

### **BURR INTERVIEW PART THREE**

0:00:00 Blackmon: So, the last thing I wanted to talk about is your performing career and some of the groups that you've been known to play in, and that would be the Ringo Starr's All-Starr Band, Carole King's Band, and Blue Sky Riders, and I'll just let you speak to each one in the order that you were in those bands and talk about them.

0:00:29 Burr: Okay. One of the best things I ever got to do back when I was writing for Universal was go to the writer retreats in France. Did you ever go to one of those?

0:00:44 Blackmon: I did not. (??) [0:00:45]

0:00:47 Burr: No, no, Miles Copeland is a manager. He discovered R.E.M. and he managed The Police and then he managed Sting.

0:00:59 Blackmon: Right.

0:01:00 Burr: And, like we all do when we have disposable income, he bought a castle in France. So, to write off the castle in France, he would rent it out sort of like a giant [air]bnb with a moat. But what he decided to do, he had a publishing company, so he started to have songwriting retreats where he'd get all these people, all these writers, all the publishing companies would send people for two two-week periods. He would put — you'd get put together in three-ways and it was always an artist, an established writer, and a writer that he had in his publishing company, a newbie. So he always ended up getting a third of everything. What was cool was, out of those camps, I became friends with so many amazing people, that was where I met Carole King, that was where I met Mark Hudson, Paul Brady from Ireland, Jack Blades from Night Ranger. The Hansons, The Go-Gos, The Bangles, Olivia Newton-John. Ted Nugent. They were all at these songwriting camps, and you know, we were writing with somebody but then for the rest of the day, you're sitting outside in the sunshine drinking unlimited wine and talking and shooting the shit and playing guitars and stuff. It was an amazing experience. I was really thrilled one time when in the — probably '94, my three-way was me, Maia Sharpe, a wonderful writer and indie artist, and Carole King. And I was freaking out when I found out, and so was Maia. Then I found out so was Carole, because this was sort of her comeback from retirement, she had retired. But now she heard about this camp and said, oh, what the heck, and it rekindled her love of writing and performing, being in these camps. So me, Maia, and Carole sat in a room and we wrote a song and Carole and I — we all had a really good time. Carole and I became friends from that and wrote away from the camp after we all got back, and then she started doing political — just the opportunities that you get, you gotta say yes to any of those things. You know, I've done camps, writing camps all over the world. I've done them in Bali. I've done them in Ireland. I've done them in Cuba. I've done them in Romania. You always say yes you always go, it's always weird, the songs are always useless, but the people you meet and the friends you make are amazing. So — you still there?

0:04:24 Blackmon: Yeah, I was listening. Let me ask you when you say the songs are useless, is it just because of the nature of being thrown together in a short amount of time or you feel like it's more like — go ahead.

0:04:41 Burr: It's more like the ones at the camp weren't useless, some hits came out of that. Celine Dion's big hit "The Reason" was written at the camp by Hudson and Carole. So, you know, the camp — some of the artists might have gone back and cut some of the songs, but there's not a huge amount of evidence for that happening. The ones in other companies, it was way too much cultural differences to ever have the songs be viable, but that's not what we were there for. We were there more for the exchange of ideas and the camaraderie and to see how somebody that is from Japan writes a song.

0:05:33 Blackmon: Yeah.

0:05:35 Burr: And you know, when we did it in Cuba, we literally were not allowed to bring home any copies of anything we wrote. We couldn't record them, we couldn't take them home with us, we had to leave them behind because the government did not want us taking the song with us, exploiting it, and us trying to send the money back to Cuba because that was against their communist economic system. So, you know, I have no idea what I wrote while I was over there, nobody does.

0:06:15 Blackmon: Weird. So you met Carole King and when you got back to the states, you started co-writing with her? Just you and her?

0:06:24 Burr: Right. And this was during a political cycle so Carole started to do — like I said, she had sort of retired, but she started to do these fundraisers where she would go and play on a piano in somebody's living room with her musical director, a great guitar player named Rudy Guess. So the two of them would play and it was like playing in a living room — it was playing in somebody's living room. So her manager asked her, after a few of those, we should take this on tour. Carole said great, we'll actually call it the Living Room Tour, and we'll set it up so it's just like me playing in a living room except in Radio City. But we'll set it up like a living room with a lamp and a couch and it'll be my living room, and that'll make me feel comfortable. And then she said, but we need one other person so that every once in a while, we had three guitars and three-part harmony. I don't know if this is true or not, but I have been told that she said, so I'll do it as long as we can get Gary Burr on board because he's the guy I want to do it with. So they called up, they asked me to do it, it was touring all over the country and then it was — I did it for years, and then we toured Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and you know, it was the amazing first experience of the big time. And she was so generous because in the middle of the show, she would let me play two of my songs. She learned them, and she accompanied me and sang harmonies on my songs.

0:08:27 Blackmon: Did you play the hits? For your two songs?

0:08:29 Burr: I played “Love’s Been” which she loved playing, she played it on guitar, and I played “What Mattered Most” which she loved. And then at another point in the show, we did a duet that she and I wrote called “Loving You Forever” that she recorded on one of her albums. So, you know, I had three spots in the show plus at the end of the night, when she did “You’ve Got a Friend,” she let me sing James Taylor’s second verse.

