

An Interview with Steve Chapman
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Interviewed by: Susan Johnson

Steve Chapman was first known to the world as Al Stewart's drummer and in the mid 80s he started managing Al's touring business. With that experience, he started his own artist management company. Thirteen musicians are signed to Chapman Management: Rick Braun, Richard Elliott, Al Stewart, Peter White, Jeff Golub, Jeff Lorber, Marc Antoine, Paul Brown, Steve Cole, David Benoit, Kyle Eastwood, Gerald Albright, and Down to the Bone. Steve works with Rick, Richard, Al, Marc, Steve, Jeff Golub and Peter and Ron Moss handles the others.

SmoothViews (SV): You started your career as a drummer/percussionist for Al Stewart and were in a group named The Pandas? I read that you got Poco back together for their Legends tour? Tell us a little about your early career.

Steve Chapman (SC): I was really a drummer and I just happened to play percussion on an Al Stewart Live record called *Indian Summer* in 1981. That was just a brief interlude and then for a minute I went out with him playing live in, I think it was '84 or '85, playing a bit of percussion but then I went back to playing drums with him. At the time it was sort of an unplugged thing when I played percussion. My first recording band was called Pandamonium. Spelled like Panda... like that. I went through a whole slew of bands in England and then started touring the States with Leo Sayer and then Al Stewart. When I finally moved here at the end of 1977, Poco had kind of disbanded and I hooked up with Rusty Young, Paul Cotton and an English bass player named Charlie Harrison and we were going to form a band called the Cotton Young Band. We started rehearsing and recording and ABC, Poco's record label at the time, wanted one more Poco record. So we just did the Poco record and abandoned the Cotton Young thing and just carried on as Poco.

I started playing drums in school. When I was 15, we had a little band in school called the Fables. I used to promote dances and stuff. I would put Fables in as the opening act and rent a church hall and hire a headliner... it was always in the blood. When I left school, I was like 16 or 17; I got a job at a music publisher called Essex Music, where my sister was working. They were a big pop music publisher of the day and David Platz, the owner, funded a whole series of independent producers... Denny Cordell, Gus Dudgeon, Don Paul. Denny was producing the Move, Procol Harem, Joe Cocker, acts like that and Gus Dudgeon was producing Elton John. They published Pink Floyd, David Bowie, The Who, Rolling Stones... so I got to meet all these characters. I was there two years. I started off as the office boy/errand boy. Then I started running the music library and then I started running the acetate cutting room where we made demos. Back then, you made them on an acetate, you know... to pitch a song to somebody else that you were trying to get a cover on... it was pre-cassette tape, so you'd either send it out on a

reel-to-reel tape or an acetate. So I'd be in the cutting room making these acetates and also recording people and copying tapes. Like Pete Townsend would come in with some home demos from *The Who Sell Out* album and I'd put them onto acetate so they could be sent out to different people. Bowie came in and I recorded Bowie there on a couple of open reel-to-reels, just guitar and voice and stuff. I did that for about six months and then got into record promotion and while I was doing that... actually, when I first went there I had joined a band called Pandamonium because this kid, Bob Ponton, was also working there at the time and they needed a drummer. Then when that fell apart, one of the bands that Denny Cordell was producing was called Juniors Eyes and their drummer had just left to join some other band. They asked if I'd like to come and play with them and I joined them and so for about three or four months I was still working doing record promotion and playing with this band. That just got to be too much, so I had to decide whether to commit full-time to music or stay in the business. There was no choice! I had to be a musician! (laughs) So I sort of became a professional, as it were, when I was 18. And that lasted all the way up until I went into management in my late 30s or something. Julia's Eyes put a record out. Denny started producing it and then Tony Visconti ended up finishing it off. Tony had just come from New York and then he went on to produce T Rex and Bowie and all this other stuff. We were on Denny's label called Regal Zonophone in England and A&M in the States.

So I was already somewhat grounded in [in the business side of music], especially in the publishing area. All through my musician years, I always had a keen understanding of the organizational side and how the deals were made.

SV: How did you end up as Al's tour manager?

