

Tracing the 'Bloodline'

BY STEPHEN CENTANNI

Band: Country Band Contraband Tour feat. Muscadine Bloodline, James Tucker | Date: Friday, Aug. 26, with doors at 7 p.m.
Venue: Soul Kitchen, 219 Dauphin St., soulkitchenmobile.com | Tickets: \$25-\$50 available through the venue's website

After spreading their country sounds nationwide, Muscadine Bloodline is once again returning to the place where it all started. Soul Kitchen provided the setting where Charlie Muncaster and Gary Stanton decided to leave behind their solo careers and collaborate on what would become Muscadine Bloodline. From there, the duo served as one of many local bands that helped kindle the Azalea City's original country music scene into what it is today.

This homecoming show will feature a fresh, live dose of Muscadine Bloodline's modern indie country goodness, which is built upon bright vocal harmonies, warm acoustic guitar and stellar songwriting.

After catching up with Stanton and Muncaster, Music Editor Steve Centanni discussed Muscadine Bloodline's current tour, their homecoming show and the band's shift from the single/EP trend to full-album experiences.

Steve Centanni: You're out on the Country Band Contraband Tour. What's that experience been like?

Gary Stanton: Man, it's been great. We took about a five-month hiatus after burning up the road for seven years. We started back in June, and we've been all gassed up from that break. It's been great. The crowds have been awesome. We've been all across the Midwest and Southeast and into Texas. We've also got some dates coming up in Colorado soon. We couldn't ask for more.

Centanni: It's been a while since we've talked. How has touring changed since you first started getting out beyond Alabama?

Charlie Muncaster: Besides riding a little more comfortably now, it really feels the same. There's more energy at the shows and bigger crowds. So, that's always better, and it makes the surroundings a little easier. Getting up there and playing the show every night is really the same.

Centanni: What's something you've learned about yourselves and the business since you've hit the national scene?

Stanton: A lot! It's different for us, because we've done everything from the get-go. It's been learn-as-you-go. When we were in Mobile playing Brickyard and Saddle-Up Saloon or wherever we were playing, it was to go up, play some covers, grab a beer and pick up a check. When you realize how to streamline this thing and it grows, you realize there's a whole lot more than just playing a show. It's a business that you're running. It's been cool to be at the helm of this thing. Our business has been in our hands. It's adjustments and working hard and just keeping our heads down and sticking to our guns and doing what we've been doing.

Muncaster: Sticking to your guns and going with your gut is definitely one thing that we've learned. It'll leave it in a good spot, as long as you stick with it. It'll take a little while, but you'll be happy at the end.



Photo | facebook.com/muscadinebloodline

Centanni: Up until "Burn It at Both Ends," Muscadine Bloodline has relied on singles and EPs to get the music out. Earlier this year, you did it again with another full-length called "Dispatch to 16th Avenue." What made you want to make the shift into full-lengths?

Muncaster: Man, I think it had to do a little with climate. For years, we felt like the fans were consuming singles more. A few years ago, we had a goal to release more music than anybody in Nashville, which I think we succeeded at doing. I do think we learned that you can put out a little too much music. Gary and I were sitting in my office one day and had written a song. We were actually arranging "Burn It at Both Ends" and deciding whether we wanted it to be an EP or a couple of singles. We had never cut a full-length record before, and we looked at each other and were like, "Dude, I think it's just time."

I can't remember any artist who had a famous EP. There's a turning point in your career as an artist where if you want to be taken seriously for decades to come, albums are just the route you have to take.

Stanton: On an economic level, we didn't have the money to release a full-length album. We didn't have a label fronting the money. We had to get to a level where we could afford to do it. Now that it's going as well as it's been going, we want to be a

record band. We're going to put out singles, but they'll be singles for records. When we were putting out the "Dispatch to 16th Avenue" record, we were already working on the record that will be coming out early next year. We put out the single "Me on You," and it's been the most well-received song that we've ever had, if not the best.

It's been awesome to see where we're taking the music is where the fans want to see it go. We've pulled our ship into harbor, as far as finding our sound. Now, it's been, "OK, man, we're making the music that we really love and want to do, and this is the stuff that people are really digging."

Centanni: Speaking of "Me on You," it's one of those catchy, upbeat country love poems. How did this song come to life?

Stanton: A guy that co-produces with us named Ryan Youmans, I was going to his house and laying down riffs and trying to come up with choruses. Me and Ryan wrote the chorus and had that funky riff. Me and Charlie sat down as we normally do. The last couple of years, it has been me, Charlie and Ryan writing songs, especially on the next record. We'll sit down at the kitchen table at one of our houses and be like, "Hey, man, this is what we're working on." Charlie spat out the first line of the first verse, and we were like, "This is gonna be something right here." When we started playing it, we had that goosebumps feeling.

Centanni: You mentioned that'll be included on the next full-length. What else can we expect?

Muncaster: I would say that this is going to be the most fun record that we've put out. Almost every song has an upbeat tempo. There's a lot of energy on this record similar to "Me on You." After you play your songs for years and years, you start looking at the holes in your sets and the needs. This record fills a lot of those needs, I'll tell you that. So, we're bringing a lot of energy for this one.

Stanton: To add to that, the songwriting on this record is the most prolific that we've done before. We're writing a lot of geo-specific stuff about South Alabama and where we grew up and what we know. It's more in-depth and has more story songs on it, even though it might not be a radio single. There are odes to songwriters that we love. There's more red dirt rock like Steve Earle. It's gonna make the live show a lot more special.

Centanni: How does it feel to come home and play at a venue where you started out?

Muncaster: It's always special coming back to Soul Kitchen. Gary and I met there. From years and years of grinding and playing covers in that venue to 25 people to 50 people to 100. To come back and play the big side of the room is a special thing. It's always kinda emotional coming back there. Not only did we meet there, but our families are always there and friends from high school. Brad and Maggie at Soul Kitchen have always been good to us, and we're always gonna try to go back to Soul Kitchen.

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