0:08:58 Blackmon: Oh, great. What was the timeframe that this all went down, these tours?

0:09:05 Burr: Probably ’95, ’96, ’97, ’98, all the way, maybe to 2000.

0:09:13 Blackmon: And I’m assuming it wouldn’t have been a heavy, heavy touring schedule because of the kind of venues and it being Carole King where you were still able to write a lot and get back to Nashville or that kind of thing?

0:09:23 Burr: Yeah, they would call me and say, were going out for six weeks, were gonna go to Australia, and here’s how much, here’s what we need, you know, clear the decks. It was like that, we’d go out, we’d leave, and we’d go out for six solid weeks. It wasn’t sort of calling me and saying we got a gig in two weeks, it was it’s a two-month swing, it was eighteen days in Japan for this amount of money, and then you’d come back and go back to your regular life and put all the memorabilia away in a drawer, and wait to see Bob DiPiero walk in your office the next day.

0:10:15 Blackmon: And did — when you’re touring with Carole King, is that fly dates, or are you on a bus too, what’s that look like?

0:10:25 Burr: A combination. If the routing makes it to where we could have a bus, we would have a really — she likes a bus. She doesn’t like to be in the big room in the back that the star has, she likes to be in one of those little bunks, because she’s used to a tiny little apartment in New York City which she’s owned since she was about twenty years old and still has. So, she liked being on a bus in a bunk and it would be so fun. Every show would end and we’d climb in the bus and there’d be pizzas waiting for us from the promoter, and we’d drive off to the next thing, sitting up talking, watching bad TV, and then she’d go, goodnight, I’m going to bed. goodnight Carole! We’d all stay up another hour and she’d go back and climb in her little bunk and then I’d climb in mine. Occasionally, it would be, the next gig is a fourteen-hour drive but the timing isn’t right because Carole has to have an interview. So we’re all getting dropped off at the airport, we’re getting on a plane, and we’re going to fly there and the bus will meet us there. So it was a little of both especially in Australia and New Zealand since they’re so huge. It was like you were playing in Brisbane. What’s our show tomorrow? Um, it’s in Perth, and we’re gonna hop over there. What’s a hop? Well, it’s a six-hour flight. You don’t think of getting to one side of Australia to the other as taking six hours, but it does. So it was a nice combination of both things.

0:12:03 Blackmon: What kind of sized crowds were you playing to for, you know — she’s loved, really famous in the 90s, what kind of venues or sizes were you playing? You said Radio City.

0:12:19 Burr: Yeah.

0:12:22 Blackmon: That's pretty big.

0:12:28 Burr: You know, anywhere — the smallest would be a 5,000 seater, the biggest would be a 10,000 seater.

0:12:35 Blackmon: Yeah, that's great. So, besides performing, you and Carole King wrote a lot together —

0:12:44 Burr: Not a lot, but we've written a, you know, I've written more songs with her than I have Bob DiPiero,

0:12:54 Blackmon: So, because you're both established writers and because she was a hero to you and many people, can you talk a little bit about her process and her writing style say as compared to yours, or just what you picked up from Carole King?

0:13:14 Burr: Yeah! Yeah, she — up until Tapestry, she never wrote songs by herself. She never wrote lyrics. Tapestry was the first time she wrote lyrics. One of the first songs she ever wrote lyrics to was “You've Got a Friend” because her husband wrote all the lyrics. She's a great lyricist, we came from two different worlds, you know. She came from the world of writing “Take Good Care of My Baby” and I came from the world of “The Gambler.” So we kind of had to, I would make the songs have too much sense, and she would be willing to have lyrics that were basically, “and then I saw you, I loved it,” you know. It all depended on what, I think for a lot of the times, she wasn't really recording so she was kind of hoping that she could get a country cut. So we had to find the middle ground between her pop writing and my country writing. But the ballad that we wrote was tremendous and of, you know, she writes on the piano and she's got this style. She's got a certain kind of chord that when you listen, is in almost every Carole King song. We used to call it a C over K because it was one of those things where it was a 4 over a 5. Counterintuitive, but when you hear it you go, Carole King. She puts it in every song, and jokingly we used to go what is that chord? Oh, that's the C over K chord. Okay.

0:15:10 Blackmon: It's the same chord Clapton used in “Tears In Heaven” before the hook, the 4 over 5.

0:15:16 Burr: Yeah, maybe.

0:15:18 Blackmon: The — so, does she start with music and then find the words? Or does she have a little hook or lyric?

0:15:30 Burr: Nope, she never came in with everything. It was always talking, talking. I think when I was with her, I think she was kind of nervous about getting back to writing again, certainly on demand. I think up until then she was writing — even when she wrote the songs in

Tapestry with Toni Stern, it was Toni Stern handing her a lyric and then her putting music to it. “It’s Too Late”, and things like that. “Jazz Man” was here, here’s a lyric, almost a poem, what can you do with this? And I don’t like to write like that, and she was willing to basically sit there and stare, talk to each other until finally, me being the taskmaster I would go, all right, what are we gonna write about? And she was very — because she never came in with anything, she was very I don’t know, you got any ideas, got any titles, anything? And I would say, how about this for a title, I’ve got a bunch of titles in a book. What about any of these? Oh, that’s cool. Just normal, nothing magical about it. She never came in and said I’m gonna play you something, what do you think it says? I would start singing the title and she would start playing her chords and we were off to the races.

