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# Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band Is Still Banging 40 Years Later

[Ericka Blount Danois](#) \_ August 22, 2016

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Its hard to imagine that the album Dr. Buzzards Original Savannah Band has reached its 40th anniversary this year, with its timeless amalgam of swing, disco, jazz, big band, Latin and African rhythms.



The album's imaginative, poetic lyrics came from Bronx-born brothers August Darnell (later Kid Creole) who was a playwright, bassist and lyricist and Stony Browder, an arranger, composer, guitarist and keyboardist.

The lyrics travel through stories that are alternately ghetto gritty, movie-style fantasy and hopelessly romantic, sung by the timeless, passionate voice of Cory Daye. Mickey Sevilla on drums and Andy Hernandez (later Coati Mundi) on vibes provide unyielding, insanely danceable Latin rhythms.

Each song unfolds into a visual story. That's how August, who has a masters degree in English, intended it, to take the listener into the imagery of a short film. The lyrics depicted regular everyday life in the ghetto, including glamour, the struggle and the joy.

The 1976 album, tucked in between the wild, free-wheeling disco era, late night quiet storm ballads and the dawn of Hip Hop, reflected an on-beat originality, right down to the bands sartorial style featuring baggy pants, flowing dresses, strapless gowns and zoot suits of the 30s and 40s.

Since its release, the album has been a cult classic for generations of listeners. The Hip Hop generation has been the latest to pass it along to their kids. Ghostface Killah memorialized the single Cherchez la femme with Cherchez La Ghost on his 2000 album Supreme Clientele.

Other groups like A Tribe Called Quest, De la Soul and Doug E. Fresh sampled it. Director John Singleton featured Sunshower in the movie **Boyz n the Hood**.

The album was a staple in our household. You could clean to it, as my mother did, prepare to go out to party to it, as we all did, get romanced by it, which I did, or dance for no reason to it. My father bought subsequent albums from

the band along with Dayes solo album. In a time when Go-Go was king in Washington, D.C., the album played on the radio alongside hard percussion rhythms of Go-Go, rap records, and disco.

Throughout the album, which features seven tracks, it is Dayes absorbing, sensual voice that carries the listener and the storyline from the first dance number Ill Play the Fool, through the samba beat of Hard Times on to the stop and go melody of Youve Got Something, right through to the funky, complicated love story of Sour and Sweet.

Cory is the heart and core of the band, said Michael Harkins, manager for Arena Production and Dayes manager. It's her style of vocal abilities and her delivery to every note and every phrase that captured what each song was about. Cory's voice told you the story. No one can do that anymore. Her silky, smooth and sultry voice is what brought the sound to life.

Cory Daye, who will be inducted and honored in New York City for the Legends of Vinyl awards this coming September, spoke to The Shadow League about the albums 40th anniversary.

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**The Shadow League: The album took 9 months to make? You guys were only supposed to be in the studio for 90 days. What was some of the process in creating the album?**

Cory Daye: At the time we were doing the showcase, we had a lead singer that was more gospel oriented Bill Dorsey. Tommy Mottola was bowled over by him.

He had a powerful voice, but he was a screamer. He didnt fit the bill as a crooner. Stony had something more velvety and sexy in mind. So he fired

Bill Dorsey. Whenever we werent in the studio, we were auditioning and interviewing other singers. Stony was not happy with any of them.

We had heard a McDonalds commercial and fell in love with that voice. When Tommy heard the commercial, he said, Thats the voice, thats the voice, its fantastic! The singer declined to meet with us. That singer was Luther Vandross.

**TSL: Why did the album take so long?**

CD: It took that long because nothing was on paper. Stony met Charlie Calello to do the orchestration that he had in his head. He didnt write out the music. He and Charlie had collaborated on it and it took a long while because everything was in Stonys head.

We went into the studio doing these rhythm tracks which was Mickey Sevilla on drums, Andy Hernandez playing the vibe, August played bass and Stony played the piano and the guitar. Susandra Tilson was August Darnells girlfriend. She was our acting manager and arranged a showcase at S.I.R. for various labels and managers and thats when we met Tommy Mottola. He was heading Champion Entertainment where his biggest group was Hall & Oates.

We basically used the studio as a laboratory. Like scientists going into it. It was a labor of love. RCA and Tommy Mottola had begun to lose faith. They were ready to use the album as a tax write off.

Four months into recording, Stony just turned to me and said go ahead and do the vocals. I had just discovered myself, much less thinking about being the lead singer. It was like an out of body experience.

