

THE BITS INTERVIEW: IAN SIEGAL (What happens, happens, with me)

Ian Siegal was the winner of this year's Blues In the South, Male Vocalist award and the Acoustic Act award in the British Blues Awards and has a growing international reputation. Ian McKenzie caught up with him between gigs.

First of all, how did you get into the blues in the first place?

I am often asked that. My standard reply The most honest answer is that I can't really remember listening to anything else.

For as long as I as a long I can remember I've always been aware of blues. It has always been all around me. There was always a lot of music playing in my house. Mostly rock and roll, Beatles and Stones and that kind of stuff.

But I also had a cousin who played professionally and he played a bit of blues as well. So it was in the atmosphere really, But blues had a big draw for me, like a kind of magnet I guess. Part of my musical faith.

And when did you first start to play guitar?

Not till I was about 18 really. I was already singing, from about 16, with the same cousin in his band on the local pub circuit. I had got a guitar at 16 'cause I thought I'd better learn an instrument and it just sat in my bedroom gathering dust. I decided to start learning when I was 18 and I learned really, really fast. Guitar works for me ..I wish I could play other instruments.

I started working with bands on a regular basis when I was about 21, before long I was gigging 6 nights a week. Turing professional was just like everything else in my life it just sort of happened. With of all the gigging it was kind of just thrust upon me ..it was not much of a choice really. I mean I didn't have anything else to do...and it's been like that ever since. I've never made a great deal of effort to

pursue anything career wise. Just what happens happens with me.

People often say you have a singing style like Wolf ..is that natural or cultivated?

It's natural now but I must have cultivated it to an extent when I was younger ..and the Wolf thing is a vocal trick I do sometimes, but do it less and



less these days. It's the same with Howling Wolf, it's not his natural voice its a vocal trick and a very effective one. Taj Mahal is very good at it, he throws it in now and again. But Wolf got it from Charley Patton, God know where he got it from! I'm sure I did cultivate it, but I'm glad I was able to.

Tom Waits was a huge influence on me and I spent several years trying to emulate him. That did enough damage and I was stuck with a gravelly voice then ..there's very little I can do about it. But my voice is a lot more varied these days, I and kind of switch between things...Its like an instrument, Some people just have one voice and nothing wrong with that (like Rod Stewart, one of the greatest voices ever) but its like an instrument in your neck and I like to toy around with it.

In 2003-4 your career took off after a tour opening for Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings. Is that how you see it?

I had a fantastic time opening for him, I think I did three tours and it was certainly an education and a great pleasure. But, my career in Europe had already started taking off of its own accord and not a great deal for me personally came from that tour. I won some more fans and my name was out there a lot more, but it was already really happening. I was already doing some big festival gigs and my career was going very nicely. I would do it again like a shot though ...It was really good fun and I'm still friends with them all.

The thing with Bill Wyman is he always carries a lot of first class musicians with him..

And he's one himself. He is one of the fines blues bass players, very underrated and very understated, but my God, on the tour, Albert Lee and Georgie Fame in the band and with guests along like Martin Taylor...you know it's crazy'

Your first album I think was called Meat and Potatoes ..Was that the first one?

The first one with Nugene – the first proper album I'd say ..I did have one out on a German label before that and you know what, I'm still very proud of it

You've been with Nugene for a long long time...

Yes, will it [the label] started with Matt Schofield and then I joined them. That was back in 2004 - so eight years. Not bad...You know these days, big labels are probably not the best idea, its best to keep it small and keep it in the family, if you like

In the early albums you obviously worked mainly with British musicians but recently you have been working with many very high quality often black American musicians; Is that part of a deliberate strategy?

Yes and no. The deliberate strategy was to work with Cody Dickinson of the North Mississippi All stars who I got to know after Nugene suggested we get together. I went over to the USA, to Memphis and hung out with him and we got along very well and discussed the possibility of working [on an album]

together. Next thing I know it's three month later and I'm out there and Cody's assembled some musicians, local guys, like the sons of RL Burnside and Junior Kimbrough and Bobby Bland, then Alvin Youngblood Hart dropped by unexpectedly, not expecting to play but ended up, playing on a couple of tracks. It was Cody's idea to bring those (Continued on [page 4](#))

(Continued from [page 3](#)) particular guys in, 'cause we were trying to make a North Mississippi Hill country style record.

