



Mud's thicker than water: (l-r) Ian Siegal, Cody Dickinson, Luther Dickinson, Alvin Youngblood Hart.

# BLOOD BROTHERS

**British bluesman Ian Siegal has recruited three of Mississippi's finest. They're loud, proud and mind-blowing live... Meet The Mudbloods!**

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**W**hen Ian Siegal & The Mississippi Mudbloods stomp onstage at Islington's O2 Academy 2 a couple of hours after our interview, it takes just a single revved up rootsy run-through to transform the crowd's traditionally English polite applause into hollers, cheers and outright adoration. And who can blame them?

On paper, the prospect of one of Britain's greatest roots-fuelled singer-songwriters locking horns with bandmates of this calibre is positively mouth-watering. In reality, it's a stroke of genius.

For the readers of this mag, the Mudbloods should need no introduction. Alvin Youngblood Hart – who's sharing bass duties with Luther Dickinson on this jaunt – is a Grammy-award winning solo artist in his own right, and a suitably killer guitarist. Luther and Cody Dickinson (on slide guitar/bass and drums respectively) not only share a few genes, they also share a top notch band – the North Mississippi Allstars – and collectively run the Zebra Ranch studio in Coldwater, Mississippi. You might also recognise Luther from his time as lead guitarist in The Black Crowes. They've an album, *Candy Store Kid*, coming out later this autumn. It's pretty damned good.

**How do you guys sum up the Mudbloods' sound?**

**Luther Dickinson (LD):** "Soulful blues rock!"  
**Ian Siegal (IS):** "That's really hard... I guess it's kind of a mix of hill country and southern rock, but then there's elements of soul, there's elements of funk, it's a very eclectic mix of styles. There's elements of everything I can possibly think of, to be honest, and I'm not just trying to sit on the fence. There's really every form of American roots music."  
**LD:** "It's very Southern... And [Ian] just fits in, writing these songs. It's weird!"  
**IS:** "I'm from the deep south of England, so maybe that's why it works..."

**You've now played your first batch of European gigs. Describe the dynamics of the band onstage.**

**Cody Dickinson (CD):** "Volatile!"  
**Alvin Youngblood Hart (AYH):** "Fragile!"  
**IS:** "Fragile... Fractious! Each of us has a lot of experience of standing up front, like with the [North Mississippi] Allstars, Cody often takes the stage alone... So you've got people who are capable of doing that whereas often there's just one or maybe two people in the band that can. I think there's a lot of energy coming from that kind of thing, but not with an ego or anything, just an attitude..."  
**AYH:** "I'm the one with the ego!"  
**IS:** "Well, I wasn't going to say! But I think the key word is energy really. There's a lot of positive energy onstage and we're knitting together very well in that kind of Stones-y tradition, which I love – the Keith'n'Ronnie tradition of interweaving guitars, and everyone just moulding together to make one good noise rather than fighting against each other or someone trying to dominate..."  
**LD:** "We're all sympathetic to each other, so it's really fun..."  
**AYH:** "Yeah, there's that and there's the fact that it just feels like Ian has been around playing with us forever, man... we've got a lot of common ground. It's not like every guitar player can come to Mississippi and make a record and have it work like Ian's records have."

**What kind of a role does improvisation play during the gigs?**  
**IS:** "Well, we didn't really rehearse, so it is kind of one long jam. I mean, we're doing a lot of the material that we recorded, so there is some structure because we know the songs. But often things will take a different turn or we'll switch things around a bit. There's telepathic communication going on..."

**LD:** "That's right. We're following his lead but every song does have a middle eight, a bridge. You've just got to stay on your toes and watch [Ian] because he'll sort it out as he feels. It's really fun, but you have to pay attention. We're not, like, going through the motions with our eyes closed..."  
**IS:** "And it's not like we're playing kind of 12 bar blues shuffles..."  
**AYH:** "Phew!"  
**IS:** "Yeah, phew!"

**So how did this Mississippi Mudbloods line up actually come together?**

**IS:** "Well, Cody and I had done a record together before of course [Siegal's sixth album *The Skinny*, 2011, also recorded at Zebra Ranch], and unfortunately Luther wasn't available at the time, but Alvin came down and did a couple of things in the studio, which was very sort of off the cuff and unplanned... Then Cody and I and some other guys did a big show at the Belgium Rhythm & Blues Festival last year, and Luther happened to be there at the same show with The Black Crowes, so that was an opportunity to get him onstage. That really planted the seed for this recording that we've just done. Having Luther there at that show made us go 'We've got to do it again!' And then the idea of getting Alvin back in more of a bigger role came up, and it all just fell together..."  
**AYH:** "Get me Hart now! Get me Hart!"  
**IS:** "Everyone here is so busy with so many different projects, so it was a miracle really to get everyone. Alvin was only really there for two days but he can do a hell of a lot in two days. We did the whole recording in four or five."

