



## Carla's Corner



## The Murali Coryell Interview Feb, 2007

Acclaimed by CNN, Rolling Stone, & The New York Times soul singer/guitarist Murali Coryell has been blazing a trail that he was destined for before he was born thanks to the legacy of his famous father jazz guitar legend Larry Coryell. Murali has played and toured with B.B. King and Buddy Guy. Over the course of five CD's, Murali has recorded the songs of Sam Cooke, Al Green, and Marvin Gaye as well as the Chess blues classics on "2120". Having toured 40 states over his ten year plus recording career, Murali Coryell is a fully realized artist in complete control of a voice with soul to burn and the tastiest of guitar chops.

December 2006: Big Al B calls me to tell me to come down to Scullers to see The Coryell Brothers All Star Band. This particular group consisted of Murali and Julian Coryell, (sons of the famous jazz guitarist Larry), Tony Levin on bass and Berklee stick man Kenwood Dennard. I showed up to the show half way through because I had mistakenly gone to the wrong club (blonde!) As I was outside of the door I could hear an amazingly soulful and deep blues vocal I had not heard live in y ears. I was really surprised when I saw this fairly young man on guitar who sounded as if he had already lived 70 years of gut wrenching soul like the blues masters of old. The professionalism, variety and sheer talent of this group was amazing, so when I was informed that NewEARS was going to host a show with Murali and guest musicians, I couldn't wait to talk with Murali and see what was behind this soul man.

NewEARS: Hi Murali, what's been happening lately? Did you have a gig last night?

Murali: Well I have 3 gigs now, of completely original material. Last night I played and I had a lot of people that knew me and had seen me open up for BB King, Cindy Lauper and people like that and they said that they loved my original music. They said, "Hey, I know those songs!" People like them (the original music), and it is my responsibility to get that original music out to them. They really can't get it from anyone else until some big star covers some of my songs. I have had a couple of offers, Robert Cray is interested in recording one of my songs but he hasn't done it yet and in the meantime it's on me.

NewEARS: I remember seeing Robert Cray back up Santana a few years back in Massachusetts.

Murali: That's funny that you say that because that's how I got my name when we lived with Carlos Santana back in 1971 in San Francisco. Everyone was following an Indian guru called Sri Chin-moy and he would give everybody a spiritual name. Carlos was "Devadip" and he went through that whole thing where he was Carlos Devadip Santana. Mahavishnu John McLaughlin, he was given the name too, and I was given Murali, which means, "divine flute" in Sanskrit. It's a musical name and I'm a musical person. It came from hippy circumstances and here I am living in Woodstock NY. Laughs

NewEARS: Well was that on purpose?

Murali: No, I think it was just destiny. You can't change it. You know my parents were hippies and they lived through the 60's, participated in it and I can't change that.

NewEARS: So you and Tony Levin are like "homies" over in Woodstock NY?  
â€.Laughs

Murali: Yeah we are, and in this area where we live in, Woodstock is very rich with tremendous musicians that you don't really see out that much, but we're here! You know it's always been my idea that it doesn't matter at what level your at, but if you are a player, your trying to get to the next level, your trying to get to the audience out there. What I have been doing the last couple of years in addition to doing just a lot of national touring is that I really made use of the tremendous resources here in the Northeast more than anywhere around the country and I've put together some fantastic "Allstar" band li neups. When you have people like that it really helps to get your

music out there.

NewEARS: Well that was going to be my first question. I was going to ask you who you were going to have for us here in Lowell and why did you choose these particular people to play with?

Murali: Well it's funny because originally it was just going to be a trio of myself with Jerry (Marrotta), Tony and also a rhythm guitar player whose been playing with me and he's probably going to be there too. His name is Eric Collerton from CT and I have been bringing him on the road with me and he does just about everything. As a matter of fact I just got off this "blues cruise" thing. It was a seven day cruise in the Caribbean featuring the top touring blues bands. It was 24 hours of blues music and food that you could have any time and I became friends with this guy out of many people on there, Magic Dick. He used to be in J Geils Band and also Bluestime, and it turns out that beyond his rock stardom with J Geils his blues roots are Chicago blues.

NewEARS: Yeah, he is just unbelievable and when I heard he was going to play with your band I was so psyched to hear this show.

Murali: He is just really good! You know obviously, but he also knows what it means to be successful and he's got a name and he's got experience and he speaks the same language that I do. So now that he is on the bill, we'll do a lot of blues and a lot of soul and I kind of try to arrange the music for the group that's there, so if Magic Dick is going to be there, I'm not going to try to do songs that he wouldn't want to play. So it really matters him being there. We were talking on the phone yesterday and he's on tour somewhere with Tommy Castro and they got this blues review thing, but we were talking and just going over songs and just saying "oh yeah I know this one and th at one and saying that's going to be great," and in all honesty we've never even played together! This is going to be our first time.