SC: I went out with him playing percussion, this kind of unplugged thing, and at the time he didn't have anyone. He had no manager and had no one to do the tour management stuff. I just came in and picked up the tour management stuff. So I was playing in the band and being tour manager and that kind of segued into being his manager. I think for about a year or year-and-a-half, I would still play in the band with him and manage him. Then, getting close to the end of the 80s, I took on some other clients and I just didn't have time. So I would hire another drummer to go on the European tours. I just did a few shows over here. The last show I played with him was in 1989 and I didn't pick up a drum stick until about a year ago. I'm going to band practice tonight with Chris Desmond, who actually produced a couple of Al Stewart albums, and a couple of other guys... ones a movie guy and the other is in the wine business. We try and play every week, usually ends up being twice a month. I really have no desire to go play shows. It's strictly for fun.

SV: Why did you make the switch from Al's manager and drummer to starting your own company and when did that happen?

SC: It was just one of those things. It was an organic thing, really. I'd signed Al to a record label called Enigma and they had a small jazz department called Intima. Richard Elliott was signed to it and Exchange and Fatburger and a band called Windows. One of the principals of Windows was Skipper Wise and he was a good friend of Peter White's. They were neighbors and Skipper knew that I was working with Enigma, so he asked me if I'd be their manager. So I got involved with them. This was in the early days of what was called NAC, New Adult Contemporary, which morphed into smooth jazz in the mid-90s. So I started working with Skip, representing Windows and then he did some solo stuff. At the same time, Peter wanted to do a record so we started shopping a deal for Peter White and finally got him his licensing deal with Chase Music Group. Then I was working with Al, Peter and Windows and I had another... Tom Borton, and a singer-songwriter, Ian Matthews, and it just kind of grew organically and I didn't have time to be on the road anymore as a musician with Al.

Then it grew going into the early 90s and after I stopped working with Tom and Windows, I really pared it down to just Ian, Al, and Peter. And I was just going to pretty much concentrate on bringing on some new singer-songwriters. Then Jim Snowden, who was running Mesa/Blue Moon, kept bugging me about this guy, Rick Braun. I went to see him and I thought he was great! If I remember right, Skipper and I went to see him and I thought, "Yeah, this guy is amazing!" So I took Rick on and then after about a year, that started taking off. Then Richard Elliott came on board and by that point, Peter White's career had really taken off. So it was great. We had Peter White, Richard Elliott, Rick Braun. So I said, "Well, I'm not going to fight this anymore." You know what I mean? This is great. It works. Then Marc Antoine came on board and then I started hiring staff. Then later on Ron Moss came on as a manager and so it just kind of grew from there. Now we have six people working here and the record company!

SV: Why did you decide to relocate from England to Los Angeles and manage contemporary jazz musicians?

SC: It was in late '77. Everything... most of what I was doing, musician-wise, was over here. It was pretty slim pickings over in England. I was coming up on 30 and England always had this very healthy R&B/Country Rock thing that was popular in the States. But going towards the end of 70s, the whole punk thing was taking off major in England. I was totally into Country Rock and had no desire to be in a punk band. I enjoyed the vibe, but it wasn't my thing. Myself and a whole bunch of guys... a couple of my contemporaries and others moved to LA, New York, and San Francisco. I was here about two months and got hired for the Poco thing and I just ended up staying.

SV: What criteria do you look for when signing a new artist to Chapman Management?

SC: This is true whether it's an instrumentalist or a vocalist or whatever, you ideally want them to be great songwriters. They've got to have a unique

