Radio Remixes* 1982 \$15 – Promo-only four-song sampler

PAIR

- PDL2-1050 *The Outlaws* 1986 \$15

PASHA

- BFZ40512 *Soldiers of Fortune* 1986 \$10

and kind of changed the twang thing into more of a straight rock approach. That’s what changes you from a club act to an arena headliner. You have to reach everybody in the facility. We did some huge shows and that’s what we did. We played two shows at Anaheim Stadium with The Rolling Stones with 100,000 people there per day. In those situations, you have to project from that stage to the very last person in the bleachers in order to get it done. We got more aggressive and heavier and, although I don’t want to credit myself entirely, I planted the seed.”

The other factor in that transformation was the enlistment of such accredited hard rock producers as Ron Nevison, who had been responsible for helming albums by Bad Company, Ozzy Osbourne and UFO, and Mutt Lange, the veteran British producer whose credits included AC/DC, Def Leppard and Foreigner among the many. They



Freddie Salem served as an Outlaws guitarist and vocalist from 1977 to 1983.

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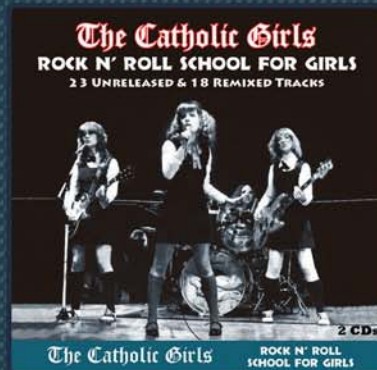


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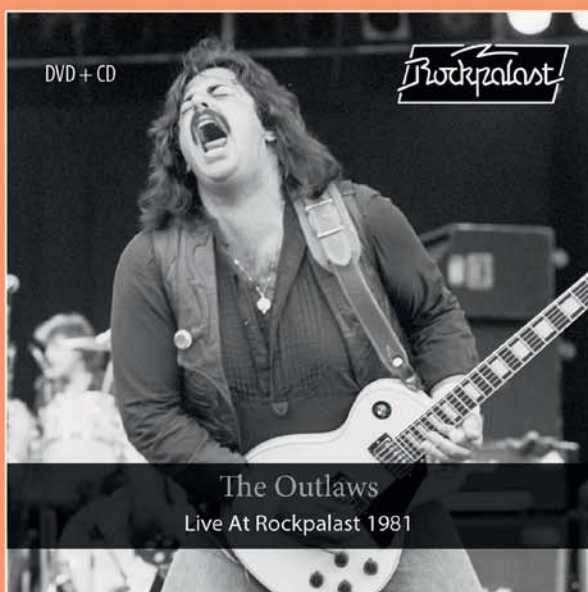


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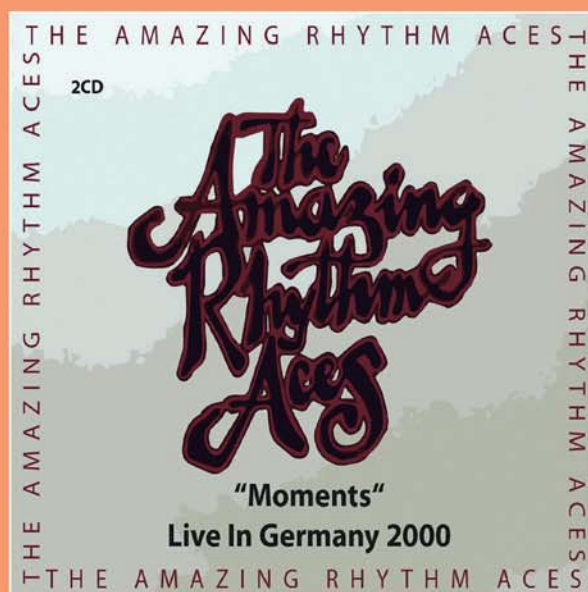
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Hughie Thomasson and Billy Jones were part of a dynamic guitar team for the Outlaws live performance.



