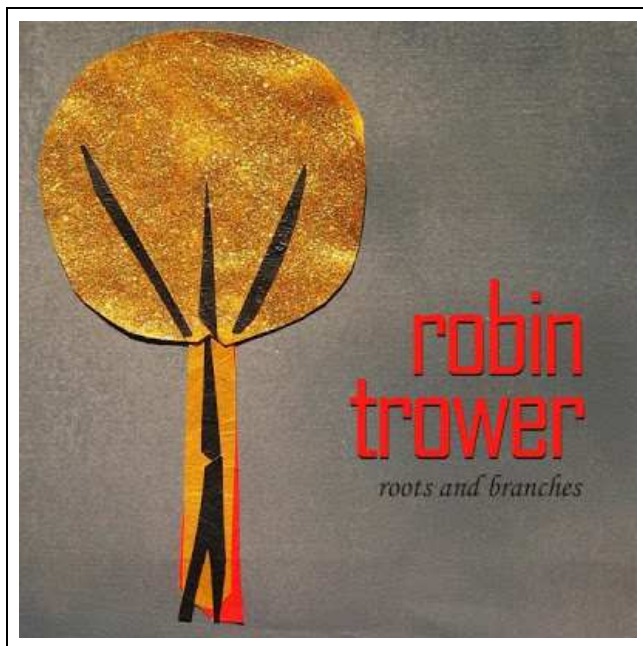


# Rock Guitar Daily with Tony Conley

What's Great In The World Of Rock And Roll Guitar

Thursday, February 7, 2013

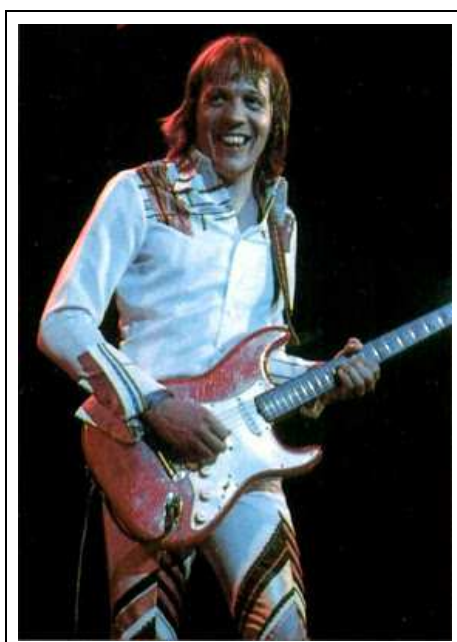
## Robin Trower - Roots and Branches - On Being The Blues



Robin Trower was the first act I ever saw on a large stage. It was 1974, and he had just released the astounding *Bridge of Sighs* (it reached #7 on the Billboard charts), and he was touring with Frank Zappa and The Mothers of Invention, who also had an album in the top 10 - that's why they call them the good old days. It still blows my mind that these two acts could draw a crowd of 6,000 longhairs into a midwestern hockey arena on a Wednesday night, but they could, and did.

Trower had a three piece band that sounded like the roar of the jungle, and the mighty winds. Cranking up his sunburst Fender Strat through his mighty stacks of Marshall amps by way of various pedals which most likely included a Uni-Vibe, a Tychobrahe wah way pedal, and a Fender Blender fuzz/Octave pedal, Trower's tone was massive and sultry. A hungry black panther still comes to mind when I remember the sound. To say it changed my life would most likely be understating the case. From that moment on, I was a devotee of the electric guitar.

Almost forty years on, and he's gone and done it again.