NewEARS: Well you seem pretty versatile, it seems like you have been able to fit in with everybody that you've played with.

Murali: You know what, I really appreciate that because I do feel like I have been able to play just about any style and kind of music. My background and training as a musician I think really lends itself to being able to really play with just about anybody or in any kind of situation and yet at the same time, if I bring somebody in to play with me I'm going to make sure that they get a chance to shine and be comfortable and that they can play with me.

NewEARS: Well that kind of segways into my next question, which is

what type of music education, did you have? Did you have formal training or just learn from your father on the road?

Murali: Oh yeah, I got a music theory and composition degree and I haven't had another job! Laughs - It's been only music and that's not the kind of degree that once you get out of college people are going to say, "ok, we're going to give you a job starting at 60 grand". I went there to learn about music, to read and write music and I love it. For example I have a gig coming up in NY state with Mark Egan who is a very famous bass player. We probably aren't going to have a chance to rehearse so I am busy writing out charts for him and collecting charts and writing down the bass lines. People sometimes say, "Well how can you play with all these different kinds of people?" They think it must take an awful lot of rehearsal. If the musicians are good enough and if you understand the style of music and know how to play, you can do it. Today's technology lends itself so that we can email MP3's and songs etc. Faxing charts, sending cd's in the mail, mailing a set list and talking things over a little bit. During the sound check or backstage before the show we go over things a little bit. To me the most fun rehearsal is just playing. When you get to a level when your good and you know the kind of music, it's really nothing hard at all. The main thing is that the rhythm section knows what the groove is and what's going on and Tony Levin is just SO prepared. He is just fastidious in his preparation. Anything that you throw to Tony as long as you get it to him he is going to play it exactly right and probably better. Tony is one of those guys that whatever you got, whatever song you're doing, he is just going to make it better, because he is just that way, that caliber of person and musician.

NewEARS: Absolutely! I saw you play recently at Scullers club in Cambridge with Kenwood Dennard who teaches at Berklee and we talked a bit and he was a really nice guy.

Murali: Kenwood is just a genius and we had a great time. Now the circumstances are different and we had a chance to pick up Jerry Marrotta to play. When Kenwood and Tony played, it was like only the second time they had ever played together and we did a couple of gigs and after that they became tight. You know the essence of blues and jazz is the rhythm section, your bass and drums and whatever is happening on top of that. It is so key that the bass and the drums be not only really great, but also that they know how to play great together. Tony and Jerry have just done so much work together for years with Peter Gabriel and tons of people. They have done it on the highest level and they know how to play together. They're like brothers in that respect.

NewEARS: You know what is cool about them is that neither of them have any of “that attitude” about it. They play because they love it. I could see them playing on the street or Carnegie Hall and it wouldn’t make any difference because they love it.

Murali: And that gets back to my point that real players and real musicians have no real ego in it. It’s just about the music. We want to be playing, we need to be doing it, we need to be doing it with people who compliment us and who also are equally up to the task and the work and the goal that we are putting in.

NewEARS: I wanted to ask you a little more about your background and training. How much on the road training did you have with your Dad?

Murali: Well there’s no substitute for that experience. You know when I was a baby they used to take me everywhere. I was a baby on the road and traveling. It was my brother that eventually did more traveling with my Dad when we were younger. My brother at a very early age was playing at a very high level. He played bass with my Dad when he was just a little kid.

Sometimes my brother would stow away in the back of the car when my Dad was going to Newport and then he would get to go. I used to get so mad at that.

NewEARS: Do you check the back of your car before you leave home?

-Laughs

(Murali is the proud father of 2 young boys.)

Murali: I know where the kids are!

NewEARS: Are your kids going to follow in your footsteps? Anyone showing any promise yet?

Murali: All I know is that they see Dad up there, they know it’s important, they know it’s fun and my goal is to let the kids become whatever it is they are going to become. There is no doubt that they love to sing. They just go around and sing all the time. That to me is a basic element. Singing, percussion and rhythm are the basic things that if you have that in you, you can do mostly anything.

Murali: Getting back to another question. Other bands that I used to be in were the Ritchie Havens band. I was in Dick Robillard’s band and being in professional outfits and traveling it’s the best experience you can get. It also teaches you how to run a band, what to expect on the road in certain situations and stuff.

NewEARS: Yeah, I think it can teach you what could go wrong as well as right!

Murali: Things can always go wrong. It's easy to do a show when everything is perfect but we are human beings and human beings are prone to mistakes all the time so things happen, that's what life is. It's more revealing of your character what you do in a situation that is unexpected or if something comes up.