0:16:57 Blackmon: Was it — coming from Nashville and being in that scene for so long and working with a writer like Carole, when you were dealing with lyrics, was it sometimes hard to find the middle ground between the literal Nashville thing and the not so literal pop thing?

0:17:19 Burr: It’s not usually hard to do with other people, but I have found when you write with certain people who are at that higher level of fame, there’s a voice in your head going who are you to tell them?

0:17:38 Blackmon: Yeah.

0:17:39 Burr: You know, you’re supposed to just whatever they say, but see, I’ve had experience writing three ways with really famous people and the other person was like, anything the famous person said they were like that’s great, that’s great. And we ended up with a song with terrible lyrics because no matter what silliness came out of the star’s mouth, the other person was too quick to go oh, that’s great, that’s great, man, you’re so good, it’s such a thrill to hear that, I can’t believe you came up with that — and I’m sitting there going, no, that’s stupid. But now I can’t because it’s two to one. But when it’s just me and Carole, the voice in my head is going shut up, it’s Carol King, just nod your head and go that’s great. But I can’t do that, I like to drive the bus so I will say all the things I’m sure you’ve had to say with young writers when you go, you know what, that’s good, but let’s just think for a second, see if we can **beat (??) [0:18:43]** it. Let’s take a second and see if we can beat it. Maybe that’s the stepping stone to the next real lyrics. Believe me, when she was writing all those songs with Jerry, I’m sure as a married couple they were screaming back and forth. Oh, she liked to be challenged, she loved to be challenged. She loved it when I went, uh, I don’t know. Really? Okay, okay. And I love that, that’s what makes writing with those kinds of legends palatable.

0:19:25 Blackmon: Well, and people really want to serve the song, whether they’re legends or not, I mean obviously she had you in the room for a reason and it wasn’t to feed her ego, you were there to help serve the song.

0:19:43 Burr: Yeah, she already knows she’s famous, she doesn’t need me to sit there for an afternoon patting her on the back.

0:19:50 Blackmon: Does — since we're talking about songwriting, did she share anything about Brill Building, songwriting where she came up in, or stories, or anything — any memory that stuck with you?

0:20:10 Burr: Yeah, the first thing is she was not a Brill Building writer.

0:20:16 Blackmon: Wow. But she wrote — she was around there though, right?

0:20:20 Burr: No, no. She wrote they had two buildings, she was at 1680 Broadway with Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, and they were in that building. The Brill Building was more Neil Diamond and those guys. So she's always quick to correct when they go, what was it like in the Brill Building? I don't know. I wasn't in the Brill building, I was in 1680 Broadway.

0:20:48 Blackmon: Wow.

0:20:49 Burr: I know, so that is such a misperception that everyone has, that she was a Brill Building writer, and she lets it go because it's become a generic term. But sooner or later, she'll correct you and go, don't even ask me what it looked like in there because we spent all of our time in a cubicle or in a little room with a piano listening to Barry bang the piano next door. She talked about — I asked her, I ask her all the time because I really love to know those kinds of things, I asked her if she knew Doc Pomus, and she said not really, but I used to go to that hotel lobby and he would be sitting there, and he was sort of like the Pope and everybody sat around dead I used to sit and listen to a few stories, but I never really talked to him much. You know, stuff like that. What was — she was — you know, I asked her stories about how different songs, you know, got written, like when she woke up and Barry had gone to work — not Barry, Jerry — had gone to work and left a piece of paper on the kitchen counter and the note said she what you can do with this, and he had written the lyrics for “Will You Love Me Tomorrow.” And so she worked on it and when he came home from work because he was a chemist, he came home from work, she played it for him, and he said perfect. And she also said Jerry was so musical that when we get to a bridge, when I was writing the music — this is her talking — when I was writing to the music of a song and I'd get to the bridge, I'd look at his lyric and I'd go, what do you feel here? He would say things like, remember the other night we were listening to that Rachmaninoff? The concerto? Remember in the of that channel where it goes to that minor chord and she'd go yeah, yeah. That's how they talked, that's why those songs last for seventy years. 'Cause there was a basis to them that was such a high level — remember that Rachmaninoff piece? That's what I hear us doing in that bridge. My jaw was on the ground when she said stuff like that. You think of these people as barely being able to play guitars back in the 50s and 60s, you know. I think they were just banging on the top of a garbage can, singing out loud, going let's put that on the radio! But these people were highly, highly intelligent, structured writers.

0:23:43 Blackmon: And did she say, was she in high school when she first started writing?

0:23:47 Burr: Yes. Junior high school, fourteen.

0:23:53 Blackmon: That's incredible.

0:23:56 Burr: Not only writing but like, getting a publishing deal.

0:24:01 Blackmon: That's unbelievable.

0:24:04 Burr: You know, it's her birthday today.

0:24:06 Blackmon: I didn't know that. How cool is that?

0:24:08 Burr: Yeah, I just wrote her an email before you called. It's her 80th birthday.

0:24:16 Blackmon: What an amazing career and cool that she's lived in that apartment for all these years, a real New Yorker, huh? She stuck with it.

