

WHAT'S ON THE SHELF

By Helen Marketti

Chuck Negron, formerly of Three Dog Night, releases final edition of his autobiography

Fans will recall the signature and memorable hits from Three Dog Night such as One, Easy to be Hard and Joy to the World among many more. As one third of the lead singing trio with a career spanning nearly 50 years, Chuck has traveled a journey of being one of rock's kings to nearly becoming one of its statistics of mourning. March 13 will be the fourth and final edition release of his autobiography, Three Dog Nightmare.

"I am originally from Brooklyn. Growing up I was into the Doo Wop groups, The Drifters, The Platters and The Belmonts. I was in a Doo Wop group myself for a while. I like that kind of sound. I found that to be my version of down home country music," explains Chuck. "During high school I was in a group called The Rondells named after Chuck Rondell. We had minimum success."

"My father lived in California. I eventually moved there because I had a basketball scholarship from Allan Hancock College. I was recruited by Bill Sharman who is mostly known for his time with the Boston Celtics," said Chuck. "Anyway, one evening I went to a dance. It was one of those events where 'everyone' was there. There were a couple guys onstage from my music class. They asked me to sing a few songs with them, which I thought would be fun. Singing wasn't something I was even thinking about or taking seriously. A few days later, I heard there was someone looking for me who turned out to be the person who was running the dances. He told me that when I sang, everyone stopped dancing and turned to look at me. He was a promoter and wanted to put me with The Sorenson Brothers."

He continues, "We did a couple of gigs

and an independent record label got in touch with us and asked us to do a record. We had some regional success with a song called, "When Love Comes My Way." Not long after that Columbia Records came to call and asked me to come to the studio. I have to admit I was dragging my feet on that opportunity because I was still playing basketball in college



and we were doing very well. We had a championship team. Well, one day I received a call from Al Stanton who was the Vice President of Columbia Records. He demanded to know where I had been and what did I think I was doing when they wanted me in the studio.

When I explained to him about playing basketball, he thought it was a joke and said, "Are you out of your mind? Every artist in town would die for this opportunity and you're going to play basketball?" He gave me an ultimatum and the following week I was in the studio doing a recording session. I learned a very important lesson from that experience. I was trying to have my cake and eat it, too. You have to make decisions."

Once Columbia Records had Chuck, they encouraged him to get himself out there, mingle, go to parties and all of the fringes that seem to connect to fame and success. "You have to remember back then I was Mr. Straight. I never smoked and never drank. I even ironed my socks. (laughs) I loved my hair, my clothes and looking nice. My weakness was girls."

"As I had said Columbia wanted me to attend parties, premiers and all that sort of thing. One night I was walking along Sunset Strip with a friend of mine when a car pulled up next to us and one of the girls said, "Hey, do you guys want to go to a party for Donovan Leitch? (Also known as singer, Donovan). At the time, I didn't

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even know who he was! So we went to the party and The Mothers of Invention were jamming. It was at the party when I first met Danny Hut-ton. Someone introduced

us and we hit it off right away and we started hanging out."

Chuck continues, "I went on the road for a while and when I returned there were several messages from Danny. We met up again and this time he had Cory Wells with him. He and Cory had gotten together and they decided they needed a third person for a three-part harmony and three lead singers. That's how Three Dog Night got started. There were moments where it seemed we couldn't live without each other. It was a time that was very special and magical."

"I feel grateful that I have this opportunity to still sing these songs. I am glad I have something left to give in spite of

all the damage I heaped upon myself. I feel blessed to be doing this at age 75. I will never be the way I was but I am glad for what I am able to give," said Chuck.

Life was not always kind to Chuck Negron. He admits that had come from his own doing. Eventually, he turned to heroin, which in turn nearly ended his life and life as he once knew. "The first time I went through rehab was in 1985. I saw it as an opportunity to change my life but when I got out of rehab the call to get high again was there and I didn't put into practice what I had learned, or should I say I didn't want to. I spent thirteen years in and out of 37 rehab facilities. Rehabs became my safe haven from being homeless. For a while, I had lived with my dealer who lived in an abandoned building. Being in rehabs kept me from people who wanted to get rid of me, who didn't want anything to do with me. They were places to stay and it was another part of my addiction and another part of my hustle."

