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*Drummer Denny Seiwell discusses his time with Paul McCartney and Wings, his friendship with McCartney over the years and much more ...*

When The [Beatles](#) imploded, [Paul McCartney](#), by all accounts, was shattered. Without a band, or the friends that had traveled that remarkable road together with him, he retreated with his new wife Linda to his Scottish farm, with its barebones living quarters, and, depressed, he drank himself into a stupor.

“I think I was just trying to escape in my own mind,” [McCartney said](#) in 2012. “I had the freedom to just have a drink whenever I fancied it. I over did it, basically, I got to a point where Linda had to say ‘look, you should cool it’.”

He released the homespun [McCartney](#), recorded largely at his London home (though the best bits, like the instant classic “Maybe I’m Amazed,” were recorded at Abbey Road Studios), but, although it’s now considered a classic, it was met with derision by both the public at large and his bandmates.

Still, it got him working.

By the autumn of 1970, McCartney was finding his legs as a solo artist. He decamped to New York City, where he lived a modest and largely anonymous existence, and began work on what would become his first true artistic statement outside The Beatles, [RAM](#).

Although McCartney had planned to use at least three drummers on the album, he clicked with session drummer Denny Seiwell, and, after the sessions were complete, asked Seiwell to join him back in England to help form a new band, **Wings**(or Paul McCartney and Wings, as it’s sometimes stylized).

The albums Seiwell made with McCartney as a member — along with former Moody Blues singer and guitarist Denny Laine, and Joe Cocker alum Henry McCullough (who [passed away in 2016](#)) — were recently released as part of McCartney’s long-running, Grammy-winning *Archive Series*. 1971’s half-baked but charming [Wild Life](#), and 1973s [Red Rose Speedway](#), which included the chart-topper “My Love” and that was originally intended to be a double album, have been expanded to include alternate mixes, outtakes and loads of videos from the era. (The [real draw](#) is the box set [Wings 1971-1973](#), which includes both box sets, as well as a stunning live album from Wings’ 1972 European tour. It’s sold-out at press time, but rumors abound that a second run of the limited edition set will be released soon.)

Seiwell sat down with Rock Cellar to discuss connecting with McCartney during the *Ram* sessions, the new box sets, the impact his days with McCartney has had on nearly everything he’s done since, and what the former Beatle taught him, about not only music, but life in general.

**Rock Cellar:** On your [new album](#), you've reworked some of Paul's songs, and, with your trio, you've put your own spin on them. [Laurence Juber has done a similar thing](#), where he's paying homage to the work he did in Wings, like you, but also has found his own voice for the songs. It's bold, but you have a pretty good relationship with Paul, don't you?

**Denny Seiwell:** Oh, excellent, yeah. We talk all the time. I'm probably the only guy from the pack that knows Paul's phone number, and texts with him, and all of that. Yeah. I can reach him any time I need to.

**Rock Cellar:** I've got to ask, as a fan as well as a journalist: what do you guys talk about?

**Denny Seiwell:** Most of the time we talk about the old days, how much fun it was. How much different it was than today. But it was truly ... we were a happy bunch of young maniacs just running around without a gig, without a hotel, without anything, just going out and having fun, being in a new band.

**Rock Cellar:** Has the idea of performing together ever come up?

**Denny Seiwell:** Years ago, right after Linda passed away, actually, I was working with an organization in L.A. called R.A.D.D. — Recording Artists, Actors, and Athletes Against Drunk Driving, and they asked me if I would ask Paul about doing something that would benefit Linda's food company and what have you. And he said, "Well, if they want to fly you over, come on. Let's hang out a little bit."

So we flew over, and Paul sent a car. We went down to the studio and we spent the day with him down at the Hog Hill. And we talked about it. And he was kind of keen on the idea, and he said, "Go ahead and start talking to some of the guys. Let's see what we can put together. Just see who's interested and what we might be able to do."

So I started working on it, and then I heard back from him. He said, "You know, doing a Wings reunion without Linda would be like doing a Beatles reunion without John." So that was the end of that idea.

**Rock Cellar:** Has he heard your version of "Live and Let Die"? Or any of the songs you've done, and has he weighed in on what he thinks of them?

**Denny Seiwell:** Oh, yeah. Oh, absolutely. He loved everything. The first record we did, five are McCartney's tunes out of the 10 or 11 that are on the record. It was our guitar player's idea. He said, "You're best known for that stuff. A good song's a good song. Why don't we take some McCartney tunes and just revamp them up for the jazz trio and see what we come up with?" It took very little time, and it was a lot of fun.

