

Charlie Daniels, Southern Rock Pioneer and Fiddle Great, Dead at 83

NASHVILLE, July, 6 2020-Singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Charlie Daniels, who played bass and guitar on Bob Dylan's 1969 *Nashville Skyline* LP and would go on to pioneer the burgeoning Southern rock movement with his namesake Charlie Daniels Band, died Monday at 83. His publicist confirmed Daniels' death from a hemorrhagic stroke to *Rolling Stone*.

With his fiery fiddle at the forefront of much of his recorded output, the leader of the Charlie Daniels Band paved the way for the mainstream country-rock success of that group and others, including Alabama and Lynyrd Skynyrd, and crossed over into the pop charts with his best-known song, 1979's Grammy-winning "The Devil Went Down to Georgia." A country chart-topper about a fiddle contest between a boy named Johnny and Satan, the song also spent a pair of weeks at Number Three on *Billboard's* Hot 100.

Charles Edward Daniels was born October 28th, 1936, in the seacoast town of Wilmington, North Carolina, the only child of teenagers William and LaRue Daniel – the "s" at the end of his name was the result of a mistake on his birth certificate. Two weeks after Daniels started elementary school, his family moved to Valdosta, Georgia, bouncing between there and Elizabethtown, North Carolina, until finally moving back to Wilmington. A feverish bout with childhood measles forced Daniels to wear eyeglasses for most of his life, making him a target of school bullies, but the youngster, who grew up on Saturday matinees of Western films and Saturday nights spent listening to the Grand Ole Opry, would soon find his niche performing and writing songs.

Daniels' first musical gig was playing mandolin in a bluegrass band called the Misty Mountain Boys in the Fifties, but by the end of the decade, he was gigging around clubs in Washington, D.C. and Maryland. His band at the time, the Rockets, would change their name to the Jaguars after the success of their instrumental hit "Jaguar," released as a single on Epic Records, the same label for which Daniels would again record by the mid-Seventies. His co-writer on "Jaguar" was Don Johnston, a Fort Worth, Texas songwriter and record producer better known as "Bob" Johnston who would play a major role in Daniels' future Nashville career.

In 1967, Daniels followed Johnston to Nashville, with the latter producing sessions for Columbia Records. "I had always wanted to live in Nashville," Daniels told *Rolling Stone* in 2017. "That was going to be it for me. Bob made it possible for me to come there."

He soon began a steady stream of session work, playing fiddle, bass, and guitar on Leonard Cohen's 1969 LP *Songs From a Room* and its 1971 follow-up *Songs of Love and Hate*, and appearing on recordings by Marty Robbins, Pete Seeger, Flatts & Scruggs, and Claude King.

But it was Bob Dylan who would give him his biggest boost. In 1969, he joined Johnston in the studio to record Dylan's *Nashville Skyline*. Although initially admonished for playing too loudly in the sessions, Daniels would appear on three consecutive Dylan albums and also play on Ringo Starr's 1970 post-Beatles foray into country, *Beaucoups of Blues*. During this period, Daniels had his songs cut by Barbara Mandrell and Tammy Wynette, and himself began to work as a producer, overseeing projects by Gary and Randy Scruggs and the Youngbloods.

In 1970, Daniels released his self-titled solo debut on Capitol Records, a collection that bridged rambling Sixties hippie-centric rock and blues with the more defined country-

rock with which he would become most closely associated. In 1973, he had a hit with the single "Uneasy Rider," a bluegrass-influenced talking-blues tune with a pot-smoking hippie as its counterculture protagonist, via the Kama Sutra label, and the next year released the LP *Way Down Yonder*, his fourth album and the first under "The Charlie Daniels Band." (www.rollingstone.com)