

## Slaid Cleaves – Bio

Richard Slaid Cleaves was born 9<sup>th</sup> June 1964 in South Berwick, Maine, and his two forenames come from his maternal grandfather. His mother, Jenny, is a kindergarten teacher and his father, Craig, a therapist. Slaid, the eldest of four siblings, has two bothers and a sister, Libby. From an early age, Cleaves listened to the family record collection and formed a lifelong affection for Hank Williams, Johnny Cash, Woody Guthrie, The Everly Brothers and The Beatles. By his mid-teen years he was a fan of The Clash and flirted with garage bands. One of them, The Magic Rats, took its name from a character in Springsteen's "Jungleland," and the line-up included his boyhood pal [and still occasional co-writer] Rod Picott. Springsteen's *Guthriesque* "**Nebraska**" is a particular Cleaves favourite. Following high school graduation, Slaid enrolled at Tufts University, Boston and studied English and Philosophy.

In 1985 the Mainer spent a year studying in Cork, Ireland having pursued a girlfriend there. When she dumped him within a week of his arrival on the Emerald Isle, as an antidote, he began writing songs and improving his guitar playing skills. In due course, he busked in the street. At the age of 25, back in Maine, Slaid decided to pursue a full time career in music, and formed The Moxie Men with his brother J. on bass and Mark Cousins on drums/percussion. Later, guitarist Pip Walker was added. The band played in local bars and in 1991, as a quartet, issued the cassette only recording "**Looks Good From The Road.**" A year earlier, Cleaves had issued his debut solo recording "**The Promise,**" also on cassette. Apart from seven Cleaves originals, the latter album included the Picott co-write "Wrecking Ball" [it also appeared on "**Looks Good...**"] and *nauling his colours to the mast from the outset*, Woody Guthrie's "Ain't Got No Home In This World Anymore." The support players included Walker, Picott and Charles Arthur. Enhanced by three previously unreleased demo cuts, from the three-piece version of The Moxie Men, dating from 1989, the foregoing pair of recordings were reissued on a single CD in 1998 by Portsmouth, New Hampshire label, Rock Bottom Records.

In late 1991, accompanied by his fiancée [now his wife], Karen, Slaid moved to Austin, Texas to pursue his career as a solo singer/songwriter. In Austin he began working with guitarist Mark Viator, and in 1992 Slaid entered the Kerrville Folk Festivals New Folk Songwriting competition. He was one of that year's half dozen winners. Cleaves cut and produced his sophomore solo album "**Life's Other Side**" [1992] in Austin, although it was initially released by the New Hampshire Play Hard label. The following year, supported by some of the city's finest musicians, including the late Champ Hood, Ron Erwin, Paul Sweeney and Viator, he self-released "**For The Brave & Free.**" For a few years the Mainer's career seemed to stall and during this time he formed the side project Cool Beans, the line-up of which was completed by Laura Nadeau and Janek Siegele.

In 1996 Cleaves was signed by Rounder/Philo Records and former Lucinda Williams sideman, Gurf Morlix was engaged to produce "**No Angel Knows.**" Recorded at Ben Blank Audio in Austin, the disc included four songs co-written with Picott, "Look Back At Me" with Nadeau, while the literate closing cut "29" was Slaid's tribute to Hank Williams Snr. The album, released in 1997, brought Slaid a deal of recognition and entered the Gavin Americana Chart. As a result he was able to commence touring on a national level, which he did for the ensuing two years, supported by The Cedarchoppers - Ivan Brown [upright bass] and Charles Arthur [guitar, steel guitar].

One of the main reasons why Cleaves had decided to relocate to Austin, instead of Seattle or Nashville, was that writers like Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Ray Wylie Hubbard, who he greatly respected, lived there. Cleaves and Hubbard toured Europe together in 1997. That said, when gigs weren't plentiful, Slaid would book himself into the local Pharmaco International Clinic earning \$100/day as a *guinea pig* testing new drugs.

In January 2000, Philo released Cleaves' *breakthrough* album, "**Broke Down,**" the title cut of which was a Picott collaboration. The ten-song collection, many of which possessed subjectively dark lyrics included, one other Picott collaboration, some penned with local scribes Karen Poston and Steve Brooks, plus the Woody Guthrie co-write "This Morning I Am Born Again." Produced by Morlix at his new home studio, Rootball, the album spent five weeks at # 1 on the Gavin Americana Chart. It also made a significant impression at the Y2K Folk Alliance Conference in Cleveland, and later that year Slaid performed at the Newport Folk Festival alongside Texas based musicians Hubbard and Willie Nelson. In the wake of "**Broke Down**" Cleaves toured solidly for the following three years in North American and Europe.

During 2003 Cleaves took part in the Guthrie narrative/song tribute tour “Ribbon Of Highway, Endless Skyway” alongside Jimmy LaFave, Bob Childers [narrator], Eliza Gilkyson, Ellis Paul, Johnny Irion and Sarah Lee Guthrie. Slaid’s third Philo album, “**Wishbones**,” the title cut of which he co-wrote with Hubbard, was issued in February 2004. The recording was produced by Gurf Morlix. Released in late May 2006, “**Unsung**,” a collection of cover songs, was recorded in Nashville at True Tone Recording, and co-produced by studio owner David Henry and Rod Picott.

Discography :

With The Moxie Men : “**Looks Good From The Road**” [1991] :

Solo : “**The Promise**” [1990] ; “**Life’s Other Side**” [1992] ; “**For The Brave & Free**” [1993] ; “**No Angel Knows**” [1997] ; “**Broke Down**” [2000] ; “**Holiday Sampler**” [2001] ; “**Wishbones**” [2004] ; “**Unsung**” [2006] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 01/04, 02/04 & 06/06

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