We still perform a lot of those — "Bip Bop" and "Coming Up" and a bunch of tunes. And for this record, I didn't want to go overboard and do a bunch of McCartney tunes. We really wanted to showcase the trio. But I thought, why not pay homage by doing the track that I'm best known for, which is "Live and Let Die"? So it was a no-brainer to figure out a way that we could do

“Live and Let Die” as a trio, a jazz-organ trio piece. And it was a lot of fun, and we still love playing that. I mean, the fans really love it when we get out there and play live, so I sent that to him. I told him we did it, and he wanted to hear it. So I sent it over immediately.

And he said, “Man, that’s very cool. I love the way you treated the song.”

**Rock Cellar: That’s nice. The seal of approval has to feel pretty good at this point.**

**Denny Seiwell:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Big time. Well, Paul always encouraged me. Because we had such a beautiful working relationship during *RAM*, that’s why he called me to form Wings with him. We just had something that you can’t put a label on, actually. It’s just a look, a feeling, a vibe. We always had this beautiful thing together, and so he’s really happy for me.

**Rock Cellar: Do you think it was — and that was where I wanted to start — what do you think it was that happened during those *RAM* sessions? He was apparently going to use several drummers, but he ended up just using you. I mean, he could’ve done the drums himself, for that matter. But he ended up using you, and then he ended up calling you again. It couldn’t have been just musical. It had to have been your personality; you had to have clicked personally as well.**

**Denny Seiwell:** Yeah. There were a few elements in there, sure. There would be a few elements in there. He made us play up to another level that we didn’t know that we had in us. Because the songs were so well-crafted and beautifully done. As session guys, sometimes you go in there and it’s, I hate to use this term, but sometimes it’s just polishing a turd.

But when we started hearing the songs that Paul would bring in each day, we all said, “Wow. This is another level. It can’t be getting any better than this.” And they always did.

But it was just such a challenge musically, and also knowing ... I believe in the back of my heart I knew this music was going to be around for a while, so it was very important to come up with the right parts. But still, we never spent more than a day on a track. And it was a matter of hours.

We’d run through the songs, find an arrangement that worked, find parts, and we’d start recording. It didn’t take a whole lot of time to do it once we knew what we were doing. And he encouraged us to come up with our own parts. The only time through *RAM* that he asked me to find something different than the part that I’d come up with was “Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey.” He just wanted something that was more sparse, and not a regular beat, and that kind of went along with the vocal, broken up. So that was great fun. He wanted me to challenge myself to find something that fit the beginning of the song a little more. So it was great fun. I just loved that record.

**Rock Cellar: I think one of the cool things that’s happened in the last couple of months is that *Wild Life* is being reassessed by older fans, and a younger generation is being exposed to it, too, who’ve probably mostly never heard it before. A lot of casual fans have never heard it**

before, for that matter. I've always had a soft spot for that record. You know, I'm a little bit younger, and I came of age kind of during the punk era, and I always found *Wild Life* to be kind of a cool, punky record when I was first buying albums.

Plus, I got it used for a dollar. [Laughter.] And — the gestation of the band was happening. Did you have that same feeling that this was going to last, or was it a little more rough and ready? Did you even know they were going to be masters, and an album?

**Denny Seiwell:** Oh, sure. We knew exactly what was going on. This is what was interesting about this time: you have a different hat on a different head for doing session work. And now, you put on the band hat. "Okay, now I'm a member of a rock and roll band." You think differently. You approach the music differently. And so, before we went in to record it, we'd just rehearsed up in Scotland. I don't know how long we were there. Not forever, for sure. And when we went in to Abbey Road to record *Wild Life*, it was supposed to be an absolutely raw, fresh, first look at a new band.

I know that, geez, I think five of those eight songs were first takes; the rhythm tracks were first takes. You know, we would get in there and just get the sounds right, and then ... give it a shot! And we'd all say, 'Wow. That was great!' I mean, here's Paul and I working, as usual, you know, we had that hookup of bass and drums, and now Denny Laine, who'd play the rhythm part. And then we took some time after that to put on guitar parts, and harmonies, and all that, because we did spend a little more time on overdubs. But the basic tracks were done very simply. We, tried to get that freshness of first takes.

