

## INTERVIEW WITH GERALD STOCKTON -- SEPTEMBER 1995

*Gerald Stockton was born in Durban, South Africa in May 1954. A trombonist, he came to North Texas in the fall of 1979 to study music. Gerald landed a gig playing bass in the top 40 band Yazoo, in which a young Dave Catney was also playing keyboards. A resident of the Dallas area, Gerald today works as a writer, arranger and producer.*

At North Texas I had a student Visa, and you're not really allowed to work in this country on a student Visa. You must have a green card to work legally. But being a musician and playing gigs, of course that stuff isn't documented, so I started playing gigs against the law. But gigs is gigs!

Through that I met the guy who is now the head of the musicians union down here, Ray Herr. At the time Ray had a band, a top 40 band, called Yazoo. He'd had some sort of local success with the band. I started looking for a six-night-a-week gig in Dallas to try to make some money and I auditioned to play in Ray's band and got in. And that's where I met Dave Catney, who was playing keyboards.

Dave at the time was a bit of a rebel. I'm sure he was always a bit of the rebel. Ray the bandleader was sort of a very straight-laced type of guy, and Dave had that spirit about him of playfulness, shall we say, which I identified with; I had a good sense of humor. We would drive down from Denton to the gig every night, and Catney would inevitably be a little late getting ready... His clothes wouldn't be as neat as they should, which kind of irked the bandleader a lot. And the more Ray got irked, the more I identified with Dave, because I recognized that Dave's talent was outstanding. So Dave and I drew pretty close; because I really respected his musicianship deeply. Especially being a foreigner; he played the way I thought Americans played. One of the reasons I came here was to hear people like Dave play. So even though he was a lot younger than me, we really took to each other. I really liked him.

At that point nobody knew he was gay, and as a matter of fact I'm the guy that he came out to, because we had developed a close relationship. It was quite a surprise to me.

We really started going out of our way to bug Ray, who was the drummer. When I think about it it's pretty funny; we would do things like.... On the way to the gig we would all drive in one car, and I'd buy a 6-pack of beer. And then on the way to the gig what we would do is just throw the 6-pack out of the window of the car rather than drink it because we found that stuff quite amusing. But it would really bug Ray, who always drove. So we started throwing things out of the car so much that at one point I grabbed Catney's gig shoes and threw them out of the car window late one night coming home from the gig. And Catney of course hooted with laughter. Then we ended up throwing the guitar player's electric pedals out.... I mean we were going mad at that stage, and this would really bug Ray. And the more he screamed at us, the more we would carry on. So Dave and I built up a friendship that was pretty amusing actually.

The band was really way too weak for Dave. However we had a good time and would sort of carry on. What would happen is... I would pick Catney up and then we would all drive to the drummer's house and we would all leave our cars and drive down to the gig in his car. Then on the way back from the gig late at night we would get our cars from the drummer's house, and I would take Dave and drop him off at his house. So one night Dave and I got into my car after getting back to the drummer's house and then I drove him as usual to his house. It must have been about two in the morning, and I pulled

into his driveway and we started chatting. I had become like a father figure to him in that I would give him advice: "Dave, watch out for this..." "Watch out for that..." He said, "I've got something to tell you," I said, "Gee, what can that be?" He said, "Well I know nobody knows this, but I'm secretly gay." Well it kind of took me by surprise, I must say. He was a handsome young man and he wasn't effeminate at all, so there was no clue.

I think it was a good thing that he spoke to me because being of a liberal frame of mind--although I'm not gay myself--I'm very tolerant of anything; that's why I came to live in this country. And I knew what he would be faced with so I told him that whatever he did he must not let people get to him, and he must try and be a good citizen. And what he does behind closed doors is his own business, not anyone else's. Also that people were going to give him a hard time once he came out, and that he just must hold his head up high and live life to the fullest. I tried to be understanding of Dave, and I think that he felt comfortable after that. He was a young guy learning about who he was.

He and I kept his orientation a secret from the others in the band. The band ended up breaking up a few months later. A few months after that Dave dropped out of school and he went to Houston. I lost contact with him for quite a long time, but occasionally he'd come through Dallas and he'd always call me and come visit. It was always with great affection when we'd see each other and I'd always make a big fuss of him, because he was so great, so talented.

Then I hadn't heard from him in a long time. I was working at a recording studio as a full time arranger, and Catney called me out of the blue from Houston and said he's got this guy who writes great stuff, and can he send me a tape? I said yes, and of course as usual Catney was right on. He sent me this tape of this guy Scott Laningham, whose music was outstanding, and whom I consequently hired as a writer. So Scott and I built up a nice relationship through Catney.

Out of the blue in late '93 I get a call from Scott Laningham, and he said, "Have you heard about Dave?" I said, "No," and he said, "Well Dave's got AIDS." It shocked me greatly. So I immediately called Dave in Houston, and what amazed me about talking to him was his maturity and his cheerfulness at his predicament; in other words, he seemed to have an inner peace that was quite amazing. I dealt with the issue with him because he and I could talk to each other. He was fighting this battle with a good attitude and seemed as cheerful as he always was. I said, "Look, let's stay in touch, and anything we can do to help...."

He later faxed me something funny and I faxed him something funny in return. Then he called me back. At that point he said he was in the hospital and he had a tube in his chest and they were injecting him with all sorts of stuff. But he was still pretty up. A few months later Laningham called me and said he had died. According to the news I heard he died with some friends there with him.

I think that I played an important role in Dave's life in the fact that I tried to make him not be embarrassed about who he was. He knew where my head was at. I'm a non-Christian; in other words, I don't believe in their way of treating people. It's a funny thing, but I was raised as a young kid to believe that the Christians were all good people and I accepted that until I got older and realized that that just wasn't so. So I'm atheist based on the fact that I was a Christian and for no other

reason than I don't wish to be, and I think because of that fact I showed him more compassion than most people would. I really loved him because he was so great and talented. He had a positive effect on my life.

Dave was such a great musician, which I recognized straightaway. He was so mature yet he was a young guy, very flippant, with always a smile upon his face. You would never take him that seriously until he sat down at the piano, and then something magical came out. Even if he just played two notes, there was something very mature there.

Dave was obviously handsome and obviously intelligent and there was just a way about him, a charisma. He could talk intelligently to anyone. Or he could turn on the humor and be sarcastic. He was very clever. Dave had it all going. If it wasn't for the AIDS thing he would have really gone to the top. I've heard a lot of great pianists in my life, but there was something about Dave. Had he been alive in ten years he would have been *the* guy. He was incredible.