



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Robert Cray: Simply Supernatural

By Glenn Swift

There's a legend in the backwoods of the Mississippi Delta that says if you really want to play the blues, you must sell your soul to the Devil. Tall tale or not, one thing is for certain – when Robert Cray plays the blues, somethin' supernatural is going on.

Universally acknowledged as one of the world's premier blues guitarists, Cray's music has been described as "thoughtfully soulful, yet muscular." It's definitely that. Cray's signature sound is a popular favorite among traditional and contemporary blues aficionados alike, and his extraordinary technique reflects a multitude of musical genres. Over his star-studded career, he has produced 16 albums, two gold albums, and been nominated for eleven Grammy awards, winning five.

Known as a high-energy performer, Cray has performed alongside nearly all of the contemporary heavyweights in his field: B.B. King, Johnny Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy, Johnny Copeland, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimmie Vaughan, Keb Mo, Bonnie Raitt, Tina Turner, Albert Collins, the Neville Brothers, and the late-great Muddy Waters, who reverently referred to Cray as his "adopted son."

Born into a musical family in Columbus, Georgia, Cray, 54, moved at an early age to Newport News, Virginia, where he spent the bulk of his formative years. Although he was an

avid music fan as a youngster, who listened to everything from B.B. King to Sara Vaughan, it was four guys from Liverpool who literally changed Cray's life.

"I got a guitar because of the Beatles. No doubt about it, those guys were incredible. The funny thing was, when they came out it seemed like everyone in my neighborhood got a guitar. Hearing their music made me want to learn everything as fast as I could. Then Jimi Hendrix came along a few years later, and that whole psychedelic thing turned my head backwards. Within a few years I began playing the blues. That's when I saw Albert Collins in an outdoor concert... he just blew me away. I mean he just walked out into the crowd and did his thing. Then I saw him again when he played at my high school graduation. I took the opportunity to walk up to him and thank him for a great show. I told him I was a big fan and he said, 'Young man, you play guitar? Keep it up!'... That really inspired me, and if I had to name my greatest influence, it would be him (Collins)."

During his late teens, Cray became an avid record collector. "I listened to everything, from Jethro Tull to Billy Preston," he said. An avid fan of pop, rock, blues and jazz, Cray worked painstakingly to hone his skills on the guitar. "I always wanted to learn from others and to incorporate other musical styles into mine. At the same time, after I got serious about music, it's always been about the blues."

Shortly after graduating high school, Cray formed his first band, Steakface, which quickly proved to be a local



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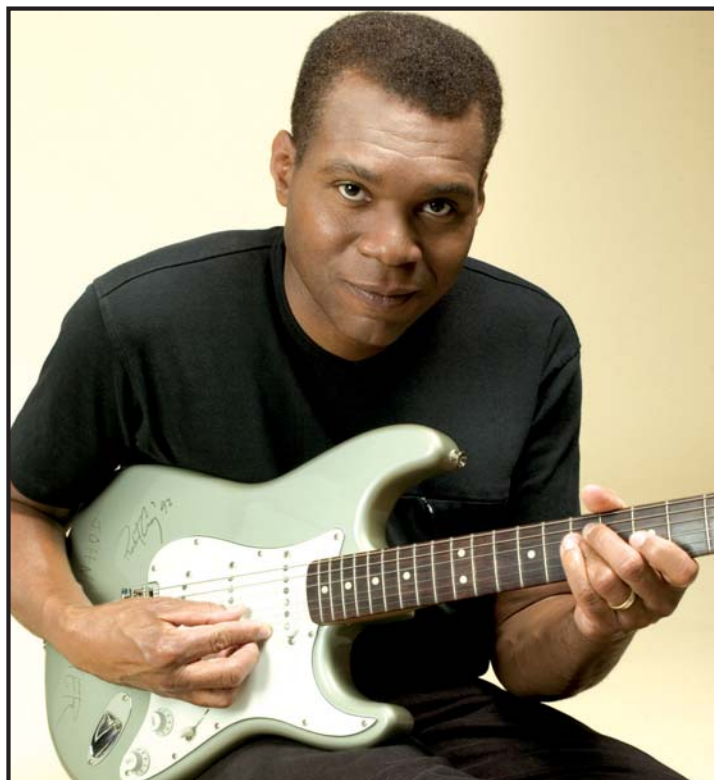


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favorite. The band's reputation grew, and, a few years later, Cray was off to California to seek fortune and fame.

In the Golden State, Cray soon became popular playing the college campus circuit, and he released his first album, 'Who's Been Talkin,' in 1980. But the big break came two years later when he signed a recording contract with Mercury Records. Following two more album releases, *Bad Influence* and *False Accusations*, Cray recorded a fourth album with two of his idols, Albert Collins and Johnny Copeland. All his early work was well received, but it was the release of *Strong Persuader* in 1986 that won Cray a Grammy Award and cast him forever among the titans of blues masters. The album's crossover single, "Smokin' Gun," also gave him wider appeal and greater name recognition.

As a result of the success of *Strong Persuader*, Cray became an opening act for some of the biggest stars in the music business. In fact, he opened several times for Eric Clapton, who remains a loyal friend to this day. But

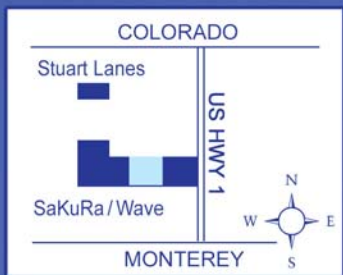


Cray had also clearly become a giant in his own right as a solo artist. His soothing, soulful voice and stellar guitar work has enabled him to play to sell-out crowds at some of the largest venues in the country. A quarter century after his first record release, his work continues to be critically acclaimed, and whenever the titans of the blues gather, Robert Cray stands among them.

Don't miss the opportunity to hear one of the greatest guitarists to ever play the blues when The Robert Cray Band takes the stage at 7:30pm on Sunday, October 21 at the historic Sunrise Theatre in downtown Ft. Pierce. For tickets and/or more information, please call the box office at (772) 461-4775 or visit www.sunrisetheatre.com.



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