

Asleep At The Wheel – Bio

Asleep At The Wheel was formed in 1970 in the town of Paw Paw, West Virginia. The initial band members were Ray Benson Seifert [b. March 16th 1951 in Philadelphia, Penn.], Leroy Preston and Lucky Oceans aka Reuben Gosfield [b. April 22nd 1951 in Philadelphia, Penn.]. Their speciality was western swing music and they performed initially in local bars and clubs.

They were joined by guitarist/vocalist Chris O'Connell [b. March 21st 1953, Williamsport, Maryland], who had just graduated from high school. After Commander Cody [George Frayne] saw a band perform at a Washington D.C. club in 1971, he sent his manager, Joe Kerr, to check the band out. Signing with Kerr, Asleep relocated to San Francisco for a couple of years, a period that included a residency at Berkeley's, Longbranch Saloon. Signing with United Artists, **"Comin' Right At Ya !"** appeared in 1973, featuring a line-up augmented by piano player, Floyd Domino [b. Jim Haber], and bass man Gene Dobkin. Produced by Tommy Allsup, and recorded in Nashville, the guest fiddle players were Johnny Gimble, Buddy Spicher and Commander Cody's right hand man, Andy Stein.

Signing next with Epic Records, **"Asleep At The Wheel"** [1974] was later reissued by the UK label, Edsel/Demon Records as **"Jumpin' At The Woodside"** [1985]. The disc yielded the band's first chart single, "Choo Choo Ch' Boogie" [# 69 in December 1974]. As for the line-up, by their sophomore disc, Dobkin had departed to be replaced by Richard Casanova [fiddle] and Tony Garnier [bass]. Moving on to Capitol Records, Asleep experienced further line-up changes in the process of cutting five straight albums for the label – founder Leroy Preston departed after **"Collision Course"** and Lucky Oceans after **"Served Live."** Oceans eventually settled in Australia. In tandem with these changes and setbacks Asleep scored more hit singles - **"Texas Gold"** proved to be the breakthrough release, yielding the Top 10 Country single "The Letter That Johnny Walker Read." They also began garnering Grammy nominations - Count Basie's "One O'Clock Jump" from **"Collision Course"** won Asleep the first of, to date, five Grammys. It has been claimed that some eighty musicians have passed through Asleep's ranks in the past 33 years. Following **"Framed"** for MCA – produced by Benson, and with debts in the region of quarter of a million dollars, Asleep broke up for a time. In the early eighties, before heading off for the Antipodes, the Chicago based Blind Pig label issued a solo/band album titled **"Lucky Steels The Wheel,"** which featured contributions from Lucky Oceans and Messrs. Benson, Domino, O'Connell, Gimble and other Asleep associates.

Asleep re-entered the fray in 1985 with **"Pasture Prime,"** by which time Benson was also working as an album producer for other acts [Darden Smith, Don Walser, Pam Tillis and Suzy Bogguss], an activity that continues to this day. The revived line-up included Benson, O'Connell and Gimble. *The wheel* truly turned *full circle* with **"10"** which found the band return to the Epic label. **"Keepin' Me Up Nights"** marked the opening gambit in a two album "stop-over" at Arista, before *the wheel* brought them back to Capitol/Liberty once more for the *guest star* littered **"Tribute To The Music Of Bob Wills And The Texas Playboys."** Those *guest stars* included several original Texas Playboys, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Chet Atkins, Brooks & Dunn, Dolly Parton and Garth Brooks. Of course the album won the band another Grammy. The following year, Liberty issued a 3 CD box set that featured the 1994 Bob Wills disc, a **"Best of"** collection and a previously unreleased *live* concert from 1977. **"The Wheel Keeps On Rollin'"** was their last Capitol effort to date, and they moved back to Sony, and the Lucky Dog imprint, for **"Back To The Future Now - Live In Las Vegas"** – which featured the current band and numerous past alumni. High Street Records issued their seasonal album. **"Ride With Bob,"** on Dreamworks Nashville, proved to be another guest star effort - Steve Wariner, Vince Gill, The Dixie Chicks, Lyle Lovett, Shawn Colvin, Dwight Yoakam and the Squirrel Nut Zippers – which saw Asleep once more celebrate the music of their mentor. The disc added another Grammy to the band's tally.

In 2001 Benson put together a *"most requested song collection"* which he titled **"The Very Best Of Asleep At The Wheel."** It was issued by the Madacy 2 label in the U.S.A. that year, and two years later, in the UK, Evangeline Records issued it as **"Take Me Back To Tulsa,"** which, appropriately was the title of the opening cut on Asleep's 1973 debut.

Discography :

Albums : **"Comin' Right At Ya !"** [1973] ; **"Asleep At The Wheel"** [1974] ; **"Texas Gold"** [1975] ; **"Wheelin' And Dealin' "** [1976] ; **"The Wheel"** [1977] ; **"Collision Course"** [1978] ; **"Served Live"** [1979] ; **"Framed"** [1980] ; **"Pasture Prime"** [1985] ; **"Jumpin' At The Woodside"** UK reissue of 1974

album [1986] ; **“10”** [1987] ; **“Western Standard Time”** [1988] ; **“Keepin’ Me Up Nights”** [1990] ; **“Live & Kickin’ – Greatest Hits”** [1992] ; **“Tribute To The Music Of Bob Wills And The Texas Playboys”** [1993] ; **“Still Swingin’”** 3CD box set [1994] ; **“The Wheel Keeps On Rollin’”** [1995] ; **“Back To The Future Now - Live In Las Vegas”** [1997] ; **“Merry Christmas Y’All”** [1997] ; **“Ride With Bob”** [1999] ; **“The Very Best Of Asleep At The Wheel”** re-recordings, USA only [2001] ; **“Take Me Back To Tulsa”** as per 2001 USA album [2003] :

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