

MISS ANGEL BROWN

Miss Angel will be the first to tell you that she did not immediately fall in love with Mel Brown when she met him in Colorado in 1975.

But she *did* fall for his music.

“Honey, when he started wailing that Super 400 [Gibson guitar], it was the best thing I ever heard. And even though I was young, I loved it. I loved the music.” She loved it so much that when Mel asked her to come with him on tour, she didn’t think twice. After all, it was summer. She was barely twenty-two. At the time, she was thinking only about the party and the music and the excitement of it all. How could she have known it would change the course of her entire life?

Miss Angel was born in Prairie Point, Mississippi and raised, for the most part, by her grandparents. In her world, there was always singing. Singing at church, singing at school, singing on the front porch after dinner at night. Still, Miss Angel never considered a career in music. “It never occurred to me that I *was* a singer. I used to sing, but when I thought about singers, I thought about people like Aretha Franklin. I just happened into it.”

This is why it’s impossible to talk about Miss Angel without talking about her late husband, Mel. When she happened upon him that day in Colorado, she happened upon a life of music. It may have started off as just a summer diversion, but somewhere along the way, Miss Angel says, “we got tangled up in each other and couldn’t let each other go.” They would live together for thirteen years in a number of U.S. cities before marrying in 1988.

But it was in 1982, when the pair lived in Austin, Texas, that Miss Angel found her voice. Mel was recording B.B. King’s “Rock Me Baby,” when Angel took a break from washing the dishes to give him a suggestion. “You should sing that song like this,” she told him. He must have been surprised by the power and originality of her voice. He must have wondered why he hadn’t asked her to sing sooner. But Mel didn’t waste another minute. He asked her to do the vocals on his album, and she agreed. The decision linked them together not just as lovers, but also as musicians. It began a lifelong partnership.

Before long, their record was playing in music stores all over Austin, and people were asking to buy it. Not long after that, Angel was playing shows with Mel, where he always introduced her as “Miss Angel.” The name stuck, and Miss Angel began her career.

After settling with Mel in Kitchener, Ontario, Miss Angel recorded her debut album, *If You Could See*. It was released independently in 1998. Mel, who had stopped recording so that he could focus on playing live, returned to the studio to work with Miss Angel. When she asked him why he began recording again, he smiled and said “I did it for you.”

Her second album, *That’s the Way I Tumble*, was produced by Electro-Fi Records and released in 2005 to the praise of critics and audiences alike.

All along, she had Mel with her, helping her to achieve her full potential. “He was very gentle,” Miss Angel recalls. “He could get you to do what he thought you were capable of doing without you feeling like he was beating you over the head.” When he passed away in March, 2009 due to complications from emphysema, the world lost a blues legend, and Miss Angel lost her partner.

That hasn’t kept her from pressing onward though. Miss Angel still lives in Kitchener, the city that Mel loved. She continues to perform every Sunday at The Boathouse in Victoria Park. Recently, she made a brave trip to Toronto where she laid down vocals for Mel’s last album. When she gets stuck, she thinks of Mel. “I just think, *What would Mel do about this?* And sometimes I can literally hear his voice.”

Miss Angel is a strong woman with a powerful, soulful voice. Her singing is transcendent, deeply rooted in the peaks and valleys of life and love. But she’s not afraid to loosen up either. In fact, she has no problem really shaking her hips if the music moves her.

“This is all me, without the Mel-man,” Miss Angel admits of her recent solo work—her new EP, *Blues in the Alley*, and her upcoming full-length album. And yet, it isn’t. Because, as with all great love, Mel and Miss Angel are still together, always part of each other. *Especially* when Miss Angel is singing the blues.