**How did you approach the recording of your album together, *Candy Store Kid*?**

**LD:** "We did it really fast and loose, but Cody was producing it and he knew exactly what he wanted, so we would throw things on the canvas but he would be, 'No, no, no, no!'"  
**AYH:** "Yeah, it was great. There was no structure, yet there was structure, you know?"  
**IS:** "Yeah, Cody did a lot of mental and physical preparation for the recording before we came in, so he had quite a clear idea of the direction to take, so that was great..."

**And what was your particular vision for the production, Cody?**

**CD:** "Well, let's see... It's easy to make a record with these guys... But I would say that the actual process of recording is sort of the fun part, and that's where the real artistry comes in, but the preparation leading up to that is intense. I want to make sure that everyone has an enjoyable, meaningful experience, and of course the end product is good, but personally my approach to music is very song-oriented. I absolutely produce for the song... It just comes down to the music and what resonates with me from the heart."  
**LD:** "It was a sculpture. Like, we put all these guitars on, but Cody knew what he wanted and one guitar may only come once or twice in a song. It's a really spacious record..."  
**IS:** "And sometimes the guitars were removed entirely, totally taken out..."  
**CD:** "That's like a one sentence concept that honestly dictated the sound of a huge part of the record: leave space for the vocals by removing the guitar in the first verse. I would just start from there. When the guitar comes back in – bang, it means something! Nine times out of ten, the song is written on the guitar anyway so you basically take out the catalyst of the whole song and then, when it comes back in, it's like 'Ooh, it makes sense!' as opposed to just beating you over the head the whole time. It's subtlety in a way, you know."

## IAN SIEGAL AND THE MISSISSIPPI MUDBLOODS

### MISSISSIPPI YEARNING

#### Ian Siegal and The Mississippi Mudbloods reflect on the current state of the blues, in the land where the genre began...

**IS:** "I was so sad when Cody and I drove down to Holly Springs and he showed me the place where Junior Kimbrough's juke joint used to be [the legendary musical hub burned down in 2000, two years after Junior's death]. You have to kind of look through some hedges and some undergrowth to find where it was. There's nothing to mark it. There's not even a sign up to say where it was."  
**CD:** "Yeah, there's just a slab of concrete."  
**IS:** "There's not even a plaque and that's a historical musical place. I was very, very saddened."  
**LD:** "The '90s were amazing and overwhelming! We'd go to Junior's and hang out with RL [Burnside] and go to Big Mama Burnside's birthday party and Otis Turner's picnic. It was unreal, life-changing, crazy, amazing – electrified country blues, modern day... But now it's just left up to us, and Gary Burnside, Duwayne Burnside and a few other people."  
**IS:** "From what I'm told, blues only gets highlighted in May at the Blues Awards in Memphis. The rest of the time, blues isn't really that relevant anymore. You've got Beale Street, which is a tourist trap, and not much else from what I can tell."  
**LD:** "If you want to check out Mississippi blues, come to the North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic, which happens the last weekend of June. That is when everybody comes together and does their thing."  
**CD:** "Maybe we could take this band there next year? That would make up for the fact that we weren't there this year, and we'd all get to play – that would make a lot of sense, wouldn't it?"  
**IS:** "Yeah, you could do the Allstars, we could do the four of us, Alvin could play solo, I could play solo..."  
**CD:** "We could do a whole day!"  
**AYH:** "We could just bogart the whole festival!"

## IAN SIEGAL AND THE MISSISSIPPI MUDBLOODS



Going up? The Mississippi Mudbloods get elevated.

### Memphis is like a bomb dropped, a bomb called the Bush economy.

**What are your favourite memories of cutting the album? Any unforgettable moments? Any glorious flashes of inspiration that occurred in the recording studio?**  
**LD:** "The song *Kingfish* is a fun collaboration. Ian joined us in Texas so we did a handful of shows, and then we flew home and started making the record. We were just telling stories on the flight back, and we started talking about Duwayne Burnside [guitarist and son of late, lamented blues legend RL Burnside]. He caught this big fish in my pond, this huge monster, and I was like, 'Fuck, Duwayne! Throw it back man, damn, you stole my kingfish!' So we were just telling this story and it just turned into this funny song... And we all collaborated on writing that."  
**IS:** "Yeah, that's a great song, a very strong song!"  
**LD:** "It's cool watching Ian write too because he'd have like a lyrical idea and a concept and then he'd keep pushing forward and pushing it and pushing it. I like the balls that he has to go into a recording studio with half-formed songs knowing that he can come up with it all..."  
**AYH:** "Whenever I do that, I come out with some half-formed shit!"  
**LD:** "Exactly, it takes me years!"  
**CD:** "Well, that's that embryo state, and that's when it's exciting!"  
**IS:** "That's the only way I can do it..."

