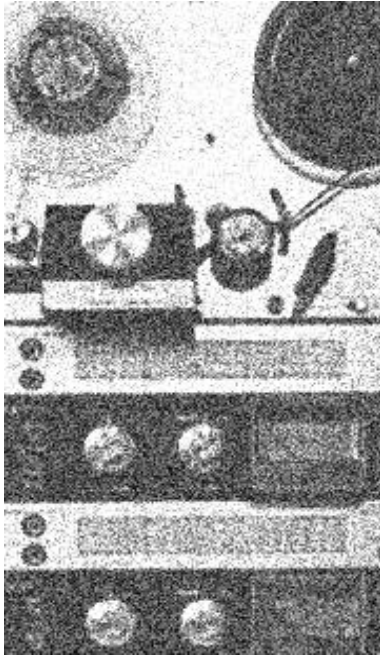


GARDNER SPEAKS (ONE): AN INTERVIEW WITH LEGENDARY ROCK MUSICIAN BUDDY GARDNER

Corey Mesler



Creole Myers: Would you take it all back?

Buddy Gardner: I would take it all back. I take it back now. I take it back just because you asked. Take it back? What do you mean fucking take it back? I don't have anything. Anything I have I have because of Lorelei, because of me. I don't owe the past anything, Memphis anything, music, rock and roll, the fans, those idjits with their t-shirts and lunch boxes and designer drugs or whatever. I owe Buddy Gardner. I owe him everything. What I have I earned and I don't care what anyone else says, what Hudson says, or any of that shit, I just care about Lorelei, about me. I'm not Buddy Black Lung. I'm not Buddy Zimmerman. I'm Buddy Gardner. What was the question?

CM: Black Lung. Tell us about that, do you still listen to "Turntable Poison"?

BG: I don't know. Don't trust me on that shit. I hate that album. There's some good stuff on it. I wrote some good stuff back then, that's evident, you know? But, I'm moving in a totally different direction now. I don't even understand that album, to be honest. Have you listened to 'I Was A Child When Smaller'? That's some of my best stuff and what are people saying? That it's self-indulgent. That it's shit. Fucking hell, what is art? It's self indulgence, man. I put myself out there with my veins exposed and I say, you know, fuck it, this is me, man.

CM: Do you ever hear from the other members of Black Lung? Anyone from Memphis?

BG: Lemme tell you how I answer that question. I ain't the past. I am the future.

CM: Okay. So, you hear from the other members-

BG: I talk to Skippy once in a while. He and his wife were here just a couple of months ago. He seems happy. His wife is a peach.

LE: Helen. Helen Holland.

BG: Right. She took to Lorelei right away. For this I liked her. After all the shit Lor has had to put up with, from Memphis, from Crafty, from that fuck, Hudson.

CM: Did you talk music? You and Skippy?

BG: Music. Love. Death. We talked, you know? It was good.

CM: But, Crafty-

BG: Fuck him, you know? He's -what?- involved in other things, things that preclude me, including still living in that fucking group, still living in Black Lung, you know? He doesn't want to grow up. He doesn't want me to grow up.

LE: He doesn't accept that you've changed. That you're not a Guitar God. That you're God yourself.

BG: In a manner of speaking. Yeah. Lorelei is always there to keep me straight. God is me, in me, you know? That's what she's saying. That's what she's always been saying, but people couldn't hear her, for whatever reason. They wouldn't listen. Just like I say in 'Burn My Bridge', you know? 'There's a black and white photograph/On my finger is a tiny bird.' You know? It's like they can't hear me now, after they all were so intent on being Black Lung acolytes, or whatever. Now, these same cats, these same sycophants and hangers-on, they're up there, pronouncing on me, on Lor, on my new stuff as if I'm not a human being, too. As if I can't be hurt, am impregnable, a force instead of a feeling, bleeding child, you know? Like we all are. We're all children, man.

CM: You're hurt by your reviews?

BG: Fucking hell, of course, I'm hurt. You know, when I was young, when I was in Black Lung, I mean, it went so fast, everything was happening so fast, them calling me the next Clapton and shit like that. I was locked out of my feelings—they could have said anything about me back then. I didn't care. Plus I was high half the time, all the time. People giving me poppers to take I didn't even know what it was. I didn't give a shit about anything. Just show me the way to the next whiskey bar, you know? Just show me the way to the next little girl. Now, with Lorelei, with what I'm saying now, it's more personal, it's what I care about. I'm hurt. Yes.

CM: You say you can't listen to the old Black Lung stuff...

BG: Not can't. Don't. I mean, why? I'm moving. I'm shadow.

CM: Who do you listen to?