signature as an artist. Something that sets them apart from any other vocalist, in style... this is especially the case with instrumentalists because it's much harder to identify the different instrumentalists, so they've all got to have a unique style. They've got to have a charisma and be able to perform... be great performers... or if you find a diamond in the rough, you can work with them and help them become a really strong performer. That's really about it. It's really an instinct thing, you know. We get bombarded with demos here and at the record company even more and there's a lot of stuff that isn't that great. There's only a handful of stuff that really sits out from the pack. For instance, Peter White. When we first started talking about doing a solo record, Peter is an extremely accomplished keyboard player and plays a lot of instruments. So his vision of a solo record was to do maybe a keyboard thing here, an organ thing here, an acoustic guitar there, an electric guitar there, and I said, "Look. You really need to focus and narrow it down to one thing you can do best. The thing that most identifies you is your nylon string guitar." And all that Al Stewart stuff that he did. He played three notes and you knew it was Peter White. So he, almost reluctantly, agreed to do that. And he tried it and it really worked. Peter White. That's what he does. And now, Peter gets up on stage and plays like three notes or six notes and that's Peter White. You know who it is. Richard Elliott has that tone and phrasing. He leans his head back and blows a couple of notes and it's Richard Elliott. Rick Braun plays four notes on the trumpet and you know it's Rick Braun. There's no question about it. I think you have to have that identifiable hook. As a vocalist, you don't have to be a great singer necessarily, but you have to have a personality in your voice that makes you unique and sets you apart from the pack. I mean, Al Stewart, love or hate his voice, he's Al Stewart. Know what I mean? Bob Dylan, Neil Young, all of these great guitarists have these amazing, unique personality voices. I think that's really the key. Having the uniqueness and style.

SV: What is one of the toughest challenges for you as a business owner in the music industry?

SC: Just keeping up with the changes and the way business is done. That's the biggest challenge. And keep forging ahead and always trying to keep one step ahead of the pack. Ideally, if you could be a leader and not a follower, which is what you strive for and hopefully you do that and get it right, half the time! (laughs)

SV: How has satellite radio and downloading affected the artists you manage?

SC: The downloading thing is going to affect... it is affecting it somewhat, but [in the future] it is going to affect it in a major way. We're all seeing first-hand with ARTizen because we actually get those numbers and statements directly from... we go through an organization called IODA, which is an independent company that collects royalties from iTunes and all the other services. Right now, iTunes accounts for 92% of our downloads on Elliott and Braun. And it's starting to become a real revenue stream. And it

will only grow and grow and grow, as probably CD sales erode. So it's going to become major and, at some point, will become the delivery system. I don't think CDs will ever go away completely, but I think so many people, especially as you get more advanced and evolved home entertainment centers... I don't know how long that will be... five years, maybe ten years... maybe you'll see CES this time out. The whole buzz is integrated home entertainment systems, whether it's a Microsoft thing or an Apple thing or Yahoo or Google. Everyone is trying to get into that game because that's going to be the ultimate delivery system for all music that's coming into the house, all movies coming into the house, all TV, all cable... it's all going to be integrated into some sort of centralized delivery system. At that point, when these things come into your house and if you want to burn CDs from that, whether it is a DVD of a movie or a CD, you can do that. Then you can use that in your car or office or wherever else you want to go. Even with the iPod, all of my music is now in my computer and on my iPod. I'm gradually moving all of my CD collection in there and some of my vinyl's are actually in there. So that's where I think it's all going in terms of downloads.

Satellite radio, I think, is absolutely wonderful. I have XM and I just re-subscribed to it. When Steve Stiles was running "Watercolors" (contemporary jazz channel)... Steve went to XM from WNUA in Chicago and now he's back at WNUA... he gave me a subscription to XM and put a player in my car because they were trying to convert people in the early days and I always loved it. The jazz channel is brilliant. They had a singer/songwriter channel called The Loft and Steve's Watercolors was terrific. Satellite radio is a lot more pure and they can take chances programming-wise. Hopefully they'll stay on track with that, you know. As with any of this stuff, when it becomes successful, maybe it will become corrupted and they'll start putting commercials on it, too. Hopefully not! Right now, I think it's terrific. Has it had an impact on people? Well, certainly for music lovers. You're exposed to more new music, which is a great thing.

In the record industry, period, all CD sales are down. I think in jazz, they're possibly more down, proportionately perhaps, for a number of reasons. One of the reasons is that a lot of the major accounts... Tower, Virgin, Borders, Barnes and Noble... maybe back a few years ago they would have gotten in their initial order of CDs and they would have kept those CDs in for a year until they turned. Now, a lot of accounts, if those CDs haven't turned in 90 days, they just send them back. They're not keeping the amount of stock that they used to. I think that's certainly hurt our corner because being an adult audience, you know, they don't rush out and buy a new CD. And smooth jazz is, in some ways, a lifestyle music and there's a lot of music out there, so maybe you have to keep striving when you make these records to do something different and give people a reason why they should buy your new album. Once you've done 10 albums, it's like people already have a body of your work so they're going to listen to that for years and years, so you've got to change it up each time to give them a reason to get the new disc.