0:24:23 Burr: Well, to be honest, she goes there when, on the rare times that she goes to New York, she just wants to hand on to it for her family, but she actually lives in Utah.

0:24:40 Blackmon: Okay, interesting. So can we talk about Ringo Starr and his All-Starr band now?

0:24:49 Burr: Okay, we can, but I don't have much today about it because I was not in the all-Starr band.

0:24:55 Blackmon: But you were, you were a guest for several years, I guess performer and singer?

0:25:00 Burr: Well, let me explain. So, at one of the castle retreats I meet Mark Hudson, one of the Hudson Brothers from back in the 70s, they had a TV show. And he's funny, he and I get along, and we become best friends by hanging out at the castle. We start writing together once in a while, and he — Ringo has been out of the business because he was, you know, a little distracted by drugs and alcohol for a bunch of years. So he's all cleaned up, looking around going I want to get back in the business, I want to write an album. His lawyer is Mark Hudson's lawyer, so he sets the two of them up and they write an album together called Vertical Man. And one day my phone rings, and it's Mark. I come home and I get a message, and the message is we just finished an album and go and promote it and do all the TV shows and play some live shows. We're putting a band together and I want to know if you want to be in the band. So, I say yes, and I'm talking to Hudson and he basically says it's — we're gonna go to London, we're going to rehearse in London, we're gonna do a show in London, we're gonna shoot a video in London, then we're gonna fly to America and we're gonna do VH1 Storytellers and play a show at the Bottom Line. I said, well, that sounds great. And he said — I don't remember how much it was,

to pay me for all that, but I'm just gonna make up a number — and he said it's gonna be 3,000 dollars. And I said great, will Ringo take a check? Because I would pay Ringo 3,000 dollars to play with him, so fine, will he take a check? And we had a good laugh about that. So I said yes, I flew over to London, I find out that the band is Simon Kirke from Bad Company on drums, Jack Blades on bass — my buddy from the castle — Joe Walsh on guitar, unbelievable session guy in LA named Jim Cox playing piano, Hudson and me on electric, acoustic, and mandolin. And Ringo. So the first three days we're rehearsing but no Ringo, we're just — we want him to walk in, Hudson is the music director, and he wants Ringo to walk in and have us be ready to play all the songs perfectly. And so, I'm in the back of the room because I'm restringing my mandolin, and Hudson and I are talking, I'm yelling across the room because I'm on the stage. And all of a sudden, this — somebody, I'm talking to Hudson, but somebody walks in and stands in front of me, right between me and him. And I'm thinking to myself, this asshole, can't you read the room? I'm having a conversation here right in front of me. And all of a sudden this woman comes up next to him and her ass is really nice. And I'm going, that's a great ass, that woman looks like Barbara Bach, that would mean that the asshole is Ringo. I'm so glad I didn't yell, hey, would you move, asshole, like I was planning on doing. So he's there, we go up on stage, we're rehearsing the first song, about halfway through we stop the sing and Mark says to me, Gary, what are you singing in the bridge? I say, well, the first two lines I'm the third above, and that title line I sing in unison with Ringo. And Ringo walks up to the mic and looks at me and goes, I've known him five minutes, but I'm suddenly Ringo. And I said to myself, I am so fucking fired right now. It, you know, Hudson assured me he — the more he likes you, the more shit he gives you, so I said I don't want him to like me too much or I'm gonna shit my pants. So let him just have a healthy disdain for me, because I can't take having him say that kind of shit to me. But we became friends, we had a great time, we did all those things, we did all that stuff, and when he said I want to write another album, Hudson called me and I was in that from the beginning. We flew over to England where his estate was and he had a studio, and we would go there, we would write a song all day, he would go and have dinner with Barbara, we would go into the city — the little village and have dinner and then after dinner, we'd come back, he'd come back, sit behind the drums, and we'd record the song. So every day was right at (??) [0:30:46] we'd record it, next day, what do you want to do? And he'd walk in and go, I was on the treadmill, I decided today I want to write a reggae song and I've got a title. And we would take it from there. From that point on, every time the album was done — when we played the show at the Bottom Line, we were standing off stage and the MC came, the guy that owns the Bottom Line, said I'm gonna introduce you, so I'm just gonna say, ladies and gentlemen, Ringo Starr! And he goes no, no, no, it's Ringo and the Roundheads. And we all looked at each other and go, we're the Roundheads? What the hell are the Roundheads? And Ringo gave us some bullshit like it was a political party, but to this day, we think it's an old English expression for a penis. But, we don't know. But from that second on, we were the Roundheads. Then the next album we did — and then as soon as the album was done, we'd do The Tonight Show and The Letterman Show, and a couple of concerts at a cool club in LA and a cool club in New York, and promote it for a certain number of weeks, and then he'd go off until he called and said we're gonna write a new album, and then I'd fly over to London and we'd do the same drill, write a whole other album.



0:32:12 Blackmon: And what's the process with Ringo Starr writing songs? Do you start with the groove, title, melody? When I say groove, drum groove?

