

STORIES

Title: Midnight Special

Label: NA

Release Date: NA

Medium: Video Stream

Availability: Very Good

Venue: NBC Studios, Burbank, CA

Recording Date: 1973

Lineup: Ian Lloyd - Vocals
Steve Love - Guitar, vocals
Ken Bichel - Keyboards

Kenny Aaronson - Bass
Bryan Madey - Drums

Set List: Brother Louie

Along with Wild Cherry, the Stories are one of the seventies best known “one hit wonders”. When their cover of Hot Chocolate’s tale of interracial love, “Brother Louie” (#1-1973), stormed to the top of the pop charts, they were labeled as a blue eyed soul pop band instead of the progressive pop/rock band they really were. Ian Lloyd’s raspy vocals reminded listeners of Rod Stewart and the guitar work of Steve Love was r&b based. While this song was their one big hit, it was not representative of what the group was about. In fact, it was an aberration that eventually led to their demise after only three albums. The band charted two of those albums and four singles during their brief career.

Stories was formed in 1972 when Ian Lloyd and Michael Brown were introduced through their fathers, who had played violin together for years as session violinists. Previous to meeting Lloyd, Brown had been a member of the Left Banke, where he wrote two hit singles, “Walk Away Renee” (#5-1966) and “Pretty Ballerina” (#15-1967). Lloyd had kicked around the NYC music scene for years, recording as Ian London. He was classically trained on both violin and piano. He also played bass.

The two men wanted to form a band that evoked the Beatles, with melodies at the forefront and baroque keyboards. At the point when they met, Brown had signed a contract with Kama Sutra Records. Lloyd brought in drummer Bryan Madey and guitarist Steve Love and Stories was born. Brown and Lloyd named the band Stories because each of their songs were self contained stories.

Their debut album, *Stories* (#182-1972) made the charts on the strength of the near hit single, “I’m Coming Home” (#42-1972). The album was similar to material released by the Raspberries and Badfinger, but not as hard rocking.

The band seemed to be moving in the right direction when they began work on their second album in England. Eddie Kramer was brought in to produce and give it a bigger sound, with more power pop inclinations. Unfortunately, Brown left the band right after the album was finished. Lloyd maintains to this day that Brown left for personal reasons that had nothing to do with the band. Brown claims that he was kicked out of the band. He was replaced by Ken Bichel.

While touring in support of the album, Kama Sutra asked Lloyd to find a new potential hit single in their vaults. Lloyd uncovered a song about interracial romance that had been released by the band Hot

Chocolate. While it was a top ten hit in England, it had not broken through in the States. Session bassist Kenny Aaronson was brought in to play bass.

“Brother Louie” rocketed to the top of the pop charts, where it stayed for two weeks. The million seller stayed on the charts for 18 weeks and Stories became huge. Unfortunately, the song was nothing like anything else on *About Us* (#29-1973). It was added as a track after it’s initial pressing. The band became huge overnight, appearing on all the popular television shows. Aaronson had joined full time, which allowed Lloyd to only sing. They toured to huge crowds and returned to the studio to record their follow up album.

Traveling Underground (1973) was released as Ian Lloyd & Stories. While the album did yield two minor chart singles, “Mammy Blue” (#50-1973) and “If It Feels Good Do It” (#88-1974), it did not chart. By this point, the group’s fan base didn’t know if they were blue eyed soul or prog rockers and failed to support the album. During a subsequent tour, Love left and was replaced by Richie Ranno.

By early 1974, Lloyd had enough and quit, ending the group. Brown formed another Beatles like band called the Beckies in 1976 and has released numerous albums. Love became a member of an eighties outfit called Landscape while Madey recorded two albums with the Earl Slick Band. Aaronson became one of rock’s most requested bassists, recording with Hall & Oates, Billy Squire, Leslie West, Foghat, Bob Dylan, and Rick Derringer among others. Bichel has done session work.

Lloyd has recorded six solo albums and has done studio work for Foreigner, Survivor, Billy Joel, Yes, and Peter Frampton. He also formed the Ian Lloyd Band. Other members of the band included Matt Grossman, Dan Natelli, Antti Jamhunen, Jon Iuhu, and Ian’s son David. The group remains active.

Lloyd’s latest solo album is *O-de-Do* (2009). Lloyd has also teamed with John Ford of the Strawbs to record new material and make appearances as the Ford/Lloyd Band. As of March, 2013, Lloyd is also a member of Social Hero, which includes his son. He also recently released a Holiday set. He has no plans to tour or record with Stories.

Stories has not released any compilations or live material, although Raven Records has reissued their first two albums as a two record set.

My first live performance of Stories comes courtesy of their 1973 appearance on *Midnight Special*. Lloyd, Love, Madey, Aaronson, and Bichel give “Brother Louie” a thorough workout, with elongated guitar solos by Love and dueling keyboards by Bichel. The strings from the studio recording are gone, replaced by Love’s biting guitar work. Lloyd sounds great and the song rocks from beginning to end. While this appearance is not included in the *Midnight Special* box set, you can easily find it on YouTube.

Title: Palace Theatre – 1973

Label: Wolfgang’s Vault

Release Date: 2012

Medium: Download

Availability: Very Good

Venue: Palace Theatre, NYC, NY

Recording Date: November 7, 1973

Lineup: Ian Lloyd - Vocals

Kenny Aaronson - Bass

Steve Love - Guitar, vocals
Ken Bichel - Keyboards

Bryan Madey - Drums

Set List: Saint James
Mammy Blue
Please, Please

Bridges
Brother Louie
Mammy Blue (Outtake)

This six song gem was recorded in November, 1973, during the *Traveling Underground* tour, right before the band broke up. Two songs are played from that album, along with one song from their debut and two songs from their hit album, *About Us*. Recording quality is good.

One thing that is immediately apparent when you hear songs other than “Brother Louie” is that the band leaned towards progressive rock, with Bichel featured. His keyboards dominate “Please, Please”, which is a weird combination of Nice/Yes prog rock with a fairly standard pop song lyric and chorus. Bichel is featured on organ and synthesizer.

Bichel is also featured in the straight prog rocker, “Bridges”. This sounds similar to early Genesis, with nice guitar and keyboard work, especially during the song’s closing moments. Lloyd tones down the raspy edge to his vocals.

“Saint James”, from the band’s debut, is a Rolling Stones like rocker, with plenty of electric piano, wah wah guitar, and Lloyd’s bluesy vocals. It rocks from start to finish and is the grittiest song on the set. “Mammy Blue” nearly made the top forty, in part because it sounds like “Brother Louie”. The performance here is strong, with more great wah wah guitar from Love and Lloyd’s intense vocals.

Similarly, “Brother Louie” is also strong, although it is cut off prematurely during some guitar/keyboard trade offs. The part that is intact is also strong. The set ends with a short jam that morphs into “Mammy Blue” before fading out.

While Stories are considered to be an “one hit wonder”, they were a progressive rock oriented band that stumbled upon a hit single that defined them in the public’s eyes and forced them to change their style. This mini set will give you a good idea of what they were trying to accomplish before “Brother Louie” got in the way.