

Walter Samuel "Sam" Moss

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MOSS Walter Samuel "Sam" Moss, 54, departed Saturday, May 5, 2007. Sam was born in Asheville to the late Rev. and Mrs. Samuel Burns Moss. He was also preceded in death by his wife, Dido. Sam was a lifelong musician who ran Sam Moss Guitars (conveniently located between New York and Miami) from 1982 to 2003. He played in numerous bands and mentored countless musicians. Sam is survived by his sister, Ruth Moss, of Greensboro; and numerous family members. A celebration of Sam's life will be held at 3 p.m. Thursday, May 10, at Grace Court in Winston-Salem. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation or Arbor Acres, in the name of Sam and Diane Moss. "Sam has left the building."

This obituary was originally published in the Winston-Salem Journal.

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A beautiful eulogy to a guitar god no one's heard of

By Ed Bumgardner

Relish, May 2007

Some prayers never reach the sky

Some wounds never heal.

Sometime Friday night, maybe early Saturday morning, the World's Fading Man, proudly unreconstructed, got caught in life's fading twilight.

There was nothing left in his field of vision, no curtain to block the storm that had been raging for years.

He could no longer see the exceptionally long shadow he cast.

He had done his job for 40 years. He did it better than most; indeed, he was a master of his craft. He had served well, a natural-born man of merit and cool, the quintessential desperado under the eaves.

But he was tired, bone tired. It was time to retire as a sunnier clime beckoned.

Sam Moss, 54, lied on the couch in his living room. He was surrounded by the ephemera of his life - books, music memorabilia, guitars - all personal treasures and manifestos of an extraordinary life lived with passion and taste.

A gun was in his hand. There was no note. That wasn't Moss' style - that would be way too cliché, and he didn't traffic in clichés.

His message was a Silvertone guitar painted by a friend years ago. The guitar was placed on a guitar stand bathed in the soft glow of a low-wattage spotlight. A slogan was painted on the guitar: "You have to stand for something or you will fall for anything."

Such was the way of Sam Moss.

Resquiescat in pace.

Rest in peace. That's all she wrote.

The loss of this singular man is incalculable, a defining shift in the cosmos of those who knew Moss (a multitude that easily stretches into the thousands).

Too borrow from Moss' friend Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, Moss was baaaad and he was nationwide.

All who knew him are now shedding a salt-mine of tears; just because you can't see them doesn't mean they aren't there.

They are. Trust me. What you are reading is covered in tears.

Oh, Sam.

Sam Moss exuded a powerful energy, His mojo loomed large. He was magnetic to the extreme. The cat had reach.

To all who crossed his path over the past 40 years - particularly musicians and music fans - Moss was the quintessential guitarist in Winston-Salem, a master of the instrument by any standard.

Mitch Easter and the late Charles Greene, two masterful stringbenders who learned from and happily bowed to Moss; who, being Moss, would have no part of it.

We all learned from Moss. There is not a musician with whom he played or a person whose company he embraced, who did not come away from the experience better and more learned.

There were his bands: The Clique; The Imperturbable Teutonic Griffin featuring the Evil Doctor Moss and the Collins Light Show; The Uppinshades; Rhythm Method; Sweet Rye; Kingfish; The Sids; The Giggling Floundermen; Liquorhouse Soul Revue; Lesbian Truck Payment Experience; Peter May & The Rough Band, and The Sams.

And in every one, Moss was an unassuming Rock God - his onstage stance wide, guitar welded like Excalibur, mane of hair flying, cigarette dangling as he gave himself over to the song. He assimilated things but didn't imitate anyone; he was just Sam Moss, a man of boundless technique, bottomless cool and bonafide exquisite tone.

He was a musical sponge who picked up on everything and could play anything, seemingly without effort. His ears were always open, adding to knowledge and understanding that was vast and appeared limitless.

But Moss was also very human, despite the dictates of The Mythology of Sam that followed him and will inevitably only deepen with time.

Sam instinctively duck-walked along the edge for years. He suffered no fools and could be a bear to work with if you couldn't keep up (but you always learned something). As darkness began to engulf him, he waved away all attempts at assistance or inquiries of concern.

He was Sam Moss. It was his world. Respect it.

And we all did - such was the reverence in which he was held.

Everyone wanted to be "Sam approved."

Over the last few years, his extraordinary played could be erratic, but his desire to "hit the note" never flagged. And when he was on with a band locked tight behind him, he would tear through impossibly inventive, scorched-earth guitar solos that would leave one breathless.

Sam Moss really was that good.

For years, he ran Sam Moss Guitars on Burke Street. He was single-handedly responsible for introducing vintage-guitar collecting to the area. At one time, he owned a stable of "good wood" that was a collector's dream.

He opened the store from profits gained by selling his pride and joy: a 1959 sunburst Gibson Les Paul guitar. The guitar is now owned by a collector in Japan and has been nicknamed in print "The Mossburst." It is considered by most collectors to be the most beautiful vintage Les Paul in existence.

By the time Moss closed the store, it had become less a thriving financial concern - the ever-present "Back in 5 minutes" sign was legendary - than the meeting place where Moss introduced an aging generation of players to a new generation who met his approval.

Moss was also a well-read man, whip smart and conversant on a scholarly level about topics that ranged from guns and airplanes to rock 'n' roll and the JFK assassination.

He communicated to his inner circle in a dialect of his making that became known as "Samese." Everything had a nickname, and it didn't take long for his dialect to creep into the everyday language of those who loved him.

Sam Moss was a private man, but he was quietly loyal and generous to his friends. (After all, the first three letters of samaritan are s-a-m). Once you were "anointed" by Sam, you were his friend for life.

And he loved the women in his life with the same intense devotion, dedication and passion that he brought to his music.

His time with his wife, the late Diane "Dido" Foster, was without question the happiest of his life.

She completed him. And when you she died after a long and horrible battle with breast cancer, a good chunk was Moss went with her. He was hit hard, then left reeling when his mother died shortly thereafter,

He never fully regained his footing.

Don't look for reason or try to rationalize in this sad time. Accept what has happened as the way that Sam wanted to end his story. The grief will not soon pass. The void that he has left will never be filled.

Remember him for what he was, not what he is likely to become down the road. The reality will always be better than the mythology.

It is the most noble who would rather break than bend.

When you want to honor Sam, pull out a copy of the Rolling Stone's Exile On Main Street, one of Sam's most loved "Sam-approved" albums.

Play the song "Happy" and turn the volume way up.

Pay particular attention to lyrics and groove, and let the song take you away,

It says all that needs to be said about Sam Moss.

Thanks, Sam.