

The Hour

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'Blood, Sweat & Tears guitarist to appear in Norwalk

Steve Katz to talk about his new book at Norwalk library

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NORWALK — In his recently published memoirs "Blood, Sweat, and My Rock 'N' Roll Years," Steve Katz hints at what is to come, when he writes in the book's introduction: "Rock stardom, real or imagined, drives people to some pretty weird places. I'm one of the fortunate ones. I walked through that door and, for the most part, stayed fairly sane. But boy, do I have a story to tell you . . ."

It took Katz, founding member of Blood, Sweat & Tears, about two years to put that story into book form, and the resulting "Blood, Sweat, and My Rock 'N' Roll Years" was published earlier this year by Lyons Press. In his memoirs, Katz presents an honest and illuminating insider's view into the music scene of the '60s, plus much more, written by someone who was in the thick of it. Steve Katz will share his insights and his music when he appears in a special "Author-Speak Concert" event at 3 p.m. on Saturday, November 28, at the Norwalk Public Library, located at 1 Belden Avenue in Norwalk. Admission is free. To register, contact Cynde Bloom Lahey, Director of Library In-

formation Services, (203) 899-2780, ext. 15133, or clahey@norwalkpubliclibrary.org.

Katz decided to write the book for a number of reasons. "I had gone back with Blood Sweat & Tears for a few years," explained Katz, during a recent interview. "The last gig I did with them (2012) was so weird, that I had to write a little essay about it, mostly for myself. I enjoyed writing it so much that I wanted to write more and then decided to write my memoirs."

Katz played guitar, sang and wrote songs for Blood, Sweat & Tears. He was with the band in the early years, when BS&T's solid, original sound and sophisticated horn arrangements revolutionized rock, and the

group's pop-friendly songs rode the radio charts. During Katz's time with the band, BS&T won three Grammy Awards, including Album of the Year. Their hits included "You Made Me So Very Happy" and "And When I Die." And Katz penned the classic "Sometimes in Winter," one of several he wrote for the band, which also appears on the soundtrack of the Coen Brothers film "Fargo." He's got three gold and one quadruple platinum record and has sold approximately 29 million records in all.

"At this age, and through all I had experienced and the people that I had crossed paths with in my life, I felt it was time to take the advice of so many of

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Contributed photo
Blood, Sweat & Tears guitarist Steve Katz will appear at a "Author-Speak Concert on Saturday.

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my friends to write about my career," said Katz. "Combine this with the interest that so many people of my generation have for the '60s, and I knew the time was right to finally take advantage of my old skills as an English major in college and devote myself to this project."

Before BS&T, Katz played washboard in the Even Dozen Jug Band that included Maria Muldaur, John Sebastian, David Grisman and Stefan

Grossman. Along with Danny Kalb and Al Kooper, he was a member of the Blues Project, a seminal New York City original rock and blues band that eventually morphed into the first of many configurations of Blood Sweat & Tears. He became a noted record producer, with two Lou Reed discs, including "Rock 'n' Roll Animal," under his guidance. He also produced the Irish band Horslips and NRBQ, among others. He was involved in the business side of the industry, too,

eventually becoming a record company exec. He was VP for Mercury Records. Later in his career, he worked for Green Linnet Records, an independent CT-based label that specialized in Irish music, all of which is covered in the book.

For the library program, Katz, who defines himself musically as a singer-songwriter, guitarist, harmonica player, and washboard player, will "sing songs and tell stories based on my career, all in chronological order. I don't do the 'hits,' just songs I've written and have been influenced by, like Mississippi John Hurt, The Memphis Jug Band, some Blues Project stuff, BS&T, etc." It's not

surprising that blues comes up first on the list. Katz notes early in the book that a recording by legendary bluesman Rev. Gary Davis, "Blind Gary Davis: Harlem Street Singer," stays on his top-ten list. "I remember Robert Johnson's album, 'King of the Delta Blues' as the first country blues album I listened to," said Katz, in the interview. "The next albums I purchased were Harry Smith's 'Anthology of American Folk Music,' Sam Charter's 'Country Blues,' and Reverend Davis's 'Harlem Street Singer.' Country blues and roots music in general became my favorite genre, and I was lucky to be able to take lessons from masters like Dave Van Ronk and Reverend Davis himself."

Katz pulls very few punches, if any, in "Blood, Sweat, and My Rock 'N' Roll Years," and there are a number of interesting facts uncovered in the book. For example, when Al Kooper left the band

needed a new lead singer, and one of the people considered to replace him was Laura Nyro, the singer-songwriter who wrote the hit "And When I Die." Instead, David Clayton-Thomas, who is not treated kindly in the book, was chosen. On Lou Reed's live recording "Rock 'n' Roll Animal," one of the live audience stereo tracks didn't record. So, in post-production, a live audience track from a John Denver concert was used in its place. He also admits to passing on an opportunity to sign a young Irish group called U2 to Mercury Records, when he was in Ireland producing an album for Horslips.

Asked how writing the memoir compares to some of the many other things he's done in his career, Katz said: "It's not too different than writing a song, except that a book is in free verse and factual - objective, if it's a memoir, rather than subjective. But there's still that blank canvas that you have to fill, although in

many ways writing a book is easier than a song, because the form is less compressed. It just takes a lot longer to write a book. And of course memoirs are also a little less challenging because the basic plot is already outlined."

Katz said he will be doing more library appearances after the Norwalk event. "It all will be posted on my website or Facebook page." And he plans to continue writing songs again, too. He's lived in Connecticut "for 17 delightful years." He is a professional photographer, and he and his wife, Alison Palmer, a ceramics artist, have a ceramics shop "Alison Palmer Studio" in South Kent. In retrospect, Katz considers himself fortunate. He writes in the book's introduction: "I was a product of the times in which I lived, but thankfully, I wasn't a casualty." For more information, visit: <http://stevekatzmusic.wordpress.com/> or <https://www.facebook.com/steve.katz.7>