You called the album the The Skinny and titled it as as by Ian Siegal and the Younger Sons, how does it fit with the the new CD?

When I went out this year it was kind of change of direction I guess didn't go for typical Hill Country style and something a bit more eclectic I guess.

This time we had Cody's brother Luther, and Alvin came back to play bass and guitar and sang on it...so a very different album ..from the first one.

The new one is called Candy Store Kid and it's a lot broader in its style.

I want to talk to you about the awards that you have won; growing in number all the time. This year, Male Vocalist and Acoustic artist, Male Vocalist winner last year and Blues Band too in that year, and a nominee for Contemporary Blues Artist with The Skinny album in the Blues Foundation Blues Music Awards.

Yeah, I think the only Brit this time (or ever) for Contemporary Blues Artist. I happened to be out there so I went to the awards. One of my favourite musicians won, Tab Benoit, I m a big fan so it didn't hurt too badly. [Laughs]

Some people say that competition between musicians is a bad thing. How do you feel about that?

Yeah, to an extent I think that's true. Something Cody said to me was that when you have five nominees and one winner, all you have created is five losers, It should be a celebration of all five bands or musicians. I see the point, but you know, but there's nothing wrong with a bit of healthy competition. I don't see

it as mean spirited or whatever. It all fine for the industry or the public to show some appreciation. The problem is partly that - as the British Blues Awards showed - two years ago it was

Hall of Fame now and he can't win again; he'll be excluded.

Also we we were runner up this year for for the best band and third for our album - after Matt Schofield and King

King. Pretty good for us, actually. Its an honour you know.

Perhaps I shouldn't say, but to win the vocalist category is of course an honour, but I find it a little strange that there are significant vocalists who are

not included, off the top of my head for example, James Hunter, Big Joe Louis, Georgie Fame, you know, who aren't even nominated. It takes a little bit away from it. But as the BBA's gain more acknowledge-ment from the public in support and votes, then I think the playing field is going to be broader and fairer.

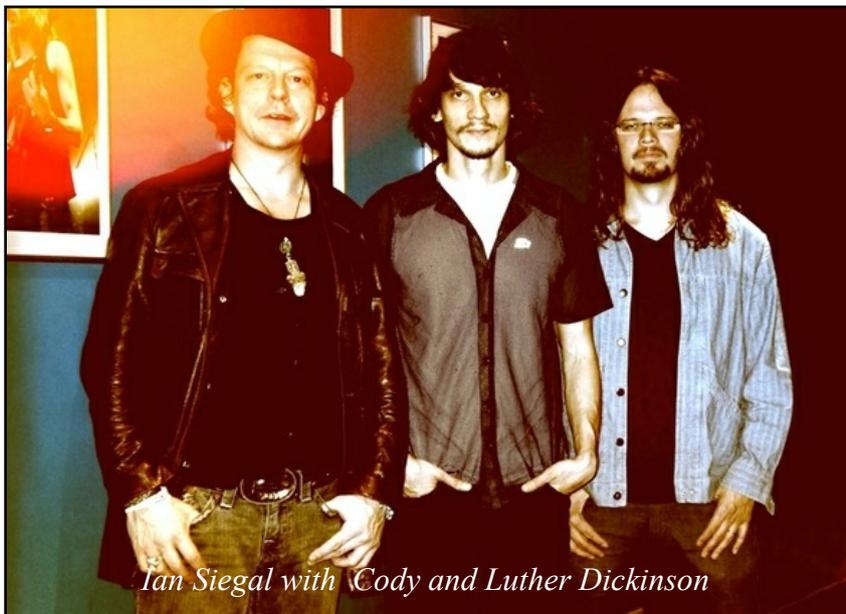
Let's move back to the new record Candy Stor Kid. Where did you record it?