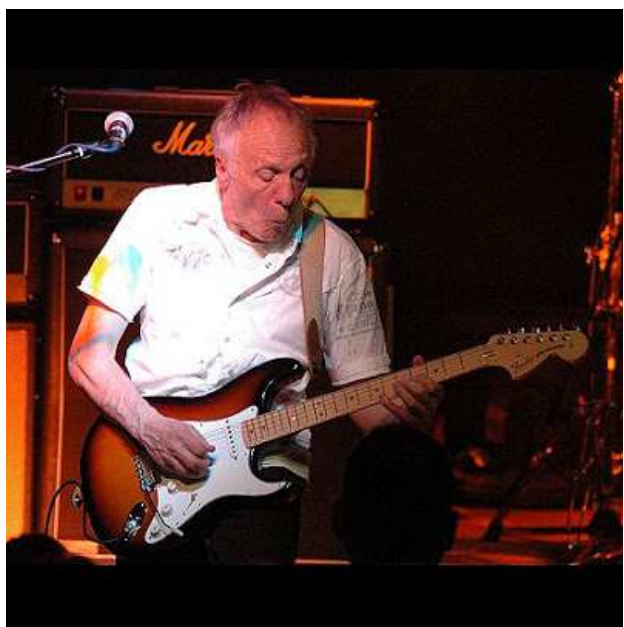
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What shocks me is not that he's done it again, as Trower has been on his game pretty consistently for the last decade, and every time a friend reports back from a show you'd think they'd seen the man himself - no, not Him, I mean Hendrix. No guitarist I know of gets such reverential treatment from fellow players. What shocks me is that he's managed to do it with a record comprised of a great many cover tunes, and not just cover tunes, but the ultimate weekend warriors list of blues covers - Little Red Rooster, The Thrill Is Gone, Hound Dog, Born Under A Bad Sign...

When I saw the song list, I shuddered. Oh, I of little faith, yes, I shuddered.

*Hound Dog* shuffles out of the gate, and it's instantly obvious that Trower and company have tossed the Presley records, and have went their own way - soulful B-3 and stabbing harp fills do the heavy lifting as Trower plays some fat rhythm fills, but come solo time here come the goosebumps - Trower is one of the few players left that still makes his living with the soul that emerges from his vibrato. In league with Clapton, Leslie West, and the late Paul Kossoff, when Robin bends a string you can hear the metal of the strings making love with the frets - there's no other way to describe it.



The ghost of Eric Clapton circa Cream encodes the sonic DNA of Trower's cover of B.B. King's *The Thrill Is Gone* - the haunting lady tone is exemplified and again, it's Trower's ability to sound like no other blues player in his phrasing and feel that makes this so very special. Before I heard this, I would not have ever hoped to hear this chestnut reopened, but I

could listen to this for hours.

I often carp about the proclivities of young blues players, and now I understand why more than ever - Trower is as identifiable in his way as Nina Simone was in her's - they have a voice that can belong to no other. I would recommend that any Stevie Ray aping youngster first take some lessons at the feet of the master, and that master is Robin Trower.

Back In ...

Neal Morse -  
Live  
Momentum  
- "Tomorrow  
Soon Will  
B...

Orianthi - "I  
Can't Be  
Anything  
Else,  
Y'know?"

► January (10)

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## Tony Conley



Glenn Hughes and myself having a chat.

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*When I Heard Your Name* puts me in mind of Robbie Robertson's solo material, but with mind bending guitar work. Every phrase is sung, not played, but sung by Trower. The vocal is answered throughout by the Englishman's taut phrasing - I find myself anticipating every lick and fill, and not once am I gone wanting.

Not since the records of the early to mid 60s have I heard the blues excite me so, and Trower's take on *Little Red Rooster* is animal in its rawness. Howlin' Wolf is smiling, I promise you - Robin sounds like a barn yard prowler, and he's got his sights set on the finish line. This tone needs to have it's cholesterol checked - it's as fat as you want it to be. And the phrasing again - it's maybe the best I've heard since Peter Green - I kid you not.

The organ driven *Believe To My Soul* is in league with the sultry soul of Robert Cray, whose last album ended up on my year end tops list. The guitar work is gentler here, and it's almost like a whisper in that it makes you lean in to get next to it, and then it's got you.



This is the first song on the album that gets you off of the guitars, if only for a minute, as Trower unleashes a studied testimony that makes the case and closes out the tune.