0:32:26 Burr: No, no. He would walk in and he would say, I was at a meeting the other day and this guy said I was so sad, I was crying so much, I was tripping over my own tears. And I said to myself, that would be great in a song. And I just went, okay, and I would, just like in Nashville, try to figure out how tripping on my tears would be. And it was me, Hudson, Ringo, and a great guitar player named Steve Dudas. And we would pick up — on any given day, I could be playing electric, I could be playing acoustic, I could be playing mandolin, I could be playing bass. I played bass on a lot of the songs on Ringo's albums. And just, whatever it kind of felt like — I usually got something going, cause like I wanted to be in charge of the melody because I thought he deserved a great melody within his limitations. So I always tried to get something going as far as a fell, and there were a lot of times, probably two or three songs per album, I would go over and get something started and they'd walk in and I'd say, hey guys, is this anything? And I'd play it, and Ringo would always go, that's great, let's finish that. That'll be our song for the day. So about two or three songs per album were me starting a song with a title and then them jumping in. But a lot of it was him going in with a little scrap of paper going, I was on the treadmill and today I decided I want to write a song called — I can't think of the name, it was the name of a, it was the name of a Spanish dance. And then another time he would go I want to write a song in honor of Henry Nilsson, one of his best friends. So I want to write it, I want it to be like a Rootie Tootie (*singing*) like that kind of a song. So we just dove in, you know. With Ringo, it really was a problem, I mean not a problem, but what was great about him was he's not a great lyricist, he knows what he wants to say, but he'll say a line — and this was the way it always worked — he'd say, how about blah blah blah? And I would go, no. And I'd have to be careful that the other two guys, I'd have to speak up quick because those other two guys were those kind of guys, like that's great, that's great. I had to quickly go no, that's not great. And Ringo's attitude was, he always looked at me and said, you're the writer, I'm just throwing out ideas, take one word out of what I said, I don't care, you're the writer, I'm just throwing you ideas to have you turn it into a song. So it was, it was a really fun process, and he was really, really agreeable. He just wanted the song to suit him.

0:35:54 Blackmon: And what — and that would be probably he wasn't a rangy singer, he's known as a likable singer, but maybe not a McCartney or Lennon — but besides working with that, what was your focus? Was there any kind of thought about making things at any time be less? Or were you guys just kind of going for it or?

0:36:21 Burr: That was the problem, that Hudson was the producer, and he liked to produce in a very Beatles-like manner. And every chance he and Ringo had, they would pit references to other Beatles songs in our songs, and I never really was into that, I always thought it was a little obvious. There, you know, he told us, he goes there was a time where putting — making the songs sound Beatle-y made me uncomfortable, but there's really only two people in the world that can get away with it and that's me and Paul, so he let Hudson be as Beatles as he wants. So background harmonies if Hudson says hey, here, let's go get (*singing*) or something like that.

Some Beatle-y background harmony, it oozed and ozed, you know. It was cool, we were writing all of those seven whatever albums that Hudson and I did, they're the most Beatle-y stuff he's ever done.

0:37:50 Blackmon: Yeah, 'cause a lot of his famous hits weren't Beatle-y from the 70s and he had some pretty big hits. What about — what did you learn from working with Ringo?

0:38:05 Burr: Well, I learned that work ethic that they had, and you see it if you see that documentary on Apple TV. We could do seven takes of a song, and you know what it's like in Nashville here, usually the second take is the one. The first one, somebody goes I figured out what to do by the end of the song, so let's take it from the top. But we'd be doing it seven, eight, nine times, come out listen to it, and Hudson would go hate to say it guys, but I think one more and we'll get it. Ringo would just go, okay! And he just walked out and played it over and over as long as it takes because it's still less than the seventy times they cut "Maxwell's Silver Hammer". He just, he was patient, he was very giving, he always said, I said it before, there's no mistakes. If one of us makes a mistake, before we just go oh, let's stop the song, we might go into the control room and say that's cool, let's build on that, that was an accident. But it's a happy accident. Not all accidents have to make someone stop the tape and go hold on, I put the cymbal in the wrong place, you know. It was really exciting, it was just a little drop of insights from back in The Beatles days where he would say this reminds me of when we recorded blah blah blah. Or he'd go, like in — we'd get to the end of a song, and we're playing the outro, and Hudson would say, oh, let's go double time in the outro instead of (*singing*). When we get to the outro, let's go (*singing*). It'll be like the end of Ticket to Ride, you know, how it goes double time? Everybody knows that. Everybody goes, I didn't play double time at the end of Ticket to Ride. Sure you did! Listen to the record, I'm playing the same beat, it's the tambourine that goes into double time and it makes you think that the whole song goes double time. I'm playing my regular beat. Ever since then, when you listen to the end of Ticket to Ride, he doesn't go double time, the tambourine does. So every song was like a little, you know, you're like next to him, waiting to hear if he'll say something like that. We walked out of one of the first sessions and he looked at me and went, you have good time. John had good time.

0:41:00 Blackmon: Wow.

0:41:00 Burr: So for the rest of my life, I can say I'm as good as a guitar player as John Lennon.

0:41:07 Blackmon: (*laughing*) Well, in working with Ringo and being around in tour and in public — I'm assuming that he's probably the most famous person you've worked with, I mean he's a Beatle — what —

0:41:20 Burr: Yeah, he's more famous than the Pope.

