



# GOLDEN GATE GROOVES

## *FROM THE EDITOR: WELCOME TO OUR FIRST EDITION*

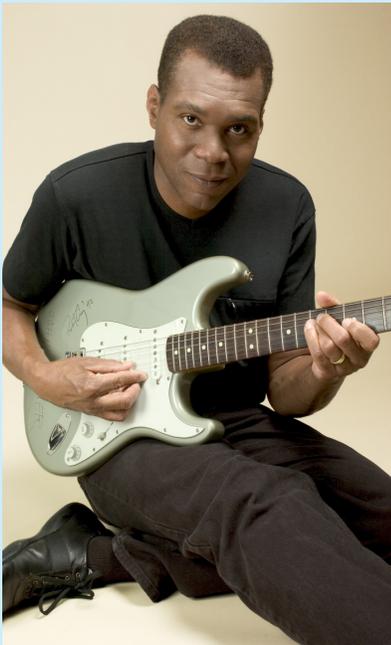
As you can see, we've started with a bang! I never expected we'd score an interview with Robert Cray for our inaugural issue, but having Joseph Jordan on board nets unexpected results. Joseph was a major contributor to this issue, as you'll see. I want to thank everyone who so enthusiastically offered support, especially Joseph, Amy Lou, and Dorothy Hill. We have some exciting ideas about future articles and information, and we welcome input from you (email newsletter@tggsb.org). In our next issue, look for some information on health insurance for the under-insured authored by an industry insider. Stay tuned. Go out and support live Blues! See you on the Blues trail! -Deb Lubin

## **Man on the Line: An Interview with Robert Cray**

*by Joseph Jordan*

*Exclusive to The Golden Gate Blues Society*

Since his first LP was released in 1980, Robert Cray has



entertained audiences in over 25 countries, performing his rich and soulful song for ordinary music fans as well as presidents and kings and queens. His honey-drenched, deep-vibrato voice blends with a guitar style as unique and recognizable as any in popular music, and he fronts a band that epitomizes excellence. Now, on

the verge of his 19<sup>th</sup> release, "This Time", for Nozzle/Vanguard Records, the preternaturally talented singer/songwriter/ guitarist and five-time Grammy Award winner stands at the pinnacle of his career. The following phone interview took place on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

*Photo courtesy of Robert Cray management*

*TGGBS: What is your personal music connection with the Bay Area? Is there a Robert Cray history here?*

RC: Well I lived in the Bay Area from about '89 to '99 or 2000, so for about 11 years, and before that we did a lot of work in the Bay Area when we first started the band up in Oregon and we came down quite a bit starting in about '77.

*TGGBS: Did you feel a part of the Bay Area Blues scene when you lived here?*

RC: In a way. Not so much for the City although we played a few gigs here and there, but mostly we played a lot at Larry Blake's and then we played down in the South Bay.

*TGGBS: To my knowledge you weren't seen in the clubs a lot.*

RC: No, I don't and I didn't really hang out (laughs).

*TGGBS: Why the move from the Bay Area to Santa Barbara (in Central California)?*

RC: Well I moved to Los Angeles before then, and I lived in Los Angeles about 11 years as well. We had our son, Sue and myself. We've been married 19 years, and we decided we didn't want to raise our son in Los Angeles.

*TGGBS: Tell me about the new one, "This Time"... producers, guest artists, approach.*



RC: Well there are no guest artists but there are two new members in the band. One is a returning member, Richard Cousins who's playing bass and Tony Braunagel is playing drums with us now. And Jim Pugh is here with us as always on keyboards, and myself. And we made the personnel changes and we just decided we needed some new music. And it was about time anyway 'cause we hadn't done anything since the double live CD.

*TGGBS: Is there any song that typifies any new direction you might like to further explore?*

RC: I wouldn't say "new direction" but a whole lot of fun. A whole lot of fun making this record, and it kicks off with this blues track called, "Chicken in the Kitchen," which is one of several blues tracks on the record, was written by Jim Pugh that's kind of a throwback to '60s or even mid-'70s-type soul kinda thing... mid-tempo groove we call "Love 2009." (laughs) We got a bunch of different kinds of things on there and everyone contributed. Richard brought in a blues tune, Tony brought in a blues tune, Jim of course he writes all the time, and myself, so there is stuff from everybody.

