

Bluesman Michael Charles celebrating 40 years as a solo artist with touring and revisiting first album

Written by Richard Amery

Saturday, 13 April 2024 10:44 - Last Updated Saturday, 13 April 2024 15:52

Australian born, Chicago based blues musician and Chicago Blues Hall of fame member Michael Charles is excited to celebrate 40 years as a solo musician with a tour that includes a return visit to the Slice, Thursday, April 18.

“Forty years as Michael Charles as a solo artist. I had a career before that because I played in a bunch of bands in my early years. But it’s been 40 years when I decided to say I’m just gonna do the Michael Charles Thing,” said Charles, taking a break from recording new material in his from his Chicago based recording studio.

“I just can’t believe how the years fly by. It’s just rock and roll for me. I’ve done this my whole life I can’t remember not doing it . And I’m still enjoying it like it’s 40 years ago, ” he said, Adding his love for performing has and the feed feedback from audiences is what keeps him going.

“It’s a passion, just love for playing music.



I just find my job so rewarding just meeting people and you get off the stage and people come up to you and complementing you on what they’ve heard and what you’ve done for them. One of the biggest buzzes I get out of it if you want to call it a buzz is the certain people will come up to me and say that particular song that saved my live because it pulled me through a rough time or rough period in my life. And just knowing that you can write material and affect people in that way is quite rewarding. And I think that’s another reason I keep doing this,” he continued.

He has fond memories of the Slice and Lethbridge.

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“The Slice to me was one of the first places that I played when I toured Chicago many years ago. The last three or four years I’ve been returning to the Slice and its so cool to return to places that have asked you back. Again, just that feeling knowing that you must have done something right if they keep asking you back . And you start getting a relationship with the venue owners and you get a relationship with the regulars who come in. It’s just very rewarding to know that people know you and want to hear you and see you. And for me it’s the ultimate compliment. So as long as they ask me back I will return,” he said.

Charles has been releasing a series of tour videos called Driven.

There is a shot of The Slice in “Driven 4, Forward,” which showcases some of the venues, festivals and television and radio spots Charles played last year

“We actually put a Driven little movie thing together every year going through what happened every year. I think we’re up to number 5. It’s great to be able to review the year and people that were at your shows, and have come out, that we’ve come to know and that I get to know who I am. They get an opportunity to look at something it and remember ‘Oh, I remember that. I was there. It’s just one of those things. It’s a bit of a promotional thing for me but it’s also out there for the venue owners, like a little thank you to let them know that I appreciate being a invited to their venues.

Michael Charles is originally from Melbourne , Australia and moved to Chicago 33 years ago after been invited to the Windy city by Blues legend Buddy Guy himself.

“ I’ve been living in Chicago 33 years now and I was invited to come to Chicago 33 years ago by the legendary Buddy Guy and his management. And I still recall when my manager in Australia said to me that ‘we’ve just been invited to come and play Chicago by the legendary Buddy Guy and his management to play at Legends, Buddy Guy’s club and I got asked what do you think. There was nothing to think about. Once you get an invitation like that, let’s go,” he said.

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“ So I got to Chicago and something clicked just kind of they picked me up at O’ Hare Airport in Chicago and the first stop was at Buddy Guy’s Legends and it was just this pure magic about the city there Chicago as we were driving into Chicago, it was a beautiful evening, it was a beautiful clear night, just looking at the skyline and then i get to the club and everybody was so warm and welcoming to me . There was just something about the vibe about Chicago so I thought I’d just come and hang out a little bit. I was there for two weeks and kept extending my visas until the United States said you can’t be extending anymore. So I started working towards green cards and becoming a citizen and things like that. And it all worked out for me. And it’s one of those deals where I think go with the flow and let life take you where you belong and things will work out. It felt like a natural progression and I’m still here, 33 years now,” he said.

Charles is revisiting his fortieth album for his fortieth anniversary.

“I’m actually working on new material. But the whole 40 year thing is that it’s when I decided to do the Michael Charles thing without being in a band. And one of the things I decided to do is rerelease the original album from 40 years ago with some bonus songs. Because the original album, when I recorded it and it got released, personally, I when would listen to it, I would say, ‘Man, I wish I had another chance to record these songs. ’I’m sure I could do them better than on the first album. So through the years I would always pick one of these songs off the original album and do a rerecording of it and throw it on one of my albums or bring it out as a singles. So what I’m doing is the original album and also bring out all the remakes of the original songs and so that should be out later this year. So that’s the plan for the fortieth let people hear where it all started,” he said. {youtube}8L1xbGnpsvw{/youtube}

He is going to remaster the original songs.

“I don’t want to mess with it too much. I think it’s great to try and leave those original sounds you had back then . And when you record something new these days that’s when you work with the

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newer sounds. And with the early stuff don't mess with it too much. Leave it as original as possible. Of course you got to clean things up because technology has improved so much. that when you play things back, the audio and everything is so much better. and if you don't clean it a little bit, you'll probably hear a little hiss here and maybe a little bit of audio that could improve the sound better," he said.

" But I don't really want to change the sound to the original recordings," he said.

He is known for playing marathon four hour plus long shows without a break, which he expects to play at the Slice on April 18.

" That's just me and everywhere I go. People sort of comment on that and say what is the deal with this non stop 4, 4 and a half hour shows you do. I've been doing that as long as I remember. i just don't like taking a break for the reason that when you're playing a show. Most acts will do 45 minutes and take a little break and get up again and do another and take another break. But for me it feels when you take a break it sort of breaks the momentum of the whole show. And I'm just having such a good time myself, playing that I just don't want to stop. I just keep going and going. That's pretty much. There's no real reason behind it. There's no trying to prove a point or anything like that. That's just me I guess. Once I'm on a roll, I just keep rolling with it. And I've had no complaints through the years, so I just keep doing it," Charles said.

He has close to 40 releases to choose a set from.

"What I do is I pick songs I enjoy playing, songs I think that the crowds would enjoy listening to and I also take a lot of note from what my audiences through the years have asked me — can you play a certain song or I'd love to hear that song off that album or that single you released. I just think it's important to please the audience. So if the audiences say that want to hear a

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particular song, I normally add it to my set list and it kind of stays in there. And that's how I've built up by requests, not particularly on the night, but requests through the years but people that e-mail and people that send it to you through social media that they'd like to hear. So that's how I put my sets together," he said.

He is busy touring and in the studio.

"I'm working in the studio, working on new material always, I'm working on the remaster of the "Try Another Key" album which was my first solo album and also really we're working really hard in the rehearsal stages, putting some new stuff together for the live shows. It's just constant. It really doesn't stop for me. If I'm not in the rehearsal room rehearsing with the band, I'm in the studio recording something new and if I'm not doing that I'm usually just strumming away on my guitar or fiddling on my keyboard and writing new songs. It's just what I do. I think it's important to stick with things that you love in life. Throughout the years I've got friends in life. I hear it so often saying I hate my job or I hate Mondays because I've got to go to work or I can't wait for the weekend to come again. I've never had those problems. I've played music my whole life. I've been a musician as long as I remember. Every day to me is the same. There's no weekdays and no weekends. I'm just constantly doing what I love and that's important. If think if people can find that in their lives I just think you've a happier life. It's important to be happy," he said.

Michael Charles plays the Slice , April 18 at 8 p.m.

— *by Richard Amery, L.A. Beat Editor*