0:41:21 Blackmon: Yeah. What — was there weirdness or challenges with being around somebody like that in public because I'm assuming people bothered him or lost their mind, was that an odd experience?

0:41:40 Burr: Well, it was really interesting to see how he handles it after all these years. Which is, sometimes he can't be nice. If he lets — if somebody says I'm an old friend, I really want to come in the dressing room and say hi, nice they get in there, they're hanging backstage with Ringo. You're gonna take a pry bar to get them out of there. So I have seen Ringo many times in the dressing room going, alright, that's it, get out. And I don't care if they're like childhood friends, they go okay, and they have to leave. I remember we were rehearsing in LA and in the next room was Jimmy Web and Glenn Campbell and they were rehearsing because they were gonna do a tour together. They were filming for a TV show and they asked if Ringo would step in and just talk about the first time he met Jimmy Webb and Glenn Campbell, you know, he goes, what do you need? I don't know, what are you willing to give me? He says I'll let you ask three questions. So he goes next door and naturally Hudson and I walk with him. We go there and we're watching and they mic him up and they sit down and they ask Ringo what's the first time you were conscious of Jimmy Webb? And then, how about Glenn Campbell? Did you blah blah blah? Then a third question, then the guy asks a fourth question and Ringo stood up, took the mic, and goes I said three. And he walked out in front of Jimmy Webb and Glenn Campbell, he said I said three.

0:43:18 Blackmon: Wow.

0:43:19 Burr: And he walked out because he's got his own work to do and he knows they'll keep him there all day because they're talking to a Beatle. I always loved walking down the street with him if we went shopping or something because you would see people's faces. They'd look up and they'd see him, and then they'd look down because they're not expecting — he's like a Smurf, they're not expecting to see him — but then all of a sudden, you'd see their head come back up and look at him again and then Ringo would pass them and I would turn around and look at them and they'd be turning around and giggling and hitting each other. It was always so cute.

0:43:55 Blackmon: Does a guy like that feel safe? Is that an issue? I know we're getting off songwriting a little bit, but I think it's interesting to, not a lot of people have your insight.

0:44:08 Burr: Yeah, I never experienced — I mean I've gone into shopping malls with him, I've gone into Barney's and I don't see any giant change in his lifestyle after John's death, but then I don't see it with Paul either. I think they've just kind of reconciled to we gotta live our lives. Just like I said, he's gonna do what he wants to do, so you're not going to stop him. His attitude is when he has to get from here to there, go as quickly as you can, and don't let anybody go hey, can I talk to you for a second? Because you are going to be buried, so you just keep walking.

0:45:01 Blackmon: What about —

0:45:02 Burr: You know, I was always really careful because I didn't want him — I saw him in a dressing room once and one of our group came in with about eight things and said would you sign these? And Ringo looked at him and went ugh, I didn't think you'd be one of them. I just, that registered, and I said I never want to be that. So I remember we were in his studio and Clapton came over to play guitar on a song that I helped write. And when Clapton was done, everybody sort of jumped at him, sign this, take a picture of this, and I just went back into the corner and Ringo yelled to Clapton, "run Eric, it's the Americans!" I just didn't want to be that, so I sat in the corner until it all calmed down, and then Ringo said Gary, you want a picture with Eric? So I said okay, so I got a nice picture with Eric, but I wasn't one of them. It was almost like I made them ask me. You know, not saying that I deserve it, I didn't want to be that, it's okay. I was there, I have the experience in my head. I don't need to annoy anybody and I think, you know, hopefully, they're aware of that kind of a thing.

0:46:32 Blackmon: The guys like that, and we're talking about a really high level of fame, and then I'll get back to music, but is it hard for them to have friends? Is it hard to be their friend?

0:46:53 Burr: I think it depends on how you act with them. I try to act really normal when I'm around Ringo so I think he considers me a work friend, you know. I mean Georgia and I are going out to LA in a couple of weeks and we're going to go over to his house and have tea. I'm that kind of friend where, next time you come over to LA, call me and come over so we can catch up. I'm that kind of friend and mainly because I'm careful she we're together to not be one of them. I don't hand him things before I leave and say would you sign this or that. My grandson is learning drums now, I'd love to get him something from Ringo, as a drummer 'cause he doesn't know who the hell Ringo is, but — I don't know if it's hard for them to find new friends, but when your eighty-something years old, you got so many old friends it's like — when he likes people, he likes to keep them around, but if you do one thing wrong, you're flicked to the corn field.

0:48:17 Blackmon: Yeah. So talking about playing with him and recording and writing, besides Mark Hudson, were there any other musicians or writers that influenced you or became a bug part of your life through that experience?

0:48:35 Burr: Through the Ringo connection?

0:48:36 Blackmon: Mhm. Or memories of playing with anybody when you were a guest on the All-Starr Band.

0:48:48 Burr: Well that was a really cool thing. I started having an unlimited pass now, that whenever he's playing, if I'm at the show, I get up and I sing A Little Help From My Friends with him. The last time he was here I was in the wings with Emmylou Harris and we were putting harmonies on the Buck Owens song that he sings.

0:49:18 Blackmon: Act Naturally.