SV: You are involved in the new record label, ARTizen, with musicians Rick Braun and Richard Elliott and music attorney and owner of A-Train Management, Al Evers. What would you like to accomplish with your own label that a larger label might not?

SC: We want to make a home for artists. I mean, certainly for the partners. That was part of the motivation... where we have a little more control and we aren't at the whim of major labels and how decisions are made at a corporate level. Rick had gone through a couple of traumatic things. First, at Mesa/Blue Moon when it was sold to Atlantic and we were left up in the air for awhile before it was all sorted out. Then after that deal was up, he went to Warner and Warner was fantastic! All of the sudden, the marketplace changes and corporate just decides, oh they don't want Warner Jazz anymore, so you have in the space of two years, what was arguably the most vital jazz department of any major label and it's just disbanded. After having been through that a couple of times, and then Ron Goldstein of Verve announced that they wouldn't be signing any new smooth jazz or jazz or whatever... so it was just a question of wanting to have more control over it and provide a stable environment for the artists we sign.

Now, having said that, we have the same business challenges that the major labels have. We have to make a profit or at least break even. So, we've got to be making records and selling them and be smart with our marketing money and promotion money and recording budgets and all of that. There's no free lunch, as it were.

SV: Has ARTizen signed any new artists?

SC: We just signed Shilts of Down to the Bone and Rick is producing him. The record should be finished by mid-February for, hopefully, a mid-May release. Then we're going to do a Peter White "Best of" from his early catalog later in the year. Then we're talking with a number of other people about some catalog pieces. And we're going to be releasing **Sessions** into mainstream retail probably in May as well. There's been talk about maybe Richard doing a Sessions, sort of "Best of" live. We're still in the discussion stages, but it's possible that Rick Braun and Richard Elliott will do a Duets record.

SV: What do you think is the future of contemporary jazz and how can you prepare to face the changes?

SC: It's really hard to say. The music... there's always had a common theme through the whole contemporary jazz thing, going back to mid-80s until now. So it's been around for 20 years and I think that they'll always be a loyal listener base for it. There will always be the festival circuit and all of that. Whether it will ever get back to the glory days of the mid-90s, I have no idea. Could another style of instrumental contemporary jazz sort of morph out of what it is now? Almost certainly. Now, what that is. I don't know. Everyone is sort of looking at that and going, "Where's it going next?" The whole chill thing... that could be direction that could take off. As of yet, it

hasn't really. It'll be hybrids. There's a lot of interesting stuff coming out of England. A lot of funk stuff in the vein of Icoognito, who forged that path awhile ago. I don't know. These things usually happen organically. Like with New Age... how that just developed. And the whole R&B-based smooth jazz thing just sort of developed out of what was loosely termed fusion, melodic fusion, or whatever. So it's really hard to say what it is. What hybrid or style will be next. But certainly for the thing to stay alive, it has to change. That's a given. You look at different styles of music throughout the decades and country music has come and gone a few times. Country rock was really strong in the 70s and then fizzled out in the 80s with the coming of punk and New Age and now that music sounds weird. And then you have the high hair movement and pop rock in the 80s and then grunge comes along in the 90s and it's huge and lasts five or six year movement. There's always different kinds of movement. And hip-hop. Who would have thought hip-hop would still be with us 20 years later? And that elements of hip-hop have been incorporated into smooth jazz? Major! People are always borrowing from each other and being inspired by different sources. You never know where the next hybrid will come from. Almost everything seems to have been done. You go back to pop music in the 60s, the very simple... Beatles, bass, drums, guitars and then it's gone every which way into different levels of sophistication. What is new? Usually now, it's just a hybrid or a style. I don't have a crystal ball to know what will be the new big thing. But great songs always endure. And great vocals and great instrumental always endure. Things that connect with peoples hearts. It's a very visceral thing.

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