*TGGBS: Why did you start producing your own recordings?*

RC: Well the idea was thrown out to me years ago when we were on Mercury... by one of the presidents of the company at that time in the mid-'90s who said, "You should produce your own records you know, 'cause you basically know what you want to hear." I said, "O.K. great." (laughs) So I started doing that off and on. But there were times when I did some [producing] and then we had different producers come in and do some work, but basically you know when we write the songs it's pretty much a band effort when we bring the material in. I just kind of take the bandleader's position and just try to get things organized.

*TGGBS: Richard Cousins asked me to ask you about the effect white shoes have on Jim Pugh's organ playing?*

RC: (laughs) That's great. I think it transforms Jim into a whole different persona. Clothes do that for anybody. It's like going out on Halloween, if you go out and put some weird clothes on or something different you become that personality. And Jim has these different alter egos, one of which is [named] "Pastel Motif." And that's his super-cool organist, you know, cool cat. Mr. Motif.

*TGGBS: What does your new drummer Tony bring to the group?*

RC: Tony brings a fresh approach to things we've been doing for a long time. And Tony's been around a long time. He's played a lot of different styles of music... a lot of people whose music we enjoy from Bonnie Raitt to Taj Mahal and all kinds of stuff so and walked right in and it was like we've been friends, yonks. (laughs) It's great.

*TGGBS: Musically, what are some of the most important things to you and your band?*

RC: Being able to converse with one another on stage, musically. I think that's the most important thing. Everybody's listening to one another, everybody's playing and everybody is able to go to different places unconsciously together. That's a lot of fun. The only way to do that is to be paying attention to one another and putting yourself right there in the moment, for every bit of every song.

*TGGBS: Do you look forward to reaching a different musical place each night?*

RC: That's what makes the whole thing worthwhile.

*TGGBS: Do you view various crowds as challenges, meaning, will you change a set list up or a style of attack for different types of audiences?*

RC: No we don't do that. We change the set list up only because I call the set. Granted we're going to do some of the well-known songs that we have, but they won't always be in the same order. Yeah, and sometimes we don't play some of the songs we played the night before. If something's not working, you just need a moment to breathe. And gather yourself, but the audience does play a part. You always got to try to get to your audience. But basically what we're up there on stage doing is trying to find something within ourselves to push out to the audience... to give to the audience, and they're not going to give it up unless you put it out... (laughs)

*TGGBS: Are fans more responsive or appreciative in the States or parts of the States? Overseas?*

RC: I think it all depends. I don't know. I don't think that it's any better any place else in the country or the world with the exception of outside of America, I think people really appreciate American music no matter what the form... whether it's blues, country, rock and roll or whatever... only because it is not theirs. And we in



America tend to kind of like, "Oh yeah"... it sounds like that... looking for the new flavors all the time. But when you're on stage and the people are out there, you really can't see 'em.

*TGGBS: What is one of the most moving gigs you've ever played?*

RC: It's always nice to play outside of this country... so to me that's always a joy. This coming week we're going to Japan where we haven't been for quite some time, so we're looking forward to that. But some of the more memorable gigs have been with some like John Lee Hooker. We still get the opportunity to play with BB King, and that's always great.

*TGGBS: Was "Crossroads" as incredible as it seemed to be on DVD? ("Crossroads: Eric Clapton Guitar Festival 2007" in Chicago)*

RC: Yeah. Crossroads was yeah... there's moments in "Crossroads" like you know you're happy to be there and there's other times where you're wondering why you're there because all the talent that's there. (laughs)

*TGGBS: I was blown away by that DVD.*

RC: Yeah that's a great DVD. It's just great. The whole thing. One act after another. One individual after another and all the camaraderie that goes on. It's really awesome. It just shows Eric's wide tastes and it was just nice to be a part of it.

*TGGBS: Before music what were some of the jobs you held?*

RC: I worked in a car wash for like a day or two. As a training machinist for about a month. And I washed dishes for a day.

*TGGBS: These weren't long-term jobs were they?*

RC: I always wanted to play music. Oh and I worked at an auto-detail place my cousin ran... I painted engines. (laughs)

*TGGBS: What are you doing when you're not within the music business?*

RC: Trying to start another vegetable garden. We've got some things growing out in the garden now and after we get back from Japan I'll get a little more time to spend out there... and I like to cook.