0:49:20 Burr: Act Naturally. He was singing that and she and I were standing behind the curtain singing harmonies and then we went out to sing A Little Help From My Friends. But I've done that in all kinds of combinations, you know. I've gotten to get up on stage and share a mic with Little Stevens, you know — I was backstage and there was a guy there next to me in Radio City and he stuck his hand out and said how you doing, I'm Gary. I said, hey, I'm Gary too. And then I realized it was Gary Brooker from Procol Harum. It was like one of my favorite early bands, and it was like holy shit, I'm gonna be on a mic with Gary — I can't remember if it's Booker or Brooker. One of my heroes, I gotta look that up. But anyways, things like that were just, it's a great thrill. I went to that Radio City show with Carole and Joe Scarborough. How's that for a combination, Carole King on one side and Joe Scarborough on the other in the audience.

0:50:46 Blackmon: Weird. So, another band I want to talk about and want to hear about is, later on, you formed Blue Sky Riders with your wife, or soon-to-be wife, Georgia Middleman and Kenny Loggins. Can you talk about how that all happened and the band and what all you did?

0:51:14 Burr: Absolutely. One of the cool things about Nashville during the 90s and the early 2000s was that it was the songwriting Mecca. Everyone wanted to come and sip at the soda fountain of Nashville's talent. So every pop star out there eventually made his way to Nashville to see what it was like and to sample it, see what the buzz was. So I used to write a lot with Chely Wright, great country artist, and singer. She became friends with Richard Marx, and Richard Marx said I want to come to Nashville, she said you gotta write with my friend Gary Burr, so Richard Marx came to town and we started writing. Between coming to Nashville and going to Chicago, he and I wrote a lot of songs. He's buddies with Loggins. Loggins is coming to LA, Marx says here's a list of guys you should write with when you go to Nashville, and I was on the list. So I get a call from Richard hooking me up with Kenny. Kenny shows up, he comes to my house, nice guy, says look, I'm going through a divorce, this is kind of like my divorce record, every song that I've written has just been sad and depressing and awful and I really, really need to write something that's not sad and depressing and awful. Okay, well what do you got in mind? And he played me this song that he started that was just depressing and sad and awful and we finished it and it's brilliant, and he kind of goes I'm sorry, I know, but that's the last one, I promise. And then he came over the next day and we wrote a couple of songs over the next few days that were very uplifting, up-tempo, oh yeah, screw you, I'm gonna go out tonight and have fun. So he ended up getting what he needed from me and we had a great — even the depressing song, we had a blast all day laughing our asses off. We have a very similar sense of humor, we had a great time and wrote really complimentary even though it was a real challenge because he is a diametrically opposed style of writing from my style of writing. He overthinks everything, he will — I'll be moving on to another line and he'll be playing this thing on the guitar and get this glazed look, he'll be playing and I'm already moving on to the next thing and I'm wondering why he's not with me. He's just starting, playing it, and then he'll go wait, wait, listen to this, and he'll play something and it'll become part of the song and it'll become my favorite part of the song. But he is used to writing songs and taking a month to write a song and I'm used to three hours, and if it takes longer than that, it can't be much of a song. So I really had to be willing to sit and watch him sit and stare into space, and he, a lot of times, complained like

I was railroading him into accepting things that, you know — there was always a legend that one of the reasons why Simon and Garfunkel broke up was Paul would give Garfunkel a tape of a song and he would say okay, let me figure out the harmonies, and then he would go hike the Alps for four months while he thought about it. And Paul was like, I was hoping you'd come on Thursday. Where are you? I'm in the Swiss Alps trying to get inspirited to do the harmony. That's kind of what Kenny is, I'm not ready for you know, I haven't landed on these chord changes yet, maybe next week. So we really had to accommodate each other, but we wrote a bunch of songs on an album, and then one night he called me up on the phone and said I was thinking, I think you and I should do an album and be a duo. The joke I said to him was I'm a little intimidated with that idea because I'm afraid people would always compare us to (??) [0:56:37] Just joking, you know, Loggins and Messina. I'd say (??) [0:56:43] and you gotta laugh. Not unlike the laugh, I got from you. So one of the other things I learned from Kenny is that there's a rule of three. If he says something once, just nod your head. If he says something twice, nod your head but think he might be serious. If he says it a third time, he's serious. So the third time he called me about it, and I think it should be a trio and we should get a female that's a great singer and a great writer. And literally, when he called me I was on a date with Georgia, who I loved and respected and thought was a great singer and great writer. And I said well, I got the first candidate right here and I'll have her send you something. So she sent him a song and he loved it, said I'm gonna come to Nashville. He came to Nashville and we thought we'd sit in our basement and play some Kenny Loggins songs and see what the sound is like and he went no, no, no, let's just write a song. So we wrote a song and the harmonies were natural, we all knew where to go, Kenny and I would swap and he'd be the lead in the verse but then id take over the lead here, and then we'd write a bridge in a higher register so Georgia could sing the bridge, and after the end of the first song, we just looked at each other and went, this is a once in a lifetime vocal blend. We gotta do this. So we did, we called ourselves — he had a dog named Rider named after Mitch Rider because he got the dog from Detroit and I wanted to keep the bands pounding a little country, so I was thinking Blue Sky something. We put the two things together and called the band Blue Sky Riders and we made a great record, fabulous, and the songs were great. We wrote all these songs and they were, you know, Georgia had the same weirdness with them, having to learn how to be patient and trust and he would eventually come up with something and it always ended up taking the song to eleven. Absolutely is a genius. We had a great time. The biggest problem with the band was we were too good. In the beginning, when we would have conversations about it, I was always talking like we'll be a little side project like Robert Plant with his little side band that he'll show up with every once in a while and do a festival or a stagecoach or go do a TV show, it's a little side thing. When we got finished with the record, it was so good that Kenny said I know we said we'd be happy if we sold 20,000 copies, but I think we could sell 300,000 copies of this record. So we ended up going out and playing a lot of shows and raising a lot of money and spending a lot of money, but you know, it was just — we weren't gonna be on the country charts because we didn't have a real record label behind us, and we weren't gonna be on the pop charts because Kenny was 25 years past his prime of that. So we did the best we could, we did a second album, we had a lot of fun, and then all of a sudden just when we finished the second album, Kenny said that he was retiring. So the second album is sitting in our closet back here, I don't think anybody's ever heard it.

