

ANDY “SUGARCANE” COLLINS

A Biography

All the way from Cape York in the hot and humid tropical far north of Australia, where the rainforest meets the reef and where there are only two seasons, wet and dry, comes Andy “Sugarcane” Collins. With fire and skill and passion and commitment, Sugarcane plays his acoustic guitars with a driving rhythmic swing and sings powerfully with the big heart of a bluesman. Inspired by the slashing delta blues of Charley Patton & Son House, the joyous ragtime guitar of Blind Blake and the powerful songster traditions of Leadbelly, his songs are filled with deep emotional content and like the best of the early bluesmen, Collins is an exceptional storyteller. He had been first drawn to the Irish based traditional music of his homeland, but the blues, when he found it, was stronger and darker and ultimately, held more fascination. His early years were divided between the city and life on a small dairy farm in the bush. When his father gave him his first guitar at the age of seven and Collins instinctively started sliding his pocket knife up and down the strings, his future life as a travelling bluesman was all but sealed.

He hit the road at eighteen and found himself way up north in Cairns, Queensland in the late 70's at the peak of the Barbary Coast days, where in the wild stretch of waterfront pubs, boozing and brawling were given equal opportunity. You either learnt how to fight or play well enough to please the fishermen, canecutters, miners, bikers and all manner of desperado who drifted around the north when Cairns was a sugarcane town and the end of the road on the east coast of Australia. Collins survived this baptism of fire and was soon in demand for his raw soulful interpretations of the old southern country bluesmen he so reveres. He put together the three piece *Lake Street Sheiks* and other small groups, but it was in the six piece *Barron River Drifters* that he tasted his first major success. Appearing all over the far north, Collins and his band were legendary for their unique bluesy sound, outstanding musicianship and dynamic, high powered performances.

Leaving the band behind, Collins hit the road again and in 1992 went to Europe where he started working on his songwriting and performing solo again under the name of Black Cat Tail. Returning to Australia he records and releases his impressive debut album of original material *Barron Delta Blue* which spawns the catchy hit song ‘Pascoe River’, gets two tracks on EMI compilation albums, receives tremendous radio airplay in Australia and around the world and is honoured with a song of the year and two album of the year awards. Described by Mike Daly of *The Age* as “one of 1999's best Australian releases” the album chronicles his life in the wild far north.

In 2003 Collins followed the phenomenal success of his first CD with the outstanding double album *Lake Street Serenade*. At the Queensland Recording Association “Sunnie” Awards, the highest honours given for recording and songwriting in Queensland, songs on *Lake Street Serenade* receive a record 12 nominations, win three “Sunnie” awards, and Collins is acknowledged as a major talent when he's crowned the **Queensland Songwriter of the Year 2004**.

Whilst appearing at many of Australia's major music festivals including the Thredbo 'Legends of Blues' Festival, 'Blues Tent' Gympie Muster, Port Fairy Folk Festival and the National Folk Festival, Sugarcane has always had his sights set on international success and in the summer of 2005 made his first solo tour of the USA. Sharing the stage with Coco Montoya and WC Clark at the Winthrop Rhythm & Blues Festival, jamming with Pinetop Perkins in Illinois, appearing on the legendary King Biscuit Time Show with "Sunshine" Sonny Payne on Radio KFFA in Helena Arkansas and singing in the streets of Clarksdale Mississippi during the Sunflower River Blues & Gospel Festival, Sugarcane's powerful emotive voice, superb original compositions and hard driving acoustic guitar were the backbone and trademark of his dynamic live performances and herald the emergence of an exciting new talent on the national and international blues scene.

In March of 2006 Sugarcane Collins released his much anticipated third solo album **WAY DOWN THE RIVER** in the USA and backed it up with the very successful three month 'Got A Story To Tell' Tour which started in New Orleans on June 13th and finished up in Los Angeles on Sept 9th. The highlights being –

Thur June 22nd King Biscuit Time Radio Show, Helena Arkansas
Sat June 24th Delta Amusement Blues Café, Clarksdale Mississippi
Sat July 8th Brandon Casey's, Kankakee Illinois
Sun July 9th Milford Christian Church, Milford Illinois
Fri July 14th Kapers Hardware House, Watseka Illinois
Sat July 15th Copper Top Lounge, Bloomington Illinois
Fri July 21st Rock Cut Blues Festival, Kettle Falls Washington
Sat July 22nd Rock Cut Blues Festival, Kettle Falls Washington
Fri July 28th Ralph's Tavern, Kettle Falls, Washington
Sat July 29th Marcus Music Festival, Marcus Washington
Sat July 29th July Caterina Winery, Spokane Washington
Sun July 30th/Sat Aug 5th Port Townsend Country BluesFest, Washington
Fri Aug 11th Meyers Falls Markets, Washington
Fri Aug 25th Ralph's Tavern, Kettle Falls, Washington
Tue Aug 29th Wine Cellar, Coure D'alene, Idaho
Sat Sept 2nd Rendezvous Rhythm & Blues Festival, Oroville Washington
Thu Sept 7th Orient Public School, Orient Washington