"The 37th place I was at was called Cri-Help and that was for hard core heroin addicts. The Betty Ford Clinic wouldn't even take me on because they didn't handle people like me is what I was told. Cri-Help had contracts with the prison

system so if people were being paroled who were drug addicts they went there. You had to quit your habit cold turkey. There was no such thing as detox," explains Chuck. "When you're kicking, you can't sleep. Every fiber in your body needs something to calm it down. There is no sleep. My mind did not stop. It always seemed I was hatching a plan every second. One day a friend of mine, Mike Finnigan stopped by to visit and I told him I couldn't take this anymore that I would rather die. Mike told me I had to pray and ask for God's acceptance. He said I had to accept whatever came my way. He literally taught me how to pray. I went to my room that night and prayed. I prayed to God to let me die or at least have one minute of relief from this sickness and relentless obsession. Then I fell asleep when I thought I would never sleep and when I woke up the next morning, it was over. The obsession I had felt was gone. I had no problem moving forward to deal with my sickness and my life changed. I knew that God had intervened. I threw myself in the program and it changed my life." Chuck is celebrating 26 years of sobriety.

He shares numerous experiences in his autobiography, *Three Dog Nightmare* with eleven new chapters due for release March 13. This will be the final edition. "The book is used in some rehab facilities, including Cri-Help," said Chuck. The first edition of the book was released in 1999. "I worked with Chris Blatchford who worked as an investigative reporter for FOX News. He encouraged me to write the book and share my story. I was not trying to make an excuse for my behavior. I needed to own my past, which was pathetic. When you tell the truth, you will have people who like you and people who will hate your guts. When you hit a nerve, they become angry and feel they have a right to abuse you. They feel they have that right because you are messing with their life. I write about those experiences in the book. Over time, the guys in the band treated me like a piece of shit. It was unbelievable. Once you have been a drug addict, you make everyone around you sick as well. Your family is sick, your friends are sick and so are the people you work with."

As Chuck got back to his music career, he noticed over time he would be out of breath when he came offstage. "My breathing was very labored but I didn't worry about it because I knew I would recover. I wasn't scared. I was too dumb I guess." (laughs) My girlfriend, Ami

started taking oxygen readings after my shows and my numbers were low. Low enough where I could have had a heart attack or brain damage. We went to see a specialist and he said I would need to wear an oxygen cannula. At first I thought I would wear it but there was no way I was going to wear it onstage. I figured that my career was over. Entertainers are supposed to make people relax, have fun and not remind them of life tragedies or illness. That's the way I felt," explains Chuck.

"My girlfriend and manager, Ami Albea looked into the matter further. She found a company called, Oxy-View. They design the glasses where the oxygen cannula is hooked up to the back rims of the glasses with two small hoses that fit in your nose. You can't even see it from the stage. We figured out how to increase the oxygen intake. I have been able to continue my career. It's been a blessing. I know that some of the fans have gotten them, too," said Chuck.

Chuck does as many as 70 shows per year. He does solo work as well as travels with The Happy Together tour, which will start in June. In addition to travel, he has recorded with his two daughters, Annabelle and Charlotte. Their album, *Negron Generations* was released last year. "My daughters have been singing with me since they were little kids. Charlotte (Charlie) performed with me when she was nine years old at the Hollywood Bowl in front of 17,000 people. She made her first record when she was nine or ten with David Foster. She is a great singer. Annabelle has worked with me in Vegas. She has done her own songs in addition to providing backing vocals. I have always wanted to sing with my daughters and work on a project together. I wanted to share the experience and teach them life lessons," explains Chuck.

Chuck is never at a loss for projects and entertaining. "I wrote a song with Juliet Piper who has a new record and video. The song we did together was, "It Sometimes Rains When It's Sunny". She is an Indie artist so it's very different from anything I have ever done," he said. "I am also gearing up to work on another record but may do a single first, if I have the time. In early June, I will be going on the road with The Happy Together Tour. I love the creative process. The act of artistic endeavors is the reward. You do what you love and hope the magic happens."

See Chuck on The Happy Together Tour August 12, see Page 13 for details. www.chucknegron.com

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