

## **MORELAND & ARBUCKLE**

### **B i o g r a p h y**

Guitarist Aaron Moreland and harpist/vocalist Dustin Arbuckle have spent nearly a decade exploring the edges of American roots music. In the process – with help from the driving beat of drummer Brad Horner – Moreland & Arbuckle have forged a relentless and haunting sound that merges Delta blues, folk, rock, traditional country, soul and numerous other echoes and murmurs from an infinitely layered musical narrative that spans more than a century.

The Moreland & Arbuckle journey began when the two met at an open-mic jam at a club in Wichita, Kansas, in 2001. Moreland had just moved into town a few months earlier from Emporia – a city located some eighty-five miles to the northeast. A guitarist since age 15, his source material was admittedly diverse – Led Zeppelin, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Black Sabbath, Charley Patton, Motley Crue – but he'd settled into traditional blues by the time he'd arrived in Wichita in his mid-20s.

Arbuckle, a native of Wichita, had been playing in a blues rock bar band at the time, but his truest sensibilities ran a couple generations deeper, into the heart of the Mississippi Delta. He counts iconic figures like harpists Little Walter and Sonny Boy Williams and guitarist Son House among his most profound influences.

“It was kind of perfect,” says Arbuckle of the chance encounter between the two musicians. “We had a shared vision, in a place where there really wasn't much interest in – or support for – country blues.”

Moreland joined Arbuckle's blues rock band for the last few months before the project dissolved, then the two started a quartet called the Kingsnakes, which Arbuckle describes as “electrified Mississippi blues mixed with a sludgy, jam-oriented rock thing.” The project incorporated a range of sounds: soul, country, funk, jam rock, blues and whatever else worked. Horner joined in 2003, but left after just a few months. A few bass players came and went in the years that followed, until Moreland and Arbuckle discovered they could lay down a solid groove on their own – with the help of Horner, who had returned by the fall of 2006.

Then again, Moreland does his share of work at the bottom end. In addition to the more typical Telecaster and Les Paul guitars, his arsenal also includes a hand-crafted instrument consisting of four strings stretched across a cigar box. One string feeds into a bass amp, and the other three into a guitar amp. It's a gritty, electrified descendent of the cigar box guitars played by countless Delta bluesmen of the early 1900s who, for all of their innate talents, were too impoverished to afford the real thing.

“There was no real adjustment for me,” Moreland says of his first encounter with the instrument, which was crafted by a friend in Memphis. “I just picked it up and played it. When I play a regular guitar, I hold down those bottom strings with my thumb and pluck those to get a kind of groove going. So when I first started playing the cigar box with the bass string, it just worked perfect with my style of playing.”

Moreland & Arbuckle crafted three self-produced album in rapid-fire succession – *Caney Valley Blues* in 2005, *Floyd’s Market* in 2006 and *1861* in 2008. “There have been times in the past when I’ve gone on a rant that we’re not writing enough,” says Moreland. “But then I look at our catalog and say, ‘Well, that’s stupid. We’ve put out all this stuff in a short period of time.’ When I look at it that way, I’d say we’re fairly prolific.”

The band took that hefty catalog to Iraq for nearly two weeks in the fall of 2008 to play for the American troops stationed there. “It was a crazy awesome experience,” says Moreland. “Super-grueling. Twelve days of about four hours of sleep per day. From a physical standpoint, it was pretty tough. But to go into a tattered, war-torn area where tens of thousands of fellow Americans were putting their lives on the line every day, minute by minute, was a very rewarding experience. I’d never experienced anything like it before.”

Moreland & Arbuckle make their debut on Telarc International, a division of Concord Music Group, with the February 2010 release of *Flood*. The album is the latest step in the trio’s never-ending quest to unearth the rawest and most honest elements of the American music tradition – without getting caught up in definitions and categories that would only serve to limit the vision.

“It’s hard to say exactly what we are and what we do,” says Arbuckle. “Blues is definitely at the core, but we’re huge fans of all sorts of American music, and all of that comes through as well. Obviously, there are elements of traditional country in what we do, elements of vintage rock and roll, soul and all that sort of stuff. We always try to stay grounded in that traditional blues center, and at the same time branch out and do as many different things as we can while still keeping it consistent with the sound we’ve developed.”

Nearly a decade into the journey, *Flood* represents a turning point in the Moreland & Arbuckle story – a new layer of excavation at that point in the road where powerful forces meet and new secrets are discovered. “The record is very spooky,” says Arbuckle. “We’ve never made a record before that has the earthy, spooky vibe that this one has. It creates an atmosphere that’s ripe for storytelling. There’s something about this music that makes you want to settle in and listen.”

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