*TGGBS: What do you feel is the most valuable function a blues society can bring to itself or musicians or to the public?*

RC: Well I think the most important thing is to let people be aware of the contribution of blues music to world music, and American music in particular. There's generations of young black kids who aren't aware of those who won't be around here in the next decade or so who have contributed immensely to American popular music in the form of blues, and I think that a blues society plays a big part in letting people know who these people are and to help the music in some respects live on... because we don't hear it on the radio as much as we'd like to unless you're listening to public broadcasting or college radio stations, so they [societies] help a lot.

*TGGBS: Anything you'd like to say about the new Administration or the changes you see within the United States?*

RC: Yeah I am really happy that, this shows a lot about this country, that this country voted for Barack Obama, and change. That makes me really proud to be in America and an American when we can do things like that and come together and make these big changes like this. And it's really boosted our image around the world. People are willing to talk, and that's the way to start things happening, being able to talk with other people. Cool. My wife Sue and I talk about the fact we were in England last year and we hopped into a taxicab and the driver said, "Oh you Americans. You'll never do anything like that, they'll never vote this guy in for President." And now we just smile, 'cause we told him, "just wait and see, it's going to be different." And sure enough.

*TGGBS: Too bad you won't run into him again.*

RC: Probably won't, but I'm thinking that he's thinking about it too.

*TGGBS: Anything you'd like to say we haven't talked about?*

RC: I think we covered everything.

*TGGBS: Thank you for your time, Robert.*

RC: Thanks, Joseph, bye-bye.

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*The Robert Cray Band's "This Time" will be released in August 2009.*

## Alvin Draper, Just Can't Keep Him Down

by Amy Lou

*Photo courtesy of Dorothy Hill*

Alvin Draper is no stranger to hard work, hard times or the blues. A couple weeks ago, I sat with Alvin and I could not help but be moved by his humility, strength, sunny spirit and passion. It's pretty amazing, considering all he's been through. Alvin has loved and lived the blues his whole life. He beat cancer when he was 64 years old and on March 29, 2009, he was inducted into the West Coast Blues Hall of Fame.

Alvin was born in Lubbock, Texas on March 17, 1942, and grew up in a family where blues ruled. They had a café where musicians like Sonny Boy Williamson, Gatemouth Brown and T-Bone Walker came to play on weekends. His dad, Richard Draper, and grandpa both played guitar and sang and his mom took him to church on Sundays. Lightnin' Hopkins was his grandmother's nephew. You could say it was in his blood to play. He started playing music when he was just 14 years old. He was a drummer and taught himself to play his Fender when the guitarist in his band up and quit. He saw his chance and declared himself the guitarist and the singing came as natural as Sunday morning.

His parents split up when he was in the eighth grade and he and his siblings went to live with their father, who abandoned them to play all over Texas. Alvin was forced to drop out of school and get a job. At 14, he had to grow up fast and was working in an auto shop and playing with his band in the evenings. He came to California in 1968 and settled in Palo Alto where he landed a job; it wasn't long before he started playing again. Alvin played all over the Peninsula with his band Alvin and the Challengers. He loved to perform but what he found later, as a young man with a family of his own, was that the isolation in a life of a working musician was taking a huge toll on him and his heart. The time spent away from his family was too

much. He was missing out on the one thing that mattered most to him. He gave up music for 25 years.

Over the years, he played with many well known musicians, such as Little Willie John, Etta James, Sam Cooke, Bobby Bland and a host of local blues players.

Alvin developed his own unique and masterful style of guitar that has gained him loyal fans and respect from blues lovers everywhere. He's been a regular and popular performer at JJ's Blues in San Jose since 2000, and when you see him play that shiny red hollow-bodied Gibson, you're most likely to agree. He's a soulful singer who is clearly in his element when performing his rhythm and blues in his sharp suits and funky hats. He credits Jimmy Reed as the artist that made him want to be an entertainer and James Brown is his favorite performer of all time.

Alvin never shot for the stars, he never cared about that. He just wanted to play his blues. He says that this life is not for everyone and it can become quite lonesome sometimes. He has mentored many younger musicians starting out, myself included. His advice for aspiring musicians is to "love what you do and don't give up." I asked him to give me a favorite memory and the first thing that lit up his face was the one time he got to play with his dad back in Texas. In later years, he had hoped to bring his dad out to California to play together again, but sadly that never happened because his dad passed away before Alvin could get him here. I asked Alvin what his biggest regret in life was and he plainly said "cigarettes."

