

STEVE CONN AND SONNY LANDRETH: PLAYING IN TONGUES

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On one night a year Alexandria has music which rivals the best found anywhere in the world: that's when favorite son Steve Conn and Sonny Landreth hook up at Spirits and continue a musical collaboration which has lasted over thirty years.

Watching Sonny Landreth play guitar must feel a bit like it felt watching Mozart caress the keys of the harpsichord. Sonny's preternaturally long fingers flit along the guitar, the glass slide flashes, and the resulting undulating blues causes the hair on the back of your neck to stand up. Steve is virtuosic as well—sometimes playing a call and response between his B-3 organ and the keyboard stacked atop it—a case where the left hand definitely knows what the right hand is doing. Jamey Bell on drums and H.B. Smith on bass cement the band with a formidable rhythm section. But it is the chemistry which exists between Steve and Sonny that has made the Friday night after Thanksgiving at Spirits such an unforgettable experience for the last ten years.

On *Thinking in Tongues*, a tune to be found on Steve's upcoming album, he and Sonny demonstrated the musical equivalent of finishing each other's sentences—Steve's powerful singing and rollicking piano fills intertwined with Sonny's blistering guitar solos. On Sonny's *Blues Attack*, Steve eschewed the keyboards and played accordion as he channeled Clifton Chenier, and Sonny conjured Muddy Waters.

Steve's lyrical sensibilities are southern to the core and seem to owe as much to Faulkner and Flannery O' Connor as to Randy Newman and Lowell George. In his song *Down on Rigolette* he shows he is the master of the telling detail—"Daddy leaned his shovel on a tombstone, took Billy by the hand and disappeared." In the Gothic romance song—"I've got your Dog," he swirled a finger around a slightly graying temple as he sang a line which was an audience favorite, "Sometimes I feel like I got snakes inside my head. Can't tell whether I'm flying or lying in my bed."

Another virtue of this longtime musical friendship, begun, according to Steve's tongue-in-cheek aside, when he was a precocious seven-year old and Sonny was a grizzled nineteen, is that these two give each other plenty of room to stretch out their considerable music skills. (Steve and Sonny have been collaborators ever since they started a band in Estes Park, Colorado in 1975, but Sonny is only Steve's senior by a year.) Sonny did some stretching on *Key to the Highway*; his soulful South Louisiana power blues shook the rafters of Spirits like a Zydeco incarnation of Cream. The music reached the pinnacle with an incendiary but hypnotic version of *Congo Square*, the singing infused with shared anguish at the destruction of mutual stomping grounds. The two friends polished off the evening with a searing version of the *One and Only Truth* as Steve took up the accordion again and ended the evening shoulder to shoulder with Sonny.

There are some folks who wish Cream had never broken up: they feel like Jack Bruce was the perfect foil for Clapton (or maybe the other way around.) There may be others who wish Steve and Sonny would form a South Louisiana super group or at least play together more often than Thanksgiving and the occasional recording. As it is now though, everybody has to be from somewhere, and Steve Conn is from Cenla. So keep coming home for the holidays, Steve, and bring your friend.