

TERRY ROBB

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Pass Terry Robb on a Portland street, and you probably wouldn't look twice at this soft-spoken, serious-minded man who easily blends in with the crowd. Catch him in the middle of a gig, however, and you'll find a passionate, precise player whose ability to grind out hot shot licks makes for a commanding onstage presence. It's like watching Clark Kent turn into Superman: the transition, while seemingly effortless, is astounding nonetheless.

Robb is one of those natural-born talents who makes guitar slinging look simple. No wonder – Robb first came under the spell of the instrument when he was just a kid; his uncle, a professional swing musician, tutored him in ragtime, blues, country, and jazz. In college, Robb studied music theory with Czechoslovakian composer Tomas Svoboda; once classes ended, he hit the road with Frank Zappa/Capt. Beefheart alumnus Ramblin' Rex Jakobosky, who taught him the ropes on the Northwest club scene.

In the early 1980s, Robb struck up a friendship with legendary guitarist John Fahey, who asked him to produce and play on several of Fahey's recordings. One of these, the eclectic *Let's Go*, was cited by *Rolling Stone* as one of the top three releases of 1983 – right alongside Prince's *Purple Rain* and Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the U.S.A.* Throughout the decade, Robb and Fahey collaborated on a handful of albums, including *Time God Casualty* and *Old Girlfriends and Other Horrible Memories*.

The 1990s found Robb focusing on his own career. He collaborated with fellow Oregonian Curtis Salgado on *Hit It and Quit It*, then embarked on a series of national tours with musicians including Buddy Guy and rocker Steve Miller, concluding the run with an appearance on the Conan O'Brien Show. In the studio, he contributed to a number of Grammy and Emmy award-winning projects, including producing a song for the Robert Redford blockbuster *The Horse Whisperer*, and later producing a W.C. Handy-nominated album for blueswoman Sheila Wilcox.

In 1994, Robb signed a contract with the Burnside label, where he made his home for nearly a decade, releasing both acoustic (*Heart Made of Steel* and *When I Play My Blues Guitar* rank as two of his best), and stinging electric blues albums.

Along the way, Robb's reputation grew: As he began cultivating an original style that combined traditional blues elements with more eccentric licks drawn from the jazz world – a la guitar greats Lonnie Johnson and Eddie Lang – he developed a following of his own, winning the Cascade Blues Association's prestigious "Muddy Award" a record sixteen times and vaulting to their Hall of Fame in both electric and acoustic categories. Robb was invited to perform with the Oregon Symphony

Orchestra, and his collaboration with Doug Smith and Mark Hansen as the Acoustic Guitar Summit has become a favorite among fingerstyle stylists. A capable teacher in his own right, he also started teaching acoustic guitar workshops at festivals like the Port Townsend Country Blues Festival and producing instructional videos for Stefan Grossman's Vestapol series, before eventually opening his own Terry Robb Northwest School of Acoustic Guitar.

After dominating the Pacific Northwest blues scene, Robb began seeking out new challenges. In 2004, he departed Burnside, landing at the Memphis, Tennessee-based Yellow Dog Records for his latest album, *Resting Place*.

Recording this brand new CD was like taking an all-important final exam: the Oregon-based bluesman journeyed to Memphis, where he cut with engineer Roland Janes at Sam Phillips' Recording Studio, located just around the corner from Phillips' original studio, Sun Records. A group of crackerjack musicians – including Stax alumnus Willie Hall (drums), contemporary Beale Streeter Charlie Wood (piano), and blues/jazz protégé Paul Taylor (bass) – were awaiting him; like Janes – who's worked with iconic players like Jerry Lee Lewis, Ike Turner, and Billy Lee Riley – they were eager to see what this outsider had to offer.

Robb strapped on his guitar, stepped up to the mic, and began playing Doc Pomus' "Lonely Avenue," made famous by the late great Ray Charles. He cranked up Chuck Berry's "Back To Memphis," and delivered an astonishing take on Big Boy Crudup's "My Baby Left Me." He played his own songs, including "Like Merle" and "Madison Ave. Shuffle." He pulled the Booker T. & the MGs' "My Sweet Potato" out of his trick bag, and sang John Fahey's "Joe Kirby Blues." The group jelled, Robb metamorphosed from everyman into a superbly skilled guitarlinger.

What should've taken two days was cut in a single session, and Robb, clearly at the top of his game, passed the test with flying colors. *Resting Place* marks the beginning of a new chapter in his career.

"Hot guitarists come in all shapes and styles... The best are those supremely tasteful and understated players like Robb... His style increasingly refers to ragtime and country blues and has a lovely lilt."

—The Oregonian

"Terry Robb embodies the traditional spirit of the blues..."

—Pacific NW Inlander

"There's no questioning the guitar prowess of Terry Robb..."

—Blues On Stage

"His facility is breathtaking, his ideas fresh, the sheer scope of his musical ability mind boggling..."

—The Local Planet

"From Leo Kottke to John Fahey, Terry Robb's name is at home with the masters of the craft."

—Cascade Blues Association BluesNotes