Back in 2005, Alvin started losing his voice until he couldn't talk anymore. They found a tumor on his vocal chords. He had cancer, but cancer didn't have him. In 2006, one week after his hospital stay, he rolled into JJ's Blues in a wheelchair and with a smile and played his



guitar to a stunned and happy house. He has been playing ever since. He is grateful for his healing, his wife and his music. This was a scary and humbling life experience as he faced death three times and the real possibility that he may never sing again. He underwent chemotherapy, which thankfully removed the cancer, but the radiation from the treatments caused his airways to swell and he had to have a tracheotomy. He adjusted to it and it wasn't long before he was singing again.

Alvin Draper is truly an inspiration to "get up offa your thing." He was the highlight of this year's West Coast Blues Hall of Fame Awards show. Ronnie Stewart, Executive Director of the awards show, said "there wasn't a dry eye in the house when Alvin got up and accepted his award." "I was hollerin' like I was in church. It was the most exciting night of our life," said Edith Draper, his loving wife and biggest fan. Alvin was deeply moved and grateful to be recognized for something he has loved his whole life.

This Texan native has certainly paid his blues dues. Edith told me sweetly, "Alvin got his flowers." Her mama had

always told her, "gimme my flowers while I'm alive and not when I'm dead." Alvin got his flowers and more when he accepted the Best Male Blues Vocalist of the Year award.

At 67 years old, he is busier than ever with no plans to quit. He just finished recording his much anticipated CD on Beat Records, appropriately called "Just Can't Keep Me Down." The CD can be purchased at his shows. You can find him on the web at [www.myspace.com/alvindraper](http://www.myspace.com/alvindraper). Alvin performs every other Sunday at JJ's Blues in San Jose and the Blue Note in Milpitas. He plays every Monday at Velma's Place in San Francisco. And Alvin is scheduled to perform at the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Hayward-Russell City Blues Festival to be held on July 11 and 12, 2009. He says he's "gonna be fine, just fine." And I believe him. I have been a huge fan ever since I first saw this tall skinny papa in the sharp suit, with the big smile, the big voice, walking through the crowd and singing "Please, Please, Please" without a microphone. Alvin and Edith don't have to write notes to each other anymore and he's back and better than ever.



**E. C. Scott**  
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**The Daniel Castro Band**

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One unforgettable night of house rockin', soul satisfyin' blues with three Bay Area Blues legends

TGGBS members \$10, General Admission \$15

Friday May 29<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 PM

**The Big Fox Theater**  2205 Broadway, Redwood City  
[www.foxdream.com](http://www.foxdream.com)

## The Golden Gate Blues Society Jam Photos

*Photos by Dorothy Hill*

The following photos were taken by blues journalist Dorothy Hill on various Wednesday nights at The Golden Gate Blues Society blues jam at the Little Fox in Redwood City. These photos show the quality of musicians that the jam has been attracting every week since its inception more than 3 years ago. Dorothy will be sharing more of her photos with us in upcoming issues of the newsletter. I expect that others will share as well.



Sonny Rhodes



Pat Wilder



Lee Hildebrand  
in a rare performance



Kenny Neal



Nancy Wright



Elvin Bishop



Daniel Castro



Mighty Mike Schermer



Kenny "Blue" Ray



Steve Freund

## Short Takes: CD Reviews

by Joseph Jordan

Welcome to a brief look at some independent Bay Area releases of the moment and the recent past. We hope these reviews will encourage you to check out and support local artists.

*Ratings: 1 to 5 stars, with 5 meaning it's still in the player a month later.*

### Nancy Wright with the Tony Monaco Trio, *Moanin'*

Describing music as being tasty gets thrown around quite a bit, but in the case of Nancy Wright's "Moanin'" the appellation fits like a home-cooked meal by your favorite chef. Tenor saxophonist Wright has been a familiar face on Bay Area blues stages for years, and now she absolutely shines with her first solo effort, a 10-track, all-instrumental jazz CD displaying her formidable chops as a player par excellence. A brilliant first effort, and a great late-night repast.