**Rock Cellar:** You touched on something that I want to ask you about. You know, the songs on *RAM* were ... it wasn't like they were Beatles songs, but they were very similar to his style he'd been writing in for a while. Whereas on *Wild Life*, and beyond, in *Wings*, he's one of the few people I can think of who has successfully changed his style of songwriting several times during the course of his career. As a songwriter, or as a musician, you develop the tools, and crutches sometimes, that you go to, to create things. And then you just go back to them over and over. Whereas, in *Wings*, it was almost as though his songwriting style took a complete left turn, and he was writing almost as though it was like a different guy.

**Denny Seiwell:** Yeah. Very true. Although, if you listen to a song like "Tomorrow," that was very *RAM*. That could've been done during the *RAM* time. So yeah, he did. But like "Love Is Strange," we were all fascinated with reggae music, so we wanted to do something with that reggae flair. And we were all so interested in the song, that he thought, let's turn that around and see if we can make something different out of it. So he was bold.

Also, one of the biggest problems we had as early *Wings*, was knowing that we were going to go out and perform as a band. We needed more rockers, rather than a lot of "Blackbirds" or "Mama's Little Girls," or stuff like that. So there was the opportunity for him to write with a specific thing in mind: That we're going to be able to perform this live. That's where "Soily" and

“The Mess” come from. He was trying to come up with rockers, so we would have more of what we would need in a live situation.

**Rock Cellar: And was there any discussion of doing Beatles songs? I know you did “Twenty Flight Rock,” and you did “Long Tall Sally,” but you stayed away from Beatles stuff. Was there a conversation about that, or did it just never happen?**

**Denny Seiwell:** No. We knew that he was going through a tumultuous time with the breakup of the Beatles. But he never brought it into the band. We were not aware of what was going on — although sometimes, with his moods, you could see that it wasn’t easy, what he was going through — but it had to be done. So we didn’t do any Beatles material other than “Long Tall Sally,” at the end of show. But I mean, geez, that’s a no-brainer. Yeah, the Beatles did it, but it’s just a good show-closer! So yeah, it was a real interesting time. I kind of feel as though I was there at the best and the worst times.

**Rock Cellar: Yeah. I bet that’s true. The college tour has been pretty well documented.**

**Well, not recordings of it, but it’s been written about a lot. But what I found was really was that in the super deluxe box, there’s the live disc. And the live disc, which is from a little bit later — from the European tour — the band is almost like an English blues band. It’s a little Peter Green; it’s a little Joe Cocker’s *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* band. It’s a funkier band than probably most people realize Wings ever were. Talk about those shows and that era — ’72, ’73 — that live era.**

**Denny Seiwell:** Well, we did the University Tour, and Paul said, ‘Well. We’re going to go out and do it now! We’re going to do a tour of Europe. And we’re going to travel around in an old English double-decker bus.’ And so we rehearsed. We actually found an old theater down off the Fulham Road that Emerson, Lake & Palmer had bought, and it was empty — there were no chairs in it, even — but it had a nice large stage. And so we went in there to prepare for the European tour. We spent a couple of weeks a month rehearsing, getting ready to get out there and do the European tour. So it was tenuous in the very beginning, because we had all of these ideas, like a 70-millimeter screen behind us, and this, and that, but coming up with the right set list that would cover all the bases that an artist like McCartney would have to cover was hard enough!

And then he didn’t want it to be a McCartney show, either. He wanted it to be a Wings show. He wanted us to be known to the public just like George, John, Ringo, and Paul were. Four individuals. So we did tons of press. We’d be up at the press office doing interviews and doing all kinds of things, because he really wanted the world to know each and every one of us just like the Beatles were known.

**Rock Cellar: I’m glad that that live disc is included, because you guys were a shit-hot band. But beyond that, you’re right, even in the music and banter, there are individual personalities there. People have dismissed Wings as Paul’s backing band, and yet you and Denny and**

Henry certainly were really world-class players who could have played with anyone, really. You had your pick as of who to work with as much as he did. I think that gets lost a little bit, because, I mean obviously, he's Paul McCartney. So, for the casual fan, that narrative makes sense. But I think, for anybody who knows anything about music, those recordings are of great players playing great songs. And so it wasn't just a pickup band of people to back him up.

Denny Seiwell: No.

**Rock Cellar: He chose those people for specific roles, didn't he?**

Denny Seiwell: Yes. We lived together as a family. We rehearsed. We had fun. I don't believe he's having the kind of fun we had. You can't manage an empire like Paul does and go out with this whole big thing that he's got, and have the kind of fun that we had on the road. It was really tremendous.