NewEARS: I don't think I know of anybody that has had nothing but perfect shows.

Murali: It's very rare. Sometimes you just say "wow, that was great" but I don't think music is necessarily about perfection, it's about feeling and giving you goose bumps. It's about making you tap your foot, making you want to move and groove and smile and sing, you know. I tell you from a musicians point of view, if people are dancing, we know that you like it. You know white people in the NE, if they drink enough and we play something they like, and then they start dancing!  
-Laughs

NewEARS: Especially those Irish ballads! - more laughter

Murali: You know it's funny, I am into a lot of what is known as black music and musicians and they really can get into it. They hear it right away. They say, "we give the white audience some slack with the no clapping or dancing.- laughs

NewEARS: So where does this young white guy get so much soul?

Murali: Well my mom got together with Jimi Hendrix the same time my Dad did so I joke and say, "Mom, am I Jimi's son or Dad's? more laughter

NewEARS: You know I am probably going to have to edit this interview!

Murali: I don't know. How does Eric Clapton or the Rolling Stones get it? They're from another country yet they really got it. You know there is very few people that can sing like me and I was just on this "Blues Cruise" where one of the soul singers was Otis Clay and he originally did "Take Me to the River" before Al Green did. He wrote it. Here Clay, after seeing him up close and trying to work with him, he did this thing where he got the audience to sing as well. There were certain parts where he was like "ok" and the only person singing was me and he said that was because there were not many people who actually could sing like that. I don't know why I have a certain kind

of voice, this deep soul gospel voice and as a matter of fact I'm doing my first gospel show in September. It's going to be in the Ulster Performing Arts Center in Kingston NY and I was invited by a gospel promoter who has been following me and he wants to present me as a gospel artist. The essence of this type of vocal style is going back to black gospel, black blues. I've always known that I've wanted to sound this way once I first heard it. I didn't always sound that way. It took years to develop my voice and it's still a developing thing. I can sing blues and soul music but I am also capable of such diversity. I feel that I just have to go out and play so people can hear it. Some people think, "Oh you're the blues guy, or the soul guy". I'm both. It doesn't always sound like the same thing. It always sounds like me.

NewEARS: When I saw you last month it was the first time I saw you play. I tell you, it just blew me away!

Murali: Well thank you. I am really so excited about playing in Massachusetts again. It's such an educated place. They really are educated as far as the music goes and they know what it is when they are hearing it. The blues music is not like in Mississippi or the south where everyone grows up around blues, it's in the water. In the Northeast you kinda have to study it a little bit and the people in Massachusetts are on it. They support the music, they study it and they get into it. That's what we need. You know we could have one of the greatest singers up there singing but if nobody knows it, it's not being enjoyed.

NewEARS: So tell me, who is in your cd player right now?

Murali: Bobby Rush. That's who I am listening to right now. I love listening to everybody I can and trying to incorporate that into my repertoire. There is nothing that I won't do. As long as it is a song that I like, then I can sing it.

NewEARS: Speaking of the future, is there someone out there that you are just dying to play with and haven't yet?

Murali: I kinda got to play with some of them on this cruise but I'll well Magic Dick is one. You know we got this gig and we never even played together so I am looking forward to playing with him. It comes down to meeting somebody that you can really play with and really sing with. I am kind of looking for great either female or male duo partners. Someone I can really blend well with. Part of that I was able to do with the Coryell brothers. I am looking for the people that can really understand what I am doing and can just get to it you know?

They can just jump right in and blend with me. I am getting up a list of people that I have played with from all over the country. Like when I go to Chicago I play with the best Chicago musicians and same with other cities. Connecting with people. I discovered on this “Blues Cruise” that people are playing my original music with their own bands. It’s all about connecting with the fans and the musicians that just love this music so much. I also have played with Buddy Guy and BB King. Buddy Guy is an incredible show. I am playing his club in February in Chicago, but it is closing. I hope he can get another one somewhere. Buddy Guy said it is my responsibility to connect with the people. BB King called me the future of the blues and told me that I need to take my voice and bring it to the people. I’m taking it somewhere. I am not just staying back in 1950. I am a younger person that grew up with soul and funk and rock. I am taking all of those things and making soul and blues a “wide umbrella” under which all American music exists.

NewEARS: Ok, this is my last one that I always end with! Murali Coryell is

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Murali: Murali Coryell is a soul, blues, singer, guitarist, and songwriter, whose destiny it is to continue to pass on the torch of blues, soul, jazz and American music and will stop at nothing to reach that end!

GO SEE MURALI CORYELL AND HIS ALLSTAR BAND IN LOWELL! AN AMAZING MAN, AMAZING MUSIC AND SURROUNDED BY AMAZING MUSICIANS. IT’S GOING TO BE GREAT!