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THE DUKE ROBILLARD BAND

Here's a quick quiz: What do Bob Dylan, Jay McShann, The Fabulous Thunderbirds, John Hammond, the late Jimmy Witherspoon, Dr. John, Maria Muldaur, Roomful of Blues, and the Canadian band The Rockin' Highliners all have in common?

Answer: Duke Robillard.

Guitarist. Bandleader. Songwriter. Singer. Producer. Session musician. And a one-man cheering section for the blues, in all its forms and permutations. And every one of those names has shared recording studio space or stage time with a man who is a legend in the blues community.

The W.C. Handy Awards have named Robillard "Best Blues Guitarist" two years in a row (2000 and 2001), B.B. King says Duke's "one of the great players," and the Houston Post called him "one of God's guitarists." And the New York Times says Robillard is "a soloist of stunning force and originality."

None of that goes to Robillard's head. He's still on the road, still playing as many as 250 dates a year. And still proving, night after night, that his true talent is bringing people out to hear the music, appreciate the show, and dance to the blues.

Duke had his first band in high school — he was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island — and he was fascinated from the beginning by the ways in which jazz, swing, and the blues were linked. In 1967, he formed Roomful of Blues, and the band was tight enough and tough enough to accompany two of its heroes, Big Joe Turner and Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson on record and in live appearances.

Always ahead of his time, Duke's first band pre-dated the renewed interest in jump blues by more than a decade — and almost 20 years later, in 1986, when he recorded with jazz sax master Scott Hamilton, he recorded a collection of classic big band tunes from the '30s and '40s, thus skillfully pre-dating the neo-Swing craze of the mid '90s.

Roomful of Blues — which still continues, a quarter of a century later — gave Duke his first exposure to a wide public, and when he left after a dozen years, he played briefly with rockabilly king Robert Gordon, then cut two albums with the Legendary Blues Band (a sterling collection of former members of Muddy Waters' band). He led his own band until 1990, and then replaced Jimmy Vaughan in the Fabulous Thunderbirds.

In 1993, as he was about to sign a world-wide recording deal with Virgin/Pointblank, he met Holger Petersen, head of the Canadian independent label Stony Plain, at a folk festival in Winnipeg. In conversation, he mentioