

SLICK!



Jefferson Starship Guitarist Tells His Story and Asks For Help

Slick is the lead guitarist for Jefferson Starship. Slick is in need of a liver transplant and has a 50/50 chance of survival over the next two years without one. There are no mincing words with something this serious. He needs our help as his insurance only goes so far and it is a matter of life or death. Talking by phone from his home in New Jersey where Hurricane Sandy was bearing down, Slick shares his past, his present and his hopes for the future.

Mark "Slick" Aguilar, lead guitarist for Jefferson Starship
Photo Credit: Mike Thut

By Helen Marketti

"I've always had the music bug in me," says Slick. "It all started with The Beatles and The Kinks, all of the classic rock stuff. I spent a lot of time listening to all of those bands back then. While I was growing up, my dad always played the piano and he used to play all of these great show songs from South Pacific to I Left My Heart in San Francisco and just about everything from that era."

He continues, "I actually became interested in the guitar by watching Ricky Nelson on "The Ozzie & Harriet" show during the late 50s. It was usually at the end of the show where Ricky would do a song or two with his band. He had guitarist James Burton in his band and then Elvis had Scotty Moore and I thought that was cool. I first played guitar by ear and then I decided to go to college at Miami Dade and major in music. When I was eleven years old, I was playing in teen clubs and the youngest member in the band. We were living in Panama at the time because my dad was stationed there while serving in the Army."

Slick shares the story of how he got his nickname. "When I was in college, I was taking private lessons and then started doing session work around Miami. I had some teachers who were showing me all kinds of great stuff on the guitar. I was usually the youngest guy in the band at that time so I would then go to band rehearsals and say to the guys, "Hey, check this out, this is what I learned today!" and then I would play. A few of the guys would say, "Wow, that's pretty slick!" After a few times of that, whenever I showed up for rehearsals some of the guys would say, "Here comes Slick!" and that's how it all got started. It does sound like a cool rock and roll name (laughs) but then you have to remember that someone else in rock already has that name, Grace Slick (Jefferson Airplane, Jefferson Starship). Sure enough there are two Slicks then!"

Over the past 35 years, Slick has played with many artists such as KC & The Sunshine Band, David Crosby (The Byrds & Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young) Marty Balin (Jefferson Airplane), KBC (Paul Kantner, Marty Balin & Jack Casady from Jefferson

Airplane) and Jefferson Starship. Slick's smooth talent at guitar has earned him a lasting spot with some key figures in the classic rock circuit. "At first it was pretty cool because you're kind of in awe. When I was young, my band played "Turn, Turn, Turn" by The Byrds and then years later I'm playing with David Crosby. However you do get over that initial feeling rather quick because you have a job to do."

As we were talking about the classic rock genre, Slick pauses for a moment to talk about Jefferson Airplane specifically. "Jefferson Airplane was together for seven years which isn't that long at all but look at the impact that band made. We also have to remember back then there still weren't as many bands around as there are now. During that time, there were two powerful female singers, one was Janis Joplin and the other was Grace Slick. These girls were hard-core rock, which made people want to attend their gigs and check 'em out."

Longevity of a music career is described by Slick in this way, "I look at each night as though I just played the songs for the first time (Jefferson Starship). Paul Kantner has always told me that I don't need to play exactly how someone else played on a song. I don't need to copy what they did and for him to tell me that gave me the room I needed to breathe because being like someone else is not who I am or how I do things. When you're onstage you're feeling the good vibes, you're having fun and putting that energy into the music. It's a different town every night with a different crowd. I put in everything I have when I play these songs."

His voice becoming serious, Slick said, "For now my run with them is probably done

due to my health issues. I'm unable to tour right now. I've got a pretty hard road in front of me."

Slick has been diagnosed with Hepatitis C and is in need of a liver transplant. He has been given a 50/50 chance for survival over the next two years if he does not receive one. Slick explains, "During the last nine months or so I started to notice my hands were cramping up and at first I thought it

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I'm often asked that question because I once ran a business where karaoke was a staple for fun for the customers and continued growth for our business. Karaoke kept our business from going under during the roughest years of the economic downturn. We offered it on commonly slow nights because it brought regulars in who showed up faithfully each week, bringing family and friends to hear them sing and eventually get up and sing themselves! These singers would send pictures of themselves singing to their friends and then suddenly a party of two became a party of four or six.

From those original karaoke nights came other business such as catered parties (WITH karaoke because this is a great activity to make any party a blast or even just keep the kids busy while the adults watch them and talk). We would host fundraisers where folks would dare each other to sing songs, paying dollars to the fund as the person accepted the dare. Family parties were often rebooked from one birthday to the next because of memorable duets, "dress like your favorite rock star" themes and from that came theme nights like "Glee" or "Musicals" or "Rat Pack." These would have our register ringing all night long because they needed to stay hydrated for all that singing. We sold wristbands to help with the costs of keeping our karaoke show going, but there are other ways to help make this a win-win offering for both the customer and the business owner.

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was maybe because I was dehydrated. So I started drinking more water and Gatorade. Then I started to notice when we were on flights, my ankles were swelling up and at first, I didn't know what the hell was going on. Swelling ankles are one of the first signs for congestive heart failure. The doctors said my liver was not processing, as it should. When the liver isn't processing, as it should, it will push fluid into your stomach and after that, it will travel anywhere it wants to in your body and that is why my ankles started swelling up. The doctors ran blood tests, I asked them to check for Hepatitis C, and when the results came back confirming I had it, I went numb. I went cold. Everyone from the baby boomer generation should get themselves checked for that and while you're at it, it is important to get a colonoscopy. I've also had colon cancer within the last six years and when the doctors caught it, I was at stage one. They performed the surgery and thankfully, I'm free of colon cancer. There are a lot of things we can do early on to prevent what I have to go through now."

He continues, "I'm taking medicines right now but the bottom line is that I need a liver transplant if I am going to survive. There is absolutely no way around it. Nothing else is going to work. My liver is not functioning properly and it's not going to get any better at this point because it also has Cirrhosis."

News of this nature has forced Slick to step back from doing what he loves which is playing music and put his effort, attention and ambition towards surviving. "I have been in this business for 35 years. I am now unable to tour with Jefferson Starship. I had been hospitalized for ten days while they were on tour. If I had gone on tour with them, it probably would have killed me. The doctors have me on several different meds and what that is basically doing is keeping me alive until I can get a liver transplant. I have spent a lot of time planning and being evaluated so when a liver becomes available I will be ready."

Time is of significant importance for Slick, his family and friends. "It's going to be a pretty heavy duty operation and the recovery could take months plus someone has to be with me 24/7," he said.

In continuing to speak openly, Slick shares his thoughts for seeking help in the form of donations so this will be possible. "I do have insurance but it will not be enough to cover all of the expenses. I am a working musician and right now because of my health, I'm not working at all. Being

a musician is a great job and I love what I do but not all of us are paid like Paul McCartney. It's a decent living but not enough to cover something as big as a liver transplant. Donations in any amount are going to be helpful. I've never had to do anything like this before but with the way the situation is I have no other source of income."

It should also be noted that Slick is not paid any type of royalties or anything of that nature from bands or individual artists he may play with. He receives straight pay at a flat rate for doing a gig and that is how he earns his pay.

Slick spends every couple of days talking to David Crosby. David had a liver transplant several years ago and provides friendship and support. "He's my coach because he knows what I am going through," said Slick. "I would like to encourage people to sign up to be organ donors. I know it's hard because it means that one family loses someone but it also gives another family hope for a loved one to survive, someone else has a chance. What I am trying to do is pull off a miracle so that I can live."

For more information on how you can help Slick, a fundraising site has been set up for him at the following link:
www.indiegogo.com/Slick-Aguilar

For further updates on Slick, please visit his Facebook page: Mark Slick Aguilar Photos of Slick may also become available to order with all proceeds going directly to him. If interested, please send a message of inquiry on his Facebook page. Please state if you are interested in an autographed photo as well.

For anyone who prefers "snail mail", checks made out to Slick Aguilar may be sent to the following address: Slick Aguilar, 1775 Deer Run Drive, Montgomery, IL, 60538

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