**Rock Cellar: There's a looseness about him, too. It's a little bit anarchic. And with all the drama of The Beatles that he's trying to deal with in his other life, I guess, it's almost like a different person that you were working with, than this guy now who's a living legend who has now sustained this career for 50-plus years. So it's a very different. I mean, things were very tenuous. He was striking out on his own, like we talked about, writing in a completely different style, playing with new people for the first time in his life.**

Denny Seiwell: Right. You know, you have to remember that everything that we did as Wings was going to be compared to the last time people heard the Beatles. That was quite a heavy load to take on. I love the way he handled it, though. He didn't make it seem like a heavy load. We didn't feel like we were under a heavy load. We were just like four guys and a girl in a new band, and we all loved each other very much, man. We just hung out in Scotland, we hung out in the house, we hung out at the studio. We had fun, until the 3:30 in the morning mix came along, you know. But it was really all fun. And we knew that what we were doing was going to be noticed.

We weren't some garage band that's going to make 15 records before getting a record deal. So there was a degree of responsibility there, and we all knew that what we did had to be relevant and had to be as good as we could do it. And so everybody gave their best.

**Rock Cellar: I think what I love most about it, in listening to it with 2019 ears, as opposed to when I was younger, is that on the live disc, especially, and on the two-album version of *Red Rose Speedway*, there's a hunger there that I think ...**

Denny Seiwell: Exactly.

**Rock Cellar: It comes across. You don't think of Paul McCartney as hungry!**

Denny Seiwell: Couldn't have said it better myself.

**Rock Cellar:** You don't think of Paul as a hungry guy, and yet you all sound like you're really going for it, him included. He doesn't know that "My Love" is going to become a standard. He's just a slightly beaten down, hungry guy with a good song. So I think that's what comes cross. Talk about the two-disc version of *Red Rose Speedway*. Because, for me, that is — along with the live disc — the real draw of the box sets. Do you remember making all those songs, developing the running order, and the thinking behind it?

**Denny Seiwell:** Very much so. Well, when we started it, I think we just started recording like we did with *RAM*: We're going to do a bunch of tracks; more than we need. And we were breaking out of recording everything at Abbey Road at that time, too. All of a sudden, we started working over at Olympic Studios, and we brought [Glyn Johns](#) in, who would kind of co-produce with Paul. Not producing, totally. Glyn was one of the very best engineers that I've ever worked with. He got a drum sound on me that was just astronomical.

But it didn't work out with Glyn, production-wise, simply because Paul had a better handle on what he wanted. He's such a fabulous producer, anyway; always was. So some of the ideas clashed, and that didn't work out so much. But we did a batch of tracks over there that were very, very, unique; I think we did "C Moon," and "Mama's Little Girl."

I don't know how many tracks were recorded there, but it was a breath of fresh air for the band, actually, playing in a different studio, with a different vibe, different everything. And we also did some tracking at Trident Studios. And Morgan. I think we might've done "Give Ireland Back to the Irish" over at Morgan Studios. So, we were hopping around, but still having a lot of fun. And by the end of that tracking, or that recording session time, we had a bunch of tunes, figuring that we were going to them all out. You know, "Wow, let's just put this out as a double album." And so it was always being planned as a double album. We didn't know how we were going to sequence it, but we were thinking that we were going to record a double album's worth material. And at the last minute, EMI just decided that we should nix the idea of the double record and just do a single album. We were too new of a band for a double album, I guess. Maybe that was their thinking. But when Paul brought that in to us, we were like, "Okay. That's fine. Let's pick the best that we've got. Songs that will flow in and out of each other. And come up with a good sequence of a single album." Interestingly enough, before that decision was made to go from a double to a single album, we had mastered up the double album. And Paul gave me acetates from EMI. Four acetates, one for each side.

And it had all of the tracks. The original double album. He said, "Go home and listen to these, and see if we have to work on any of this stuff again." So, I took them home and listened, and we talked about stuff and everything. He just never asked for them back. And when I left the band, I left with those acetates.

**Rock Cellar:** A true collector's item.

**Denny Seiwell:** Oh, tell me about it. And me, like a schmuck, the first time I did one of the Beatles Fests, they asked me if I could bring down some memorabilia, because the fans would

just love it, and it would be something that they could sell at an auction. And I just looked, and thought, “I don’t know what I want to give them.” And I took one of the four acetates down, and sold it for practically nothing. Someone got the acetate that had “My Love” on it. And so that’s floating around out there in the universe. And I have the other three stashed away in a vault somewhere. I’ve been trying to locate them.

