



Buddy and Julie Miller
Breakdown On 20th Avenue South

Buddy and Julie Miller began recording *Breakdown on 20th Avenue South* in a manner even more intimate than their previous duo recordings—all of which were created at their home studio.

Excited about his wife’s new song, “I’m Gonna Make You Love Me,” Buddy decided to record the demo in an upstairs bedroom. With Julie on lead vocals, Buddy on harmony, and his Italian-made electric guitar urging the song forward, the recording impressed the couple with its emotional clarity and bare-boned punch. Buddy sparingly fleshed out the track with bass and drums, and the duo had their first finished cut.

Encouraged by the result, they continued work in the room that Julie dubbed “Studio B,” a play on historic Nashville recording studio RCA Studio B, which isn’t far from the Millers’ home. The bedroom recordings give *Breakdown on 20th Avenue South* a distinct sound built upon Julie’s expressive, sparrow-like voice and Buddy’s stirring harmonies and rugged, propulsive instrumentation.

“After that first song, we wanted the record to just be us,” Buddy said. “The songs are all Julie’s, and she wanted the sound to be as raw as the lyrics are. She writes directly from her heart to her pen, and she has the sound in her mind. My fingerprints come in as I help her create the sound she wants.”

Expounding further, Julie said, “As we worked, and I got all excited, I got to where I woke up every morning with a new song in my head. They felt fully conceived, and Buddy helped get that sound from my head and onto this record.”

These new recordings deepen the foundation of the Miller’s collaborative artistry. Whether recording under their individual names or as a duo, the couple imprint their talents on all of their projects. Buddy’s solo albums lean more into country roots and soul; Julie’s delve into her sensitive perspective on the world and her rock ‘n’ roll beginnings. They both juxtapose profound songs of love, pain and spiritual searching with carnal, playful roots rockers.

Their work led to Buddy being honored as the Americana Artist of the Year in 2011 and crowned Artist of the Decade by No Depression magazine for the 2000s. Cameron Crowe cited Julie’s song, “By Way of Sorrow,” as inspiring the entire storyline of his Tom Cruise film, *Vanilla Sky*.

The Los Angeles Times described the duo's *Written in Chalk* as an "uncommonly moving collection" that managed "to find light in the darker recesses of the human experience."

Their joint sound gets distilled to its essence on *Breakdown on 20th Avenue South*. From the driving title song, in which Julie exposes her personal and creative dilemmas of the last several years, to songs that explore hard-fought affection, spiteful anger, spiritual sustenance, and a world where children are forced into combat, the album confronts difficult subjects with the poetry and the persistent, heart-bearing honesty fans expect from the Millers.

Julie laughs—a familiar sound in almost all of Julie's conversation—when she notes which song set the stage for the new album. "I wrote 'I'm Gonna Make You Love Me' as a message to Buddy, because we kept putting off making our album because he was so busy. Every time he would leave, I would be like a forlorn dog waiting for him to return so we could play some more. So I wrote a song telling him how I felt."

Both husband and wife admit the album took longer than expected. After initially starting work on their follow-up to *Written in Chalk*, released in 2009 on New West, Julie got waylaid by a bad turn in her battle with fibromyalgia. With time on his schedule, Buddy became more in-demand than ever as a creative collaborator for others.

"I took all the work I could," said Buddy, who still remembers the years when he sold instruments and equipment to pay bills. "The offers I accepted came from people I admired so much. It didn't feel like work I could turn down, but then it just blew up and took over everything."

He accepted Robert Plant's invitation to join the band supporting Plant and Alison Krauss on their tour behind the Grammy-winning album *Raising Sand*, then produced Plant's album *Band of Joy*. He produced standout albums by Solomon Burke, Carolina Chocolate Drops, Patty Griffin, Allison Moorer, Richard Thompson, the War & Treaty, and Shawn Colvin and Steve Earle. He joined T Bone Burnett on the musical team working on the hit ABC-TV series *Nashville*, and when Burnett left, Buddy became the show's executive music producer.