1:00:44 Blackmon: Are you gonna release it?

1:00:48 Burr: I don't know what that means anymore, Odie. What does that mean?

1:00:51 Blackmon: Well at least put it out for people that love your music and Kenny and Georgia's music to hear it, I don't know. Maybe Apple Music?

1:00:58 Burr: Yeah, I don't know. I mean right now I think it's probably available on the Blue Sky Rider website. But it was a great experience, we got to play some cool places, got to play The Tonight Show, did play Stagecoach, we did a lot of tours — we opened for Kenny which was very generous, we'd go out there, we'd open, we'd play a half hour with Kenny, and then Kenny would go back, change his shirt, and come back out as Kenny and do his show. That's how much he was into it.

1:01:33 Blackmon: And so, now, you and Georgia, your wife, have a band and play and tour, correct? Or a duo, do you guys work together?

1:01:46 Burr: Yeah, yeah, it's — we don't tour since the pandemic hit, Georgia and I have put out a couple of albums because we love writing together and it's a great style and we love singing together, so we've recorded a couple of albums. We write all the time together, and every week, we write a song and we do two Internet shows a week. We started right at the beginning of the pandemic, we started doing a Wednesday night Stage It show, and a Sunny afternoon Facebook show. We have this loyal audience that comes to every show and every Thursday she and I write a song and I record it and we give it away to everybody that comes to the Friday show — I'm sorry, the Sunday afternoon show. So we have two internet shows a week, you know, we still go out if somebody hires us — songwriters are kind of in for corporate events, so if somebody hires us to come and play a corporate event, and give them a little behind the scenes of here's the story behind the hits, kind of blooper experience, we go and do it. We're having a blast, it's just enough to make us happy and feel fulfilled. Not so much that it's scary, being out there with all the COVID.

1:03:20 Blackmon: That's great that you guys share that, besides your life, sharing music and songwriting. That doesn't happen a lot, I don't think. That's really cool.

1:03:31 Burr: Yeah, it's pretty great. I'll be down here messing around and all of a sudden she goes what's that? I say nothing and she goes hold on and she comes downstairs and she'll start singing something. You were playing that, and we'll start playing that, and we'll go is this anything? Yeah, it's our afternoon stopped to shit because now we're gonna write a song. I was gonna catch up on Ted Lasso and now I'm gonna write a song, way to go. And so that's our life and I love it.

1:04:00 Blackmon: That sounds pretty good. Gary, I really appreciate your time. This has been great. Is there anything you would add to your story or what we've talked about?

1:04:13 Burr: Well, it's been very, very inclusive and I can't think of any era that I missed, you know. Once again, it all comes down to Harold J. Kleiner, the late great Harold J. Kleiner. That was awful, man. I knew he was in the hospital, I called him up, I was living off of Westend, and he was in LA, he worked for Disney which was great because he hired me to produce a Disney album called The Best of Country Sings The Best of Disney. It was Faith and Little Texas and Hal Ketchum and Collin Raye and all these people singing famous Disney songs. So I got to work with orchestras and record this whole album and after it was over, I heard he was in the hospital, I called him up and he was in his room, and he said oh man, they're coming in and taking me to go do a test, I'll call me in about an hour. So they took him for tests, I called in an hour, and they said he's dead. He died while he was on the test, he had a massive heart attack. So that was Harold, the guy that got me started, and George and I play a show in New York City at the Cutting Room every few months, we've done it for years, and the partner for that is the partner who worked with me with Harold, Erwin. The guy that said he'd dig me a canal if I want to gamble. He's still in my life, great guy, and he helps us do our shows in New York City every few months and we bring in another big-shot writer and the three of us bring that experience to New York City. We have a great audience that comes to every show but between Harold, Erwin, Bob Montgomery, who also passed away, and Jerry Crutchfield, I'm glad that we got to have all their names on the record for posterity because they were really important to me.

1:06:43 Blackmon: Yeah. Yeah, it's not a straight path to success, and certainly getting to hear how you learned music and all your life experiences is important stuff before success and the career, you know.

1:07:03 Burr: Yeah, I appreciate the opportunity a lot, Odie. I thank you a lot and it's been a pleasure.