**How far do you have different musical tastes and how does that feed into the mix?**  
**LD:** "Well, Cody keeps up with current music. He hits me with all kinds of stuff, like pop songs or Skrillex. Cody keeps me abreast..."  
**CD:** "I'm not nostalgic. I listen to new music..."  
**LD:** "Alvin is always sending me obscure rock'n'roll from the 70s!"  
**AYH:** "I haven't heard a record since 1972! I never progressed!"  
**LD:** "But, yeah, we're very different. I'm really old-fashioned, Cody's super modern and Alvin's right inbetween."

**Is this line-up going to continue far into the future?**  
**LD:** "Alvin already quit!"  
**AYH:** "I left two weeks ago!"  
**CD:** "He's actually not here. This is a hologram!"  
**IS:** "I've got to try and replace him for a tour somehow which is a daunting task. We've got a bunch of dates booked in November in the UK, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Poland and France."  
**AYH:** "It's so much fun, man, but I can't do it..."  
**IS:** "It sucks that you're not coming..."  
**AYH:** "Yeah, I can't make that trip. I really want to do it but I can't."  
**IS:** "But the honest answer is that we just don't know. I would do every gig for the rest of my career with this band. It'd be great."  
**LD:** "Yeah, it's like we're The Travelling Wilburys, man!"  
**IS:** "Like I said before, everyone is so busy with different things, especially these three... So, in the future, I guess we'll just hopefully work out periods when everyone's available."  
**CD:** "There's a chemistry that happens with us that's undeniable and it's very, very hard to come by. When you start replacing people and start shuffling stuff around, you still have something but it's not that initial kind of spark."

**Ian, when you first went to visit Mississippi, how did the experience affect you?**  
**IS:** "It *did* affect me, inevitably... Even just down to the heat of the place... But I think, because I had an album to do, I purposefully didn't let myself think about it too much. I just kind of kept my head down and focused on what I was doing. I think I could've been overwhelmed or intimidated at that time but, with hindsight, I think that's how I probably behaved."  
**LD:** "But being in Mississippi sucks! As far as being an environment to go to... it's really hard to find anything of the real old Mississippi – you've got to go look for it! I mean our studio's really great, but the town that we grew up in has just turned into suburbia. It's just like every other town in America. Mississippi is rough, man, and Memphis is rough. It's a rough city and it's in decay. I love it, don't get me wrong, but you're not going to be bowled over by the culture!"  
**CD:** "Man, there's parts of Memphis that look like a fucking bomb dropped – it's unbelievable! It's like a bomb dropped and left nothing but liquor stores and bail bondsmen and fucking car retail loan places!"  
**AYH:** "Yeah, a bomb dropped and it's called the Bush economy..."  
**IS:** "If I'd been there 20 years earlier, when hill country music was at its height with the likes of RL [Burnside], and Junior Kimbrough when his juke joint was running, then maybe I would've been intimidated by that scene and by being there. I think it probably would've bowled me over a little bit."

**What does the blues mean to you?**  
**LD:** "Great music from the 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s."  
**CD:** "What does the blues mean to me? Oh god... It means when the lights go out, hold your wallet!"  
**IS:** "Ah shit! How do I follow that?"  
**AYH:** "I love the blues, man but I've never claimed to do anything but play rock'n'roll. I'm not a blues musician."  
**IS:** "Yeah, I go with that. I get called a blues musician but I've never considered myself part of the blues scene. I play American roots music, even though I'm English, and I've always had influence from all parts of it. I've never been into British blues, that's for sure. I was never into Clapton or the Bluesbreakers or Cream or any of that stuff, ever, and I'm still not. The blues is a very essential and important part of my musical education and history and it's always in everything I do, but I'm open to the whole history of 20th-century American music and, before that, music from the 19th century, too."

*Candy Store Kid* will be released via Ntogene Records on October 15. Check out [www.iansiegel.com](http://www.iansiegel.com) for upcoming tour dates.