



THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND

The Rise of Southern Rock



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1969, the year of long hair, psychedelic highs, and the hippie revolution of brotherly love. It was also a time of cultural change in the south as society began to break down Jim Crow barriers and become consumed in the commercialist industry. It was a time when rural principles of life had begun to fall wayward in the wake of the suburbia development craze. It was also the time when one of the greatest southern rock and roll bands ever banded together through the bond of brotherhood, long hair, and the love for some jazzy blues inspired southern rock. The Allman Brothers Band to this day, have held strong as a cornerstone to the foundation of improv jam music and the blues country infusion. Their original style of musical liberty, harassing battles of addiction, and dances with death provided a youthful nation with the opportunities to escape the commercial revolution through their exotic dual guitar style of play. Duane Allman and The Allman Brothers Band will forever be remembered as one of the greatest musical ensembles ever to join ranks of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

On March 26, 1969, The Allman Brothers band came together in the most fitting of ways imaginable. It was a Sunday afternoon in sunny Jacksonville Florida and soon to be lead guitarist and front man, Duane Allman was twenty-three and looking to jam with anyone and everyone. Already proving to be a singular force in American music and culture of the southern rock through his stint at Muscle Shoals, Alabama; “The Jacksonville Jam” located at 2844 Riverside Ave in Jacksonville, FL was open to any and all musicians. This jam session brought in the likes of Berry Oakley, Dickey Betts, Butch Trucks, and Jai Johanny “Jaimoe” Johanson, all of whom would become the original members of the legendary southern rock band, The Allman Brothers. As the story goes, at the end of the three-hour long jam session, Duane blocked the door and declared “Anybody in this room who thinks they’re not going to play in this band will have to fight your way out of here” (Soergel, 2019). Soon after the band would relocate and plant their roots in Macon

Georgia and begin working on southern rock masterpieces under the guidance of new record label, Capricorn Records. During this time rock and roll listeners were graced with the memorable performances and albums such as “Eat a Peach” and “At the Fillmore East,” which to this day is considered one of the greatest live performances ever given or recorded in the history of rock and roll.

Southern rock music encompasses the foundation of the Allman Brothers Band story. Entering a musical genus that contained industry icons like Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Marshall Tucker Band, ZZ Top, Charlie Daniels, and so many more. The Allman Brothers Band emerged from a region playing a new form of rock music that relied heavily on the band members’ southern influences too fuel some of the most exotic duel guitar jams ever recorded. American musician, author, and historian of country music, Bill C. Malone once wrote that the region “gave rise to virtually every form of American popular music, and the Allman Brothers band reflected every aspect of this in their sound” (Beatty, 2019). The band miraculously fused elements and inspirations of acoustic blues of the Mississippi Delta, electric blues and rhythm of the Great Migration, Appalachian blue grass and string music, along with western swing, gospel, and southern soul into musical gold full of psychedelic interludes, fiery guitar solos, and the grizzly lyrics from brother Greg Allman. This new age style of musical freedom and improvisation would become the standard for the southern rock genera and jam bands for decades to come.

Inspired by American singer-songwriter Curtis Mayfield and with aspirations to be unlike other similar musicians, Duane Allman created the idea of having two lead guitarists infused with the elements of jazz improvisation. “He wanted the bass, keyboards, and second guitar to form patterns behind the solo rather than just comping,” said Allman. This style and way of incorporating guitar harmonies would go on to be very influential to musicians of the future. New

York Times Instant Best Seller, Alan Paul once wrote “the pair also had a wide range of complementary techniques, often forming intricate, interlocking patterns with each other and the bassist, Berry Oakley, setting the stage for dramatic flights of improvised melodies” (Paul, Trucks, & Jaimoe 2015).

After forming in March 1969, success came slowly for the new age jam band as their second record album, *Idlewild South* (1970) only sold marginally after less than a year into the band’s debut. Younger brother Greg Allman became concerned with the bands rate of success and the impeding effects of a relentless tour schedule leading to drug addiction and unsuspected violence. After coming to terms with the band’s situation and origin, the emphasis was placed on live performances rather than albums. This decision doubled the bands yearly earnings by 1971. “We realized that the audience was a big part of what we did, which couldn’t be duplicated in a studio. A lightbulb finally went off; we needed to make a live album,” said Gregg Allman (Paul, Trucks, & Jaimoe 2015).