**TSL: The band would not be the band without your voice. Its crazy to think of what could possibly have not happened.**

CD: Had I known that I had it in me, we wouldn't have been auditioning all these other singers. None of us knew I could pull it off. August said he wanted to do some of the lead vocals. Stony said no and that caused a bit of dissension in the band because August always wanted to be a band leader himself, which eventually he did with Kid Creole and the Coconuts. He made his dreams come true.

**TSL: You hadn't thought about auditioning?**

CD: No, I was his girlfriend. I was in the studio every day. It just never came up. When we did the background vocals, a lot of them were my creation, combining that with the harmonies from the 40s big band sound.

I think that's what prompted Sony to be inspired to ask me to do it. He became more comfortable and had more faith in me. I didn't really have a lot of say so and being his girlfriend, I didn't want to cause any more dissension than what was going on to begin with. With all the time we were taking up with this project, I pretty much kept my mouth shut.

**TSL: Why did RCA devote \$500,000 to the project, then feel so hesitant about it that they were going to write it off?**

CD: I think it was Tommy Mottolas influence with RCA, they had a lot of faith in him because of the success of Hall and Oates. But they were becoming impatient. Tommy was putting the squeeze on Sandy Linzer because he was in the studio producing us.

RCA wanted to hear some of it. We wouldn't let them. We didn't want anyone to hear anything until it was finalized. When they first heard it they were scratching their head. What kind of music is this?

In those days everybody was pigeonholed. There wasn't even hard rock and soft rock, it was just rock. Pop? Jazz? They didn't know what to make of us. Visually as well. We were all dressed in our 40s style.

“Cherchez” La Femme” was danceable. They put us in the newly developed disco department under Tony King. They promoted it as a disco album and “Cherchez” was the single.

**TSL: Who were some of your influences?**

CD: As kids, Stony, August and I were products of the TV era which had Million Dollar Movie, The Late Show and The Late Late Show. Musicals were the popular genre of the 30s and 40s.

I would lay on the floor in our apartment on Longwood Avenue in the South Bronx (later, the area was called Fort Apache) fixated to the TV watching Fred Astaire dance, Lena Horne singing Stormy Weather and Abbott and Costello featuring the harmonies of the Andrews Sisters. Gene Kelly's athletic choreography's were amazing and sexy.

The fashion designers of that time had an endless budget, which resulted in the most glamorous outfits. My look was a fusion of what the younger generation wore at that time by day, and the glamour of the more sophisticated stars by night.

**TSL: How did you meet Stony and August?**

CD: It was 1970 and I was a senior attending Mabel Dean Bacon High School for cosmetology. I always heard about the notorious Browder Brothers but hadn't met them yet.

My neighborhood school, James Monroe, had a Drama Department that was looking for kids to play the king's children in their adaptation of "The King and I", so I enlisted my 8-year-old brother and my neighbor's 4-year-old son. After the performance, I went backstage and for the first time, our eyes met across the room and I fell instantly in love with Stony. He was like no one I had ever met before, and I knew at that moment we would be together.

He and his younger brother were already in a group called The In-Laws, later to be called Unum Mundo. I joined the band, we had various male and female lead vocalists and I primarily sang backgrounds and duets.

**TSL: What stories do you have being the only woman in the band the good, the bad, and the ugly?**

CD: The good – being the only woman in the band and the band leader's girlfriend.

The bad – being the only woman in the band and the band leader's girlfriend.

Stony had written the music but didn't really have definite lead vocal arrangements prepared. With the gist of what the melodies should sound like, I created most of them and now know in hindsight that the writers' royalties should have been credited to Browder, Darnell and Daye.

After the success of the album, Susandra was ousted from getting any personal management percentages as she should have gotten. She was the primary liaison between Savannah Band and Champion Entertainment, especially during the nasty divorce we went through with Tommy Mottola and RCA after releasing the second album.

In my opinion, being a female in the music business in the 70s was a detriment in terms of having equality on the artist end and business end. We

just weren't taken seriously when voicing opinions but they heavily depended on us at the same time.

The line about 8th Avenue bars, I was working at a bar on 8th Avenue to pay for studio time. My personal relationship with Stony was stormy and coming to an end.

**TSL: Did they play it at Disco clubs? How were they promoting it?**

CD: At the time, the deejays would go to the record companies with a 12-inch and it was up to the deejays to play. We had a promoter, Ray Caviano, he sent us to Fire Island and the gay community embraced our sound. They loved it. Then when Fire Island closed for the season, they brought it back to New York and it was a domino effect, and we started getting radio play in the summer.