also changed their touring regimen to team them with more certified rock acts, such as UFO, Ozzy Osborne, Thin Lizzy and Motörhead. “Lemmy loved the Outlaws,” Salem recalls. “For that matter, so did Bon Scott. At the time, we were changing the template without trying to discourage the old fans. It was a shock but we brought in new fans in the process. We pushed the envelope a little bit. So no matter what our records did, our live shows got bigger and bigger. It’s all about the longevity factor. If you don’t change things around, people are going to get tired of the same old same old, and you’re going to drop from grace. But if you do it and you’re successful, you’re back at the top of your game again. It seemed to work for us when we switched the channels a little bit. You can hear the velocity change on the live album from the previous stuff.”

Given his memories, it’s little wonder that Salem has been preparing his memoirs — which he’s tentatively titled *Ready Salem: Outlaw Rising*. It will detail his entire career, beginning with his initial breakthrough as guitar player for The Chambers Brothers through to his work with the Outlaws and a few solo albums — most notably, Freddie Salem and the Wildcats and even more recently, the rerelease of their album *Cat Dance*.

“I came in as a humble servant and then started writing songs,” Salem says of his period with the Outlaws. “It became an absolute wall of sound.”

The Outlaws still exist, but its ranks consist of pickup players that weren’t

part of the original incarnation. “We had lost members along the way,” Salem says, citing the departure of Thomasson, Jones and second generation drummer Monte Yoho as particularly traumatic. “That was a detrimental move. It was right in the midst of the release of our album *Los Hombres Malo*. We had a terrific run, but things just started going south. Our record deal with Arista was terminated due to management differences. That was a major thing. We’d have a Spinal Tap moment. We’d fly into Seattle or whatever and it was like, ‘Oh great, where are we playing?’ Then new management came in and they put us on a club tour. I remember they booked us for this festival in the middle of nowhere and when we got there, there was like maybe 400 people on the big muddy field. The attendees were sliding down on this muddy hill. After kind of riding the crest for so many years, we looked at each and said, ‘Let’s give it a break.’ And that’s what we did. Huey kept working and put together different versions of the band and got a deal with a small L.A. label. Then Billy passed away and Huey joined Skynyrd for a while. He was with them for nine years. Then there was a new Outlaws formation. When you look at Wikipedia, there’s like 400 musicians listed there. It was kind of like The Flying Wallendas. Later on, Mutt Lange wanted to bring us to London for another album, but then Huey passed away and that was it.”

These days, Salem spends much of his time in the studio, working sessions



Southern Rock’s Soul

Big fan of Southern Rock?

Pick up the next issue of *Goldmine* (March 2021) to find out how to bid on a portrait of legendary Lynyrd Skynyrd vocalist **Ronnie Van Zant** (above), **painted by Skynyrd drummer Michael Cartellone**, in a charity auction with the Cancer Support Community organization.

(“Just another day at the office,” he says), producing other acts, and prepping his forthcoming solo album, *Freddie Salem and Lone Wolf*, due for release next summer on what he says will be a major European label. He describes it as “a hard-edged conceptual record,” noting that the effort has been two and a half years in the making.

“Of course, nothing compares with my tenure with the Outlaws,” Salem says in hindsight. “It was a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful part of my career, which I will never forget. Rolling back the hands of time and then rolling forward until now, that version of the Outlaws would still be extremely vibrant in today’s market. There’s some vicious, vicious young bands out there now that absolutely follow the template of the Outlaws and some other Southern Rock bands, bands like Blackberry Smoke, Georgia Thunderbolts, Blacktop Mojo, Hellbound Glory... and they’re all wonderful and doing very well. Social media has put these bands on the worldwide stage. But I believe that our version of the Outlaws would still be absolutely viable on the worldwide stage and on record, especially within the indie market.” ●