In the same place as the other one. in Coldwater Mississippi in the Dickinson studio; The Zebra ranch.



Zebra Ranch, Coldwater, Mississippi

basically a Facebook campaign so who ever had the most Facebook fans had a big advantage over other people. They change things a bit this year and had a committee making the nominations and that's made it a bit of a fairer playing ground and that's been reflected in this years awards. There's no doubt the public should be involved in it. Awards given just by music professionals are diminished, as selection AND voting by specialist groups could reflect a certain snobbery. Yeah is a tricky one, but I guess I'm a little biased cause I keep winning things.



Ian Siegal with Cody and Luther Dickinson

And your bass player Andy Graham has also won the BBA bass player award this year.

That's right, he's won it three years running, so he in what is called the

And are all the songs original Ian Siegals?

Actually I didn't have that much original stuff when I went out there. I wrote a couple on the plane over and during the sessions. Luther came up with a great one and we did a couple of covers. I think I wrote five of them. One is a proper cover of a song that has been done before, Green Power, by Little Richard and a couple by other

people that have not been recorded. Eleven tracks in all. Alvin Youngblood Hart played bass and some guitar too. Luther wanted to play some bass too, so they had to fight over it! In fact when we did the tour, they'd be constantly swapping (Continued on [page 5](#))

(Continued from page 4) behind my back so I never quite knew who was on bass and who on guitar at any given moment.

Alvin did backing vocals too - an incredible talent - they all are. And the album is different there's country and soul and funk and bits of every-thing,



so its a lot broader than before. Not that that was intentional, that's just the way it came out, I'm very, very pleased with it.

I always like to ask people I am interviewing "What is the best thing that has ever happened to you as a professional musician"?

That's hard to narrow down to one thing ..But I'd say...probably when a bunch of members of the Muddy Waters Band, completely unexpectedly just got up on stage and joined me and without asking, (Bloody Rude! [Laughs] while I was doing a solo gig. I suddenly had Muddy's drummer, bass player, guitarist, harmonic player on with me. They were all there to hear Pinetop Perkins and Hubert Sumlin, but they just got up an joined me and we did an hour set. It doesn't get a lot better than that.

And the worst thing?

Oh God, probably playing the blues festival at Skegness in Butlins, thanks to the Butlins staff not the festival people. The treatment of the musicians was absolutely appalling really, really bad., But I won't go into any detail. Most musicians wouldn't publish a statement like that, but I really don't care. I don't plan to go back and I doubt they'll have me. Apart from that I can't really think of anything . I've had a really good career, a lot of laughs, a lot of fun.

What about gigs in the future?

Well we have a Mudblood tour coming up in November (see GIGS ON, page 2) and I've got a solo tour coming up too. Fourteen 14 dates (see www.iansiegal.com for full details). So there is plenty going on.

Thank you very much indeed for talking to me and the best of luck for the future, Lots of awards to come, lots of great music and huge success for Candy Store Kid too.

Thanks very much it's been a pleasure talking to you. Bye!

To hear this interview with ADDED MUSIC go to www.bluesinthesouth.com/interviews

EXTRA REVIEW HOME SWEET HOME – SOMETHING BLUE

This is the second album by Sussex-based duo "Something Blue" - Rob and Sarah Skinner (nee Raynes). They teach music in the West Sussex area and play guitar, saxophone, bass, drums, harmonica, mandolin, ukulele, banjo and percussion.



The album is based on the trauma they suffered last March when they returned from a gig only to find their house had been burgled and their computers complete with musical ideas were amongst the items that had been stolen.

So, unlike their first album which I reviewed last month, this one is mostly brand new self-penned material with only a couple of covers. The music is well-played and sung and the songs themselves reflect the anguish and anger the couple must have felt – and are still feeling if the song "Mr Jones" is anything to go by. That song and the following track "Lay Me Down" were the self-penned ones I liked the most. I feel the duo have some way to go where songwriting is concerned to attain that elusive something that lifts a song above the merely competent; but they're good musicians so I look forward to hearing more from them. They have good musical instincts (i.e. they seem to like the same stuff that I do) as the last track – a simple but effectively performed John Prine song – illustrates.