**TSL: That album went gold eventually and you were nominated for a Grammy, but you guys didn't have any money.**

CD: Tommy Mottola signed to RCA as a promissory note for us. We never directly signed to RCA, Tommy did. There was some money missing. We did have limousines and rent paid, and spending money, but there was nothing coming in from the bank.

Our \$500,000 advance back then would be at least a million today. We had to pay that out before we would see royalties. We did have a management divorce with Tommy because of that. We got out of our contracts and we had to pay him. We paid him through the front money we got for the second album.

We didn't do a lot of concerts because the band was so large, not many venues could afford us. We were a staple at The Ritz, which is now Webster Hall.

They didnt pay that great. The only band that did stadiums or arenas back then was The Beatles.

Not having much experience in the business or having the business savvy, we just wanted to get a record out. We didnt look at the fine print. I was 24 years old.

**TSL: Why did you mention Tommy on Cherchez?**

CD: At the time he was our idol and August wanted to immortalize his name.

**TSL: Hard Times was a romantic kind of ballad, with some hard doses of reality. Some of the lyrics, it can even be perceived as a protest song. The line: ballots and boxes, bullets and guns, and the outlaw always rides in front. What was behind Augusts storytelling prowess?**

CD: August was a brilliant lyricist. He was an English major at Hofstra. His father, Carash Brozine as we affectionately called him, was very influential in their love for music. Stony and August were blood brothers.

Anytime I would go to their house in high school, their father would sit there with his cigar in his mouth and a guitar on his lap.

When they were with the group, the In-Laws, he would drive them around with all the instruments. He was very influential in their life in regards to music. When the record came out, this was the bicentennial and New York was jumping with excitement. We had the tall ships, fireworks, there was a lot of dissension going on politically and with finances. The lyrics fit the times: hard times as long as we have each other we can get over

**TSL: The album hit every generation and various genres, but to me its a New York album. Of course, New York is international.**

CD: I dont if its a rumor or if its true but I heard that John Lennon took the album to England and played it for all his friends and thats how it spread out there. A lot of Hip Hop artists sampled “Cherchez,” and a lot sampled Sunshower.

**TSL: As a kid, I always connected to the kids that were singing on Sunshower. How did that song happen?**

CD: Those were Sandys children. Stony said he wanted kids on this, so he went home and got his kids, he said they can sing on key and he put them on the record.

Sunshower has these elaborate orchestrations and Stony went in and decided, lets get rid of everything and go for the percussion and that was it. Just a few of the horns, but it was very spare. It has the pulsethe pulsating African hare drum.

**TSL: The album makes references to Latin culture, African religions, references that Im sure were familiar to Bronx residents. What was the sentiment around the Bronx about the album?**

CD: We were delivering what we called then, Mulatto Madness.” Our music reflected our intercultural heritage – Latin, disco, big band, jazz. It was the original creation of fusion music.

We all came from the Bronx. We were all of mixed heritage. I was Puerto Rican and Syrian. Coati was Black and Latin. Stony and August were of African American descent.

I grew up on Longwood Avenue near Fox Street which was like the worst part of the city, near Hunts Point in the South Bronx. My father had to have two jobs. We were poor. Then he bought a candy store when I was 10 and it was a whole different dynamic.

We moved to a better neighborhood and had a better lifestyle. It was right across the highway from the Bruckner Boulevard apartments where August and Stony were born. That's where we all met. Sandra was August's girlfriend at the time. She was instrumental in finding us Tommy and other people.

**TSL: How did Youve Got Something come about.**

CD: My vocal arrangement on that song was inspired by Ella Fitzgerald, especially at the end, betcha the love bug done bit ya, the whole thing was my imitation of Ella.

As a little girl, I was watching movies and there she was in Ride Em Cowboy singing, A tiskit a tasket, and I just loved her voice. She was in a couple of other films that I'd seen and I just adored her.

Growing up we had predominantly Latin music playing in the house because my mother was Puerto Rican. My dad liked Perry Como, Sinatra, Vic Damone, Steve & Eydie and also loved Tito Puente, Pacheco and big band Latino bands like Xavier Cugat.

**TSL: What kind of feedback are you getting today, like from the recent DJ festival in Chicago?**

CD: It was amazing. It was a festival honoring celebrity DJs and the event was called the Chosen Few. I am singing "Cherchez" and everybody knew every word of it—all ages. It was amazing. I got the lifetime achievement award.

Our album has survived the test of time with flying colors for 40 years now, and in my opinion, will last 40 more. This is attributed to the fact that our music is a combination of eras past, present and future. In my speech I said I want to thank you, your mothers and your grandmothers.

Tags

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