*Shapes of Things to Come* is a Hendrixian piece of walking guitar line bliss, and unison bends that sustain wonderfully and don't release until Trower lets them. Again, Trower is just ridiculous - how dare he have the audacity to play like every song may be his last, and he has to deliver, or pay the price. You're going to think I'm crazy until you throw this record on - then you'll say, "Damn, he's right."

*That's Alright Mama* is another tune on which team Trower has thrown out the template, and refit the tune to serve their mood - drummer Chris Taggart takes this one down to New Orleans, and the swing is fierce. Mama's got a red dress on, and she's shaking it. If you walked into a bar and heard this, you would again instantly be in love with the blues - I know they've been beat up pretty good, and you'll realize just how much when you hear this record. I am reminded of the day in 1990 when I saw Gary Moore electrify Los Angeles - all the imitators and wannabes melt, and the truth is revealed.



Trower is loving his tone these days - it's evident in every lick, in every bend, and in every phrase. *Save Your Love* is a fairly run of the mill slow blues, but Robin's guitar carries the day, and keeps me listening throughout. The glassy solo is presented in

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extreme high definition, and again you can hear every nuance, every intention in his playing.

The ghost of Cream emerges again on ***Born Under A Bad Sign***, and Trower owns it. The notes almost sound as if they are flying out on their own, and he's just controlling the trajectory. This record is engineered so well - every time he starts playing, it's as if the guitar has taken over all frequencies - the band plays great, everything is right, but Trower is so on top of it, that it's musical omniscience.

***Sheltered Moon*** is the first tune that's taken me back to the memory of the late Jimmy Dewar in many decades - this would fit perfectly on any of the early Trower masterpieces - Robin breaks out the wah and the swirls, and were are sent back in time, and The Dreamer has returned. This takes me right back to Hara Arena, 1974 and I'm fifteen again, and that's never a bad thing - thanks, Robin, it's tremendously appreciated. Sometime you forget how it felt, and it's great to be reminded in such a wonderful way.

Keeping the way cocked and the big cat tone intact, the album closes with ***See My Life***, a soul filled funk that takes me back to Trower's days playing the Fillmores to thousands. This is just a great way to end up he record - maybe this sets the stage for what's next - Robin Trower just keeps getting better, and if someone can make my jaded self dig the blues again, I am again converted.

This is a fabulous guitar record - it is a tremendous testament to the artistry of one of our truly great guitar heroes, and for that I am extremely grateful.

Release date: February 19, 2013 on V-12 Records in the US and Manhaton Records in the UK/Europe

Posted by Tony Conley at 6:37 PM 

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Labels: Robin Trower, Robin Trower Roots Branches, Roots and Branches

## 6 comments:

**Chris said...**

Totally agree, this is a wonderful example of a man who's at the top of his craft. I rate RT every bit as good as the Hendrix and Claptons of this world - marks out of 10....11

February 11, 2013 at 2:06 PM

**Anonymous said...**

Isn't "shapes of things--" a yardbirds tune? I was just wondering. I haven't listened to the new Trower album, so I can't say if it's the same song though.

February 11, 2013 at 3:50 PM



**Tony Conley said...**

No - actually The Shape of Things to Come is a new original tune, and not The Yardbirds' classic - I thought the same thing at first!

February 11, 2013 at 4:02 PM

**The Happy Idiot said...**

Awesome dude. Bridge of sighs, if you listen to it today, sounds as good as any modern recording, and you know how they had to do it in the day. Props on the blog.

February 11, 2013 at 10:11 PM

**Trev said...**

Truthfully I have not dug Trowers more recent stuff, always believing his 70's playing was so much better ; just incredible guitar soloing. But, hey, maybe I should check this album out and see how the old dude is sounding thesedays. The review sure is a good one. Trevor.

February 14, 2013 at 1:10 PM

**Anonymous said...**

Did you know Robin sings six of these tunes? In the past, people have suggested Robin take the mic, because he CAN sing...and he always modestly comments something like, "why should I sing when I know professionals that sing for a living?" But he definitely holds his own on the mic. What a fantastic collection of songs. Thank you Robin.

February 16, 2013 at 7:12 PM

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