Dave Hards



ON OCTOBER 2012 SWANAGE BLUES FESTIVAL

PEOPLE PARTICIPATING INCLUDED: Assorted Buskers, Back Porch, Bare Bones Boogie Band, Blind Lemon Gliders, Blue Touch, Blues Machine, Bob Pearce Gospel and Blues Band, C Sharp Blues, Chris Collins & Blues Etc, David Raphael Band, Elevators, Fabulous Fezheads, Hugh Budden, Jam Sessions with Robin Bibi Band, Jason Manners & 3 Buck Shirt, Jawbreakers, Jay Tamkin, Johnny Sharp, Martin Froud, Motel 6, Mustangs, Open Mic Sessions, Paint It Blue, Pete Harris & Hugh Budden, Riotous Brothers, Riverside Blues Band, Robin Bibi Band, Sonny Black, Stan's Blues Jamboree, Steamer, Steve Darrington, Tim Harrison, Tin Cats, Tommy Allen & Johnny Hewitt, and Will Killeen.

And here are some of the things folks had to say. Go to <http://tinyurl.com/csv3m6f> to see more!

PD said: Three days of great music, over 40 gigs in a variety of venues, some of the Finest examples of Blues Music talent around, the chance to see seasoned pros and up-and-coming talent, a great atmosphere, one of the (if not THE) friendliest festivals around, meeting friends old and new, looking forward to the next one. All this for the purchase of a £10 wristband. Hell even buying one for each wrist would be insanely good value!!!!!!

DK said: Don't know why they call it The Blues, cheered me up no end. Great time, great bands. Well done to all concerned. Here's looking forward to March

AG said: This is only my 5th festival and I organise my work time off around them. I'm absolutely sold on them and cannot imagine not having them. They are part of my life. I'm a certifiable Swanage festival freak! I've introduced friends who equally love it. And what better place? Full of old familiar faces and the only strangers are just friends you haven't yet met. Keep it up!!

Robin Bibi said: Another Swanage Blues Festival over...a fantastic weekend of music and good vibes..Great gigs for us starting the weekend at the Bar 1.... and Saturday nights gig at the White Horse for us was indeed special...Big thanks to all who contributed in any way and especially to the MAIN MAN Steve Darrington....hoping the wristbands were a success...the vibes we were getting were positive, so lets all keep our fingers crossed...and say thanks again to Mr Darrington!!

EG said: Just to say I and a group of friends (from Bedfordshire) have been coming for several years now and how much we enjoy the Festival. Only problem is too much music, so many bands, so many venues and the impossibility of being at so many places at the same time. Decide who you want to see, pass a pub n think that sounds good, or can't tear yourself away from one particular band, and the whole plan goes out of the window so you miss several of the gigs Perhaps the Festival should be 5 days instead of a weekend? Wonder if it is worth having wristbands of different colours sold on different days so that those who feel very enthusiastic can buy one of each colour, as, when all's said and done if, like us ,you manage to listen to 8 hours of music (give or take a bit) each day £10 is not very much to pay for the whole weekend's entertainment! I asked about having collection boxes for those people who can just turn up to one gig or so but would like to put in some money but was told the security of the collection box in a busy pub is a concern, but surely there must be some way that people who would still like to contribute (even if they have bought a wristband) can just donate a few extra pounds?

Hannah Robinson from Paint It Blue said: Firstly, a BIG thank you to everyone who was at Swanage Blues Festival last weekend - what an amazing time! All three gigs were brilliant fun and we were thrilled by such a positive response. Of course, huge thanks to Steve Darrington for organising another brilliant festival and having us there. Thanks to all those who bought wristbands and programmes to support the festival. Steve has announced that there WILL be another festival in March 2013, which is fantastic news! Keep an eye on our Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/paintitblueuk> for photos