It was at L.A. Beatlefest and I believe it was some guys from Riverside, California, or something, really some old, hippie, long-bearded brothers that bought it in the auction. So I’ve been trying to find it. If it ever sticks its head up, I’ll pay a handsome price to complete that set again, just for my own archives.

**Rock Cellar: You’re breaking my heart over here, I’ve got to tell you.**

**Denny Seiwell:** Yeah. Well, my heart too. But on my list of top ten dumb things I’ve ever done, that’s not even in the top ten.

**Rock Cellar: That’s another interview, then.**

**Denny Seiwell:** Yeah.

**Rock Cellar: So, things got started to take off — “My Love” took off, *Red Rose Speedway* did well. There were signs that the band was going to have legs. Were you routining the songs for *Band on the Run*? Did you hear them? What was going on and how did it all fall apart?**

**Denny Seiwell:** Paul played my drum parts on *Band on the Run*, because we had rehearsed that up at the farm in Scotland. And somewhere in the universe, there’s a two-track tape of our rehearsals, which are so much better than the record. We were a band at the time. And that’s where the beginning of the end occurred, at those Scottish rehearsals at the barn.

One day, Paul just pushed Henry in a corner, trying to make him play the same solo on “My Love” all the time, and the same solo, the same parts on the songs that would be on *Band on the Run*. He said, about the “My Love” solo, “This is iconic, you’ve got to just repeat this part.” And Henry was so organic and everything, that he didn’t go along with it. And he left the band. And when he left the band, I pleaded with Paul to replace Henry — which would be hard to do — but to replace him with a guitar player, and put back the album — put back *Band on the Run* — for a month, and rehearse with a new guy and break him in. So we can go down there as a band and record it, because it had grown into something pretty fantastic, but he wasn’t into that idea.

And there were some other problems. He had to sue the other three Beatles, so there was court receivership on all the money. And so the money was real tight in the band. It was very tight. Needless to say, I think. And it was wearing on us, the situations that were occurring, when we were doing so well, yet we were living like a garage band. I mean, I was making one-tenth of the money I used to make in New York doing sessions. And living that way, too! It was wearing



on us, and it's one of my only regrets in life, actually, is that I didn't sit Paul down and talk to him about that particular thing, to see if we could work out some sort of agreement.

Because the original agreement was that we were all part owners of this band. Shareholders. And because of the Apple Corps case and everything, that was impossible. We had no contract, or even written agreements. And that was main reason for the decision I made to leave when I did. That, and the fact that we wouldn't be a band anymore, without Henry. I regret doing it that way. And for years we didn't speak. And then I saw him again in '93, when they played L.A. I just out of the blue said to my wife, "Come on. Let's drive down to Anaheim. We'll go backstage, ask security to see if he'll let us in. And if he doesn't, we'll take a little drive and we'll come home and forget about it."

We get down there, and I tell the security, I say, "I'm the guy who started the band with him. Would you let him know that we're here?" We were very close, you know. My wife used to take care of the kids for them sometimes. We went on tour and all. So in thirty seconds, the guy comes back in a golf cart. He says, "Hop on, man." And he led us to the dressing room and we had a great reunion. All the kids were there, and they loved seeing Monique again. That night, Linda gave me the home phone number, and their contact info. And we said, "We should stay in touch."

And then after that, that show, we spent a lot of time together, talking and stuff. Then Linda died. We went over to see him. Well, we went to the memorial in New York, and we went to the house to see how he was doing without Linda. And then, [\*Wingspan\*](#) came out, and I helped him with some *Wingspan* stuff. So we remained close, but the relationship was really dead for many years; we didn't talk. So I was glad to have him back in my life. There's just so much that went on in those early days that's just a major part of my life.

**Rock Cellar: It's funny, it's almost as though, when you talk about the record and the songs, and when we talk about your relationship, it's like it's two different guys for you. That you have this relationship with this guy named Paul, and you were in a band with Paul McCartney. It's as though you separate them out because you have a real affection for him in a way that us outsiders can't probably relate to.**

**Denny Seiwell:** Absolutely. Every time we talk on the phone, he says, "Make sure you give Monique a big, sloppy, wet kiss."