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10 MINUTES *with* ROBIN TROWER

By Jeb Wright

ROBIN TROWER turned the big 7-0 this March. His career spans three-quarters of his life, as 53 years ago, in 1962, Trower joined a band called The Paramounts. Within a few years he was touring the country with Procol Harum on the back of that band's giant hit "Whiter Shade of Pale." In fact, it was during Trower's Procol Harum days that he snuck a play on Jethro Tull's Martin Barre's Fender Stratocaster and changed the path of his musical life (more on that later).

By 1973, Trower founded a three-piece band, mastered the wah-wah guitar pedal and began a journey that would see him go from sideman to a guitar God. The '70s brought Trower success, as 1974's "Bridge of Sighs" and 1975's "For Earth Below" are considered to be the best in his catalog.

Fast forward to 2015 and the guitarist with perhaps the worst case of guitar face in music history is back. His latest effort, "Something's About to Change," is a solid mixture of Trower's blues influences and his classic distorted Stratocaster guitar.

In the interview that follows, Trower opens up about the new album, "Something's About to Change," his record label and what it was like to work with the late Jack Bruce.

GOLDMINE: Is there a hidden meaning to the title "Something's About to Change"?

ROBIN TROWER: I did have a feeling all through writing the material for "Something's About to Change" – all of the songs – that I was moving into a different era, musically. I think it drew out of my last album, "Roots and Branches," where I was drawing much more on my blues, rhythm and blues and soul influences. I wanted to go further with that and write all the material for this album out of that. I feel that I've opened a new door, or at least partly opened a new door.

GM: The last song, "When I Reach Home" is a great tune.

RT: I will tell you a little story about that. I wrote the lyrics for another piece of music three or four years ago. I happened to come across the demo and I liked that lyric, but I didn't like the music, so I took the lyric for this song.

GM: Another standout track is "Gold to Gray."

RT: That is another one where the lyric was to another song originally. I never throw a good lyric away, as they are harder to come up with than the music. I came up with a new piece of music for that lyric, and I was much happier with it.

GM: V12 is your own record company. Does that allow you to be more in control of your own destiny?

RT: My manager came up with the idea several years ago. He said, "If you have your own label, then you can make any kind of music that you want to make and have no pressure from outside at all." That is what we've been doing, and that is when I started having fun.

GM: Chrysalis Records was your label back in the

day. Did they try to make you conform to certain sounds?

RT: No, not at all. In those days they didn't do that. They just let you get on with it. After the '70s, they started having big sales, so they started to pressurize the artists and the producers, and I think that is when it all changed. You had a lot of people who are running record companies, which is a business, having their say on what that artist's concept should be. It is a strange concept, really.

GM: I know that one of your major influences is James Brown. When I listen to "Bridge of Sighs" or "For Earth Below" I don't see the connection. How did he hook you?

RT: Have you ever heard the album "James Brown - Live at the Apollo"? He had a huge influence on me. I can't give you any practical demonstration out of my music how that has influenced me, but I know it has! He is such a soulful singer. He is my favorite singer. He is so soulful. He changed the way I thought about music.

GM: Talk about the rock artists that influenced you?

RT: The first rock guitar I heard that made my ears prick up was Scotty Moore with Elvis. He was a unique and fantastic guitar player. There has never been anybody like him, before or since. BB King came along next, and that was a big influence, and then Albert King was as well. Jimi Hendrix was a very big influence. People like Howling Wolf as well. He had some guitar players who really had that dirty sound. They were all big influences to my approach and to what I was trying to pull out of myself.

GM: Have you had the opportunity to share the stage with any of your icons?

RT: Unfortunately, no. I did share the stage with Johnnie Taylor, who happened to be one of my favorite singers. I got up and jammed with him one night and that was a great thrill.

GM: Rumor holds that you switched from Gibson guitars to Fender Stratocasters because of Jethro Tull's Martin Barre.

RT: Yeah, that's right. When I was on tour with Procol Harum, we were opening up for Jethro Tull. One day Martin's Strat was on the side of the stage... I am not even sure why he had it out, as Martin plays Gibsons as well. I picked it up and plugged it in and thought, "Wow, this is something else." I went out and bought one the next day. I had never seen Martin play the Strat, but he had it there as a spare.

GM: For those who are not guitar players, can you explain what the difference is between the two

guitars and why it made such a difference?

RT: Gibsons have Humbucker pickups and that makes the sound more thick and it has a lot more body to it. It has less "highs". The Strat, being a single-coil pickup, has a lot more highs to it. The main thing I get off of a Strat is that it has kind of a feeling voice to it as you're playing lead guitar. I think that is what I responded to. It has such a vocal quality to it. They are quite hard to play, so I use a couple of tricks. I use a lot of bends and vibrato – as much as I can. I also tune down a whole step. My strings are tuned to D instead of E. I can use heavier strings and get a better sound that way.

GM: We recently lost Jack Bruce. You did a lot of work with Jack. Do you have any comment on what Jack's music meant to you?

RT: It was a big thrill for me to work with Jack, as I was a big fan of his. Working with him, the energy that he brought to it was unbelievable. The guy was dynamite. The last album we did together, "Seven

Moons," we were both very proud of that album. It was a big thrill to work with Jack every time I worked with him. **GM**

