

It's the ROCK in him

After creating 18 studio albums and three No. 1 singles, rock star Steve Miller '61 has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

At 5-years-old, he knew chords, strums and harmonies like the back of his hand. As guitarist Les Paul's godson, he knew how to own a stage — and he knew he would.

In a home filled with rocking noise and inspired sound, he learned how to create tracks with the earliest German tape recorders, fresh from enemy territory after World War II.

Then, at 12, he created his own band with his classmates and started booking shows. He'd make \$300 [\$2000 after inflation] every week, and if a gig didn't pay what he wanted, then he simply hung up. They always called back.

Now, at 72, rock star Steve Miller '61 got a call he never expected — from Rock and Roll Hall of Fame officials, informing him he was among this year's inductees into the Hall of Fame.

Since the Hall of Fame wasn't something he'd been working for all his life, his acceptance into the prestigious organization was totally out of the blue.

"I heard about [my selection] through the news," Miller said. "It was sort of like being in a reality television show for about a week."

But unlike other artists, who just simply accept the selection, Miller has issues with the way the organization is run. The problems run deeper than communication or appearance—they arise from the heart of the Hall of Fame.

"I stopped paying any attention and caring about the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame," Miller said. "I felt like they were using my name and my career to sell the Hall of Fame. The whole thing seems like a promotion and a hype, not really honest and not really true. I don't want my personal life being smeared around in front of people."



THE SPACE COWBOY In February 2015, Miller '61 was the featured performer at the Celebrate St. Mark's Auction. Foreground, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, Ohio.

Although his experience with the Hall was tainted, there were gratifying aspects of being inducted.

"All that being said," Miller said, "you start going, 'This is kind of cool, even though the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is run in a very elitist, narrow-minded way.' People really do love it, and it's a big deal around the world. I'm going to be in this room of people like Les Paul and Jimmy Reed, people like the Beatles and Ben Morrison, all the great Motown groups. And so that, that feels pretty good."

Regardless of the award, for Miller, it's always been about the music. The chords, the beats, the strums.

His life, since he started hearing Les Paul play and work with his father, has been focused on one thing: jamming out.

"[His father's German tape recorder] was a really cool machine, and my old man got one, Miller said. "He ran into Les Paul, and asked if maybe he could record while he was rehearsing his act, and Les said, 'Yeah!' I would go see Les Paul play every night, and he was an unbelievable guitar player and musician."

Paul taught Miller chords and many other things.

"By the time I was 5-years-old, I understood what he did, and I wanted to do it. It seemed like so much fun," Miller said.

The music didn't stop there. When he went home, he was surrounded by his mother's "Ella Fitzgerald" voice and his family's love for everything harmonic.

"I just hit the ground running with music in my veins," Miller said. "I grew up going to St. Mark's and getting a good education, and I supposedly had to go to college and get a real damn job, be a doctor or something. But I've been playing every Friday and Saturday night since

1956. It's what I like to do."

Many criticize the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for expanding its boundaries too far, for awarding artists who don't even claim to make rock and roll.

One of the 2016 inductees, N.W.A, is a group that has never made a classic rock and roll song. But in Miller's eyes, rock and roll isn't simply a musical genre — it's way of life.

"There's a spirit to rock and roll: rebellion," Miller said. "Hard as it may seem to understand, in 1968, when I wrote 'Living in the U.S.A.' it was written to be played at the National Democratic Convention in Chicago where the police were beating everyone. We were radicals. What N.W.A was doing was a lot like what we were doing. They were getting beat up much worse. Their world was ten times worse than ours. But we were getting kicked out of hotels, we were being called queers, we were being threatened."

That rebellious soul of his music also extended to Miller's life as a "hippie" and as he decided to board a bus and become a freedom rider.

"When you see racism, and you're young, you can't stand it," Miller said. "I got on a bus and headed out to Selma, AL. Luckily for me, my bus was diverted and sent to the White House. But it was so scary."

When the bus stopped in Chicago, half the people got off and went back to Madison.

"Those of us who stayed on the bus, we were going to be beaten or killed, but we were fighting for civil rights," Miller said. "We were fighting in the streets, and our music and culture were fighting for it."

Although the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame isn't extremely important for Miller,

Steve Miller's greatest hits



"The Joker"

- No. 1 on *Billboard's* Hot 100.
- Certified 'gold' by RIAA.
- Topped U.K.'s single chart 16 years after release.



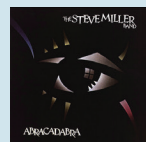
Fly Like an Eagle

- Certified quadruple platinum by RIAA.
- No. 1 on *Billboard's* Hot 100.
- No. 445 on *Rolling Stone's* list of "The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time"



"Rock'n Me"

- No. 1 on *Billboard's* Hot 100.
- Featured in *Grand Theft Auto V*.
- Top 30 in Canada, U.K., Austria and New Zealand.



"Abracadabra"

- Topped charts in six countries.
- Second time one of Miller's songs knocked out Chicago's No. 1 song.

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he believes it is extremely important for it to change, for it to evolve and become an organization that has a real impact on the lives of young musicians.

"[The Hall of Fame Museum] should be a place where you can really go and do some research," Miller said. "There are some people who are really into the education as well. That work should really be supported. We need as much art, creativity and freedom of expression as the human race can tolerate."

STORY GOPAL RAMAN PHOTO ILLUSTRATION GOPAL RAMAN, DAVID CARDEN, IMAGE COURTESY THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME MUSEUM

in his words

Steve Miller '61 reflects on the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in this essay penned for The ReMarker

Founders Ahmet Ertegan, Susan Evans, Jann Wenner, Seymour Stein, Bob Krasnow, Noreen Woods and Allan Grubman did a fantastic job pushing the Hall into existence.

Their hard work in raising funds and convincing the city of Cleveland to accept and help pay for building a beautiful museum says these are exceptional people who worked hard to bring an impossible project into being.

Their creation of music education programs and trust funds that help musicians in need is meaningful and appreciated by the entire music world.

Yet in spite of all this hard, selfless work, the Hall has been criticized for its lack of transparency. To the original founders, this issue has to be the ultimate definition of "No good deed goes unpunished."

The organization is changing as more time passes, and a fresh look at who should be inducted is indeed taking place.

I'm encouraged to see the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame broadening its range of participants and restructuring its induction process as it moves forward.

So where do we go from here?

First, I recommend a serious program for the induction of more women and the inclusion of more genres into the Hall of Fame.

Is Kenny Chesney putting on some of the greatest stadium rock shows in history? Sure, he is. Is Chaka Khan bad to the bone? Yes, she is.

The more inclusive and less exclusive the Hall becomes, the smarter and broader the musical education programs become.

What isn't commonly known about the Hall of Fame induction ceremony is the cost to the artist.

For many artists, being inducted is somewhat like being held by the nose, kicked in the a-- and patted on the back all at the same time.

So my fellow Marksmen, my dilemma is: should I keep my mouth shut, accept my award with humility and grace, attend with just my wife, play one song on my acoustic guitar and get out of there as fast as I can?

Or should I read this note minus the cost of the tickets, bring my band and kick out "Fly Like An Eagle?"

Now you know the whole story.

What would you do?

— Steve Miller '61