"In my mind I thought I was always about to get back to work with Julie, but in reality it kept getting put off," he said. "I apologized a lot. I look back, and I realize I was neglectful. It was a mistake I wish I hadn't made. What Julie and I create together is fulfilling to me in a way nothing else is, and I should have nurtured it more."

Julie acknowledges the tension that arose in the years between recordings. "It took me too long to communicate how I was feeling," she said. "I felt as if I was waiting for my turn. I know he feels guilty about it. I was ill, and I was depressed, and that complicated everything. Once he realized how I felt, he was incredibly gracious, and he really focused on helping me craft what I wanted to create."

The new album reveals both the scars and the healing. The music is fueled by madness and love, and by passion and patience—all qualities that go into a working, evolving marriage involving two sensitive, wildly creative individuals. “I wanted this to be Julie’s record,” Buddy said. “In the past I would sometimes impose my ideas on her when she didn’t necessarily want that. This time I really wanted to stay focused on encouraging her to make the record she wanted.”

As Julie grew ever-more prolific, another task surfaced: How to select the songs that worked best together. “She must have written 50 or 60 really good songs,” Buddy said. “She was on fire with it. She seemed really inspired.”

Julie’s only co-writer on the album is her nephew Alasdair MacKenzie, a student at Harvard University. When Alasdair was four, he created a list of song titles. For Julie, the title “Storm of Kisses” immediately stood out. Later, as Julie mourned the death of her younger brother—killed in Austin by a lightning strike—she says God reminded her of her nephew’s song title and comforted her by reminding her that her brother felt no pain in the moment of his death. Julie came to view the flash of that moment as “a storm of kisses.”

Julie’s creative and spiritual life is filled with such epiphanies. Buddy and Julie met in Austin when Buddy joined Julie’s band in 1976, five years before their marriage. Their work took them to New York, where Julie had a spiritual awakening in the alley behind a Manhattan nightclub as they unloaded gear for the evening’s show.

Julie eventually embarked on a solo career in Christian music, where she spoke in personal terms to her audience through her music, which included an early version of one of her most beloved songs, “Broken Things.”

The vagabond Millers moved from New York to San Francisco to Los Angeles before landing in Nashville in 1993, where they found their creative home. The couple signed separate solo deals with Hightone Records, with Buddy’s *Your Love (and Other Lies)* drawing enormous critical acclaim upon its release in 1995. Julie received a similar response two years later with her album *Blue Pony*. Both established them as creative forces who worked on each other’s albums but embraced separate musical visions.

Their songs soon found favor with others, with cuts by Dierks Bentley, Dixie Chicks, Dixie Hummingbirds, Emmylou Harris, Levon Helm, Wynonna Judd, Diana Krall, Miranda Lambert, Patty Loveless, Linda Ronstadt, Little Jimmy Scott, Lee Ann Womack, and many others.

As word spread, Buddy joined Spyboy, a quartet led by Harris that toured behind her landmark album *Wrecking Ball*. In the 1990s he also worked with Kasey Chambers, Elvis Costello, Steve Earle, Mark Heard, Patty Griffin, Allison Moorer, Lee Ann Womack, Lucinda Williams, Victoria Williams, and Trisha Yearwood.

Their solo albums continued to draw acclaim, and in 2001 they released the first album to share their names, followed by *Written in Chalk* in 2009. Since then, Buddy has released the spiritual album *United House of Prayer; Majestic Silver Strings* with similarly acclaimed guitarists Bill Frisell, Greg Leisz and Marc Ribot; and a duet album, *Buddy and Jim*, with Lauderdale, which shares a name with a Sirius Satellite Radio program the two old friends co-host.

With lessons learned, both Buddy and Julie believe the creative reunion that makes *Breakdown* so moving and fulfilling is the start of a new, actively creative period for them. “I’m so proud of Julie and these songs,” Buddy said. “She’s still writing, and everything is of such a high quality. I feel like we’re on a roll, so why stop?”