BG: Man, I'm not in with anyone who is in. I know that sounds funny to you, but I just don't listen to anything you would know, man, or that your readers are gonna know. Or expect I would listen to. Old Beatles, Old Stones...no, I don't know. I been listening to this guy plays the pan flute. I can't remember his name. There's this group out here, West Coast Pop Art Group or something like that. No one's ever heard of them. No one listens to them except the few hundred souls who go to their shows, but their stuff intrigues me. Terry Riley. There's this cat, Wild Man Fisher, you might know, who plays on street corners, someone Zappa found. I like his stuff. I still like Roky Erickson's stuff, even if he's a child of the devil. Lulu—she's cool. Brotherhood Of Breath. I'm all over the place. Uh, jazz guys. Ornette. Old black jazz guys who nobody recorded. There's some German stuff I like. Some Eastern European stuff...John's Children.

CM: Lennon, John Lennon...

BG: Naw, man, that's their name. The group, the guys that did 'Desdemona,' man, you heard that? Great song.

CM: Yeah, I know that song.

BG: Okay.

CM: Rock and roll?

BG: It's labels, man. That's the trouble I have. What is rock and roll? Can you describe it for me?

CM: You said jazz—

BG: Right, right. Some old jazz. Lor turned me on to it.

CM: Back to Black Lung, if we can. You say you talk to Skippy but there are hard feelings still with Crafty. Is this still part of the legal fallout?

BG: I don't know. I don't know much about that legal stuff. I can't follow it. Why I have a lawyer. But, yeah, Crafty wanted to go on as Black Lung. I mean, fuck, without me, he wanted to tour as Black Lung, play those old songs like they were his. I said Fuck you, man. That's when the lawyers came in. And let me go on record right now as saying that he brought the lawyers in. I mean, he told me he was going on tour -told me, not asked me, and I said Great, what are you gonna fucking play? You know? Like, I mean, I was being blunt, but for his good, because like he's written, what two, three songs? And he's like I'm playing all the old stuff, off 'Turntable.' And I said I'll be fucked if you are. I was Black Lung, man. I wrote the shit. That's my guitar -the whole sound of the group was the guitar, man. Those are my songs, whether I want them or not.

CM: And has this been settled?

BG: I don't even know. Ask Pete. Pete Holder. He's the lawyer. Is Crafty touring?

CM: Um...

BG: Don't even fucking tell me if he's touring. If he's playing even the fucking Shell man. I don't want to know.

CM: Back to your songwriting. You wrote some of the best songs from that time period

BG: Me, Dylan, Lennon, Lou Reed, Joni, Leonard, maybe Ochs—

CM: They call you a genius. A Guitar God.

BG: They can say what they want, you know? Does it matter what they say? Does it matter to you?

CM: My question is, are you a genius?

BG: I'm a genius, sure. What does it mean?

CM: How would you rate your guitar playing?

BG: Back then or now?

CM: Um, back then.

BG: I was the best, one of the best. Clapton, Hendrix...uh, B.B.

CM: You hung out with Hendrix for a while, right? Tell me what that was like.

BG: Hendrix was a cool cat, man. He was just cool. He sweated it. He fucking slept with his guitar, you know?

CM: Slept with it?

BG: Literally. Fucking literally slept with it. He said it made it more a part of him, made him more in tune with it. I believe him, man, because nobody, I mean nobody could get the sounds out of a guitar that Hendrix did. Nobody can now. In one way he was just so far above all of us -even Clapton. I mean, he was untouchable. But, yeah, we hung out

for a while. This would have been, uh, early sixty-nine, I think. He slept on my couch for a while. We'd get stoned, sit up all night talking, blues, soul -he knew it all, man. The cat lived music. And, you know, he was bleeding, that's the sad truth, man, he was bleeding and no one could see. I didn't know it. He was just full of pain, man. He *had* to do drugs. The rest of us, we were like just blowing our minds, you know, but Jimi, he needed it. Just to get through a day, just to keep down the demon that made him play like that. A cold wind blew through Jimi, yet he was the sweetest cat. Sad death, man. He died for all of us. You know? So we could go on.

LE: He showed us the way through death.

BG: That's right man. Jimi and Janis, they did it early so we could keep playing. Why I left the electric stuff behind partly.

CM: Really. Why?

BG: Well, I mean, he did it all, he took it to the edge and then when the edge laughed at him he laughed back, man, and he went over. And he fucking took it with him. It's disrespectful in a way to continue in that vein.

CM: So you went softer, acoustic?

BG: Careful saying 'Softer,' man. To players it sounds too much like 'Weaker,' you dig? Like tea. Like wimpy. Well, anyway, not totally. Not just. I don't know. Don't write this down, man. It's just talking about Jimi makes me feel, I don't know, useless somehow. Vulnerable. You dig?

CM: Did you go to the funeral?

BG: Naw. I didn't, man. We were playing that weekend, I think. But, it was like, he's dead, you know? He's dead forever. What does one day have to say about forever? You follow me? But, he was the best of us. Write that. He was the best of us.

(garbled here...low sound quality, it appears that a few moments are lost)