“You know, we get kind of frustrated doing the [studio] records, and I think, consequently, our next album will be ... a live recording, to get some of that natural fire on it.” Said Duane Allman to then disc jockey, Ed Shane (Soergel, 2019). “*At Fillmore East*” was released in July 1971 by Capricorn Records after the bands fourth visit to the New York location. Sold as a double album, “people-priced” for the cost of a single LP, biographer Alan Paul claims that “these shows were crucial in establishing the band and exposing them to a wider, sympathetic audience on both coasts” (Paul, Trucks, & Jaimoe 2015). Recorded over three nights in March of 1971, “*At Fillmore East*,” produced by Tom Dowd, began to climb the charts peaking at number thirteen on Billboard’s Top Pop Album chart and was certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America that October, marking the band’s first true commercial and artistic breakthrough. To this

day, the album is considered among the best live albums of all time and in 2004 was selected for preservation in the Library of Congress due to its “culturally, historically, or aesthetical importance” by the National Recording Registry (Cannady, 2005). The performance of “*At Fillmore East*” showcased the band’s wide-ranging mixture of rock, country, blues, and a jazz fusion as producer Tom Dowd claimed “here was a rock’n’roll band playing blues in the jazz vernacular. And they tore the place up” (Paul, Trucks, & Jaimoe 2015). This incredible performance opened with the iconic song “Statesboro Blues” which bore similar resemblance to musician song writer Henry Saint Clair Fredericks, Aka Taj Mahal, who’s 1968 rendition served as inspiration for Duane Allman to first pick up the slide guitar. The show maintained forward progress and transitioned between memorable performances of band favorites like “*Done Somebody Wrong*”, “*Stormy Monday*”, “*You Don’t Love Me*”, “*In Memory of Elizabeth Reed*.” Then coming to a close on a high note with the twenty three minute evolution of “*Whipping Post*,” a favorite of the audience and the band.

Originally written by Gregg Allman on an ironing board with burnt out matches on a 1968 night, “*Whipping Post*” was originally recorded on the first Allman Brothers album but quickly became a staple of the band’s live performances. “*Whipping Post*,” the studio version is a solid, southern-boogie track lasting five minutes in comparison. The performed version on the other hand was a constantly evolving work of art that turned into a twenty-three-minute live jam session that came to a head “*At Fillmore East*.” To date, that performance has been regarded as the best rendition ever recorded. By adding eighteen minutes of battling guitar solos between Dickey Betts and Duane Allman, listeners and attendee’s witnessed musical mastery through the seeming question – answer format of play. Musically eccentric, “*Whipping Post*” was written with the chorus in 11/8 time, but the verses are written in 12/8. When questioned on composing such songs

with progressions that rarely resemble blues or typical rock and roll, Duane Allman replied “Man, I just stumbled onto ‘em, I really didn’t know exactly what I was doing, I just did it” (Songfacts, 2016).

In 1972, through the turmoil of dangerous substance abuse and losing band leader and motivator, Duane Allman in October of ‘71. The Allman Brothers Band was able to turn out another double album titled “*Eat a Peach*” in February of ’72. “*Eat a Peach*” consisted of leftover live material from the bands Fillmore East shows, plus three studio tracks previously recorded before Duane’s unfortunate death, and three more tracks recorded afterwards. This nine-track double album was the bands biggest commercial success to date, reaching the number four spot on Billboard’s Album Sales Chart (Mikkelson, 2015). This album contains classics like “*Midnight Rider*”, “*Melissa*”, “*Ain’t Wastin’ Time No More*”, “*Blue Sky*”, and “*One Way Out.*” To this day, many skeptics believe that the title “*Eat a Peach*” album was based around T.S. Eliots poem, “The Long Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in reference to Duane’s accident. But in reality, the title is an allusion to a tongue-in-cheek sexual reference Duane Allman once made during an interview with *Good Times Magazine*.

The albums third track, “*Melissa*” provides a mellow, reflective number that gives a natural break after the first two up-tempo tracks. Penned by Gregg Allman in 1967 while staying in a Pensacola motel during the pre-Brothers’ band Allman Joys days. The laid-back vibe of the track bubbles along with a quiet energy, feeding off the hip of Bassist Berry Oakley. When naming songs, Gregg Allman truly struggled at times. Once going as far as to say that he would spend hours sometimes days trying to give name to a musical journey that the band had recorded. “*Melissa*” was one of those songs, and it wasn’t until coming across a young girl named Melissa being scolded in a grocery store the song was without a name. It’s been said that Gregg Allman

did not personally like the tune and only showed it to his brother, Duane, whom loved it. The song went uncompleted, minus a demo session in 1968, until recorded for the “*Eat A Peach*” album after brother Duane’s death. Gregg Allman performed the song at his brother’s funeral and called it “my brother’s favorite song that I ever wrote” (Allman & Light 2013). “*Melissa*” has found renewed popularity in the 2000s due to its commercial feature for Cingular/AT&T Wireless cell phone company, the movie *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Bodyguard*, and the 2005 film, *House of D*.

“*Eat A Peach*” shipped enough copies to be verified by the RIAA as gold while peaking at number four on the the US Top 200 Pop Albums and Canada 100 Albums at number twelve in 1972. “We’d been through hell, but somehow we were rolling bigger than ever,” said Greg Allman (Allman & Light 2013).

From the years 1971-1972 The Allman Brothers Band and its entourage were drowning under a heroin and cocaine addiction. Following the leadership of band leader Duane Allman, four members checked into the Linwood-Bryant Hospital for rehabilitation in October 1971. During that month, Duane Allman was killed at the age of twenty-four in a motorcycle accident while traveling to Macon GA. Amazingly enough, the band tied on their boots and performed nearly ninety shows in the following year, touring as a five-piece still noticeably damaged from the passing of motivator Duane Allman.

According to friends and family during this time Berry Oakley had appeared to have lost “all hope, his heart, his drive, his ambition, [and] his direction” after Duane’s Death (Paul, Trucks, & Jaimoe 2015). Roadie, Kim Payne stated that Oakley repeatedly wished to “get high, be high, and stay high” (Paul, Trucks, & Jaimoe 2015). On November 11, 1972, while slightly intoxicated Berry Oakley crashed his motorcycle into the side of a bus, just three blocks away from where Duane had been killed. Berry would walk away from the accident but died of cerebral swelling

caused by a fractured skull. After facing two back to back major deaths in the band, the remaining original members buried Gregg next to Duane, took time to mourn, then hit the road again looking for their next bassist.

As the years went on through the mid to late 70s, the Allman Brothers Band rose to the heights of being named “The most popular band in the country” (Paul, Trucks, & Jaimoe 2015). The band began playing at larger venues, receiving more money, dealing with less friendships, and a rapidly accelerating drug addictions that eventually boiled over into a backstage brawl at Washington’s RFK Stadium in June ’73. As the popularity grew, the drugs became worse and the friendships began to wear thin. The Allman Brothers band would go on to provide decades of incredible hits, but nothing as magnificent and unique as the prime of The Allman Brothers Band with Duane Allman and Berry Oakley in the late 60s and early 70s.

Rewinding a bit, looking into the deep rural south way of life is what makes the Allman Brother’s Band unique beyond the fact that they were an integrated band in the south during the Jim Crow era. Bands like The Allman Brothers were distinguished from other bands by the way they would play with popular myths of the rural south. A region that had long been idealized as an upholder of conservatism and rural simplicity. Their progressive political message could not be lost in songs like “Revival,” where brother Gregg Allman proclaims, “we’re in a revolution.” (Elmore, 2010). Southern rockers of this time sought to create an alternative rural South, one that offered rejuvenation to the youth seeking an escape from the urbanized world of new commercial establishments and suburban neighborhoods.

The Allman Brothers band along side Lynyrd Skynyrd symbolized how changes in the southern environment in the 1960s and 1970s shaped the music of southern rock. In a South undergoing significant environmental and cultural shifts, southern rockers like these two bands

tried to make sense of these changes through their promotions, compositions, and most importantly their performances. The Allman Brothers band is exceptional in illustrating the tensions and anxieties that young southerners faced about racial integration, cultural sterility in an industrialized world, and an ever-changing landscape. The Allmans promoted a message of liberation not only through the music, but also in crafting an anti-commercialist image of the band. From the clothes worn while performing to the album covers created, the band sought to give the impression of a “ramblin’ man” living outdoors and not in the confines of a studio (Elmore, 2010).

The Allman Brothers tapped into the hippie, nature-loving culture of the 1970s, but did so in the heartland of the South, on rural farms that in ways remained for many people popular symbols of a repressive southern past. The Allman call to abandon suburbia was not a call to return to Confederacy, instead it was an invitation to find freedom in and, by doing so, reclaim the rural south. Many music historians consider this new style and southern way of music was a call for a new beginning away from the plagued past of slavery and intolerance.

This new style of southern rock infused with a blues-jazz fusion created by the Allman Brothers would leave a legacy of paving the way for several notable bands while almost single handedly turning Capricorn Records into “ a major independent label” (Eder, 2018). Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top went on to write that the group “defined the best of every music from the American South in that time. They were the best of all of us” (Gibbons, 2004). The bands extended popularity through heavy touring the early 90s created a new generation of fans that would label the band the pioneers of the “latter-day collegiate jam rock (Serpick, 2001). The Allman Brothers Band would go on to inspire the likes of rockers such as Dave Matthews Band, Chris Stapleton, Gov’t Mule, PHISH, Pearl Jam, Blues Travelers and many more.

Gregg Allman once wrote in his 2012 memoir, “A note has to have enough time, even if it’s in a fast song, to start nasty, get nasty, stay nasty, and end nasty – and do it all in a millisecond” (Richards, 2017). What an astonishing way to think about listening to music. Every note is crucial as each singular note contains a life cycle of emotion. With that mentality in mind, listening to the Allman Brothers band can open the listeners eyes up to worlds inside worlds within the realm of music and southern rock.

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