★★★

On: Summit Records/Chicken Coup Records, 2009  
Check out: <http://www.myspacemusic.com/nancywrightmusic>

### The David Landon Band, *This Time*

Multitalented guitarist, singer, songwriter, producer and Berkeley resident, Landon has fashioned a completely home-brewed 12-track effort that, although blues dominant, will please listeners of pop and rock to boot. David's sidemen are well known local stalwarts—drummer Randy Hayes, bassist Steve Evans and keyboardist Tony Stead—and the foursome blend beautifully together. Guest saxophonist Charles McNeal is a revelation. On this, his fourth album, Landon provides ample proof of his consummate musicianship and loving attention to the blues.

★★★

On: Whip Records, 2009  
Check out: <http://www.davidlandon.com>

### Lady Bianca, *A Woman Never Forgets*

If there is a Bay Area artist more deserving of national attention and ultimate praise, it is Lady Bianca. This East Bay resident continues to astound by way of her unworldly piano and vocal prowess, her thorough command of song and a stage presence that fellow pros can only dream about. Having a song-writing hand, along with her longtime partner Stanley Lippitt, in all but 1 of the 11 tracks, Bianca moans, cajoles, oozes and flat-out kills in her pop and gospel-sensibility delivery. A star has been born for some time... let's just hope it can now shine countrywide.

★★★1/2

On: Magic-O Records, 2009  
Check out: <http://www.ladybianca.com>

### J.C. Smith Band, *Defining Cool*

The Bay Area too has its own "Big Man." J.C. Smith's third studio recording features 12 self-produced songs featuring his six-piece band of big boss bluesmen.



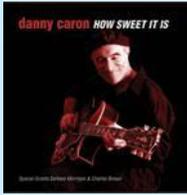
Smith, a drummer/vocalist turned surprisingly adept lead guitarist obviously had a blast making this CD, and that joy permeates the recording. It's built to lure you in, tempt you, tease you, make you starry-eyed and stone satisfied.

Clocking in at just under an hour, and featuring songs both well and lesser known, all brilliantly chosen, you'll get more than your money's worth with every spin. Rough-and-ready and gone-daddy-gone, this one's a Chicago-blues-by-way-of-San-Jose keeper.

★★★

On: Cozmik Records, 2009  
Check out: <http://www.jcsmithband.org>

## Danny Caron, *How Sweet It Is*



An absolutely stunning effort by Caron and his stellar hand-picked players (with vocal contributions by Barbara Morrison and the late Charles Brown) makes for one of the best indie CDs of the year. A guitarist of taste, intelligence and subtle phrasing, Caron can also beat the beat with the best. A six-string master at ease with blues, jazz and pop, Caron and co-producer Bruce Kaphan lovingly bring home 11 tracks of majesty, grace and just plain fun.

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On: Caron Records, 2009

Check out: <http://www.dannycaron.com>

## In Future Issues

We will present Short Takes on CDs by:

- Sid Morris
- Alabama Mike
- Leah Tysse
- Mike Schermer

If you want your name here, contact the Editor via [newsletter@tggbs.org](mailto:newsletter@tggbs.org)

## Upcoming SF Bay Area Blues Events that Caught the Editor's Eye

May 29 EC Scott, Mark Hummel and the Blues Survivors with Rusty Zinn, and The Daniel Castro Band, Fox Theater, Redwood City (Friday)

June 14 Saffire - the Uppity Blues Women, Last Tour, Freight & Salvage, Berkeley (Sunday)

June 19 Charlie Musselwhite, Biscuits & Blues, SF (Friday)

June 19 Earl Thomas and Mighty Mike Schermer, Poor House Bistro, San Jose (Friday)

June 26-28 Monterey Bay Blues Festival (Friday-Sunday)

June 28 Candye Kane, Biscuits & Blues, SF (Sunday)

July 4 Red, White, & Blues Festival, Alameda County Fair, Pleasanton (Saturday)

July 11-12 Hayward/Russell City Blues Festival (Saturday-Sunday)

July 25 Redwood City Blues Festival (Saturday)

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[www.tggbs.org](http://www.tggbs.org)

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The Golden Gate Blues Society is a nonprofit affiliate of The Blues Foundation, based in Memphis, Tennessee. The purpose of the Golden Gate Blues Society is to enhance the appreciation and understanding of the Blues in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area through:

- sponsorship and promotion of Blues performances;
- education programs and publications on the performance, interpretation, preservation and growth of the Blues as an American art form; and
- the financial as well as moral support of the San Francisco Bay Area Blues community.