Says Sugarcane " American audiences really responded to the power and passion of my voice, the variety and dexterity of my guitar styles and the honesty and intensity of my overall stage performance. The Australian accent didn't hurt either!"

WAY DOWN THE RIVER has an Australian / Rest of the World release scheduled for November 2006 in Cairns. With a fascination for the acoustic bluesmen of the 20's & 30's this astonishing new album resonates with a rich imagery plucked from deep within the rhythms of life in the Mississippi Delta. With moody production and sparse arrangements Sugarcane conjures up the cotton fields and baptist churches, the smoke-choked juke joints and gutbuckets, the freight trains, prison cells, dirt roads and street corners of the south that gave birth to the blues.

The response to **WAY DOWN THE RIVER** from the Blues community in the USA has been absolutely sensational. They write -

Sugarcane's guitar-playing and vocals are stellar, and so authentic that you'd think he grew up picking cotton by day and belly-fiddle by night near Tutwiler, Mississippi. This CD proves you don't have to be an American bluesmaster to master American blues. Mark Hoffman (author of 'Moaning at Midnight', the Howlin Wolf Bio) for Blues To Do, Seattle

Sugarcane Collins hails from halfway around the world, but his music is right out of the Delta, acoustic blues as it was born to be: powerful, personal and penetrating. Any one of the 13 cuts could have come to life 70 or 80 years ago on a sweltering Mississippi porch. Collins' intense vocals are impressive, his lyrics will knock you flat. Suzanne Cadgene – Elmore Magazine, New York

The production is first rate and the songs are outstanding. It's one of my favourite blues albums of the year so far. Chip Eagle - Publisher of BLUES REVUE

I like this album. He has a bold and dangerous personality in his music. Bruce Iglauer – Alligator Records

Way Down The River is a masterpiece album from Australian bluesman Sugarcane Collins. Everything about this album is remarkable. James Walker - BLUESWAX.com

It is a great CD in every way. Delta Frank Black - WGLT Blues DJ, Bloomington Illinois

It's one of the best acoustic blues CD's I've heard in a long time! Jan Ramsey - James River Blues Society, Virginia

This album is a must have for acoustic blues lovers. These are all original compositions and they are classic. Pat Kreeft - Atlanta Blues Society, Georgia

The CD is great. I'm impressed with the blues talent coming out of Australia. You are a credit to our music. Richard Ludmerer – New York Blues and Jazz Society

If this CD doesn't rack up some awards then one will have to ask where in the hell has the blues gone? Bill Martin - Blues Society of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Sugarcane Collins is a true wonder from "downunder". This CD has already received extensive airplay on my "Bigdaddy's Blues" Radio Show and will continue to be heard. It's that good. Ray Hansen - Walla Walla Blues Society, Washington

This stunning new outing is a remarkable collection of thirteen original tunes. Particular sparklers include the sad penitentiary blues of "One Wing Frank", the detail packed tribute to "Leadbelly", the haunting hoodoo - mystery tale of "Sallie Mae", a hand - clapping testimonial titled "Shine the Light", the jew's harp spiced "Dancing Rabbit Creek" and a washboard - enlivened, string - tickling rag called "All The Way To St Louis". **Gary von Tersch - Big City Blues Magazine, Detroit**

*If you didn't know any better, listening to his new self-released disc *Way Down the River*, you'd swear that Sugarcane Collins was raised on blues music in the Deep South of the USA. Collins wrote all the tunes and they are a powerful commentary on the music of that time. Highlights include "Got A Mind To Ramble," about the wanderlust that struck so many residents of the Delta during that time in an effort to improve their lot in life, "One Wing Frank," about a prisoner who finds a way out of the hard labor in the pen, "Leadbelly," a biographical piece about the legendary Louisiana singer, and "Shine The Light," a stirring gospel track. Two instrumentals, the rousing washboard propelled ragtime number "All The Way to St. Louis" and "Dancing Rabbit Creek" with its quirky use of jew's harp, also showcase Collins' dynamic fretwork.* **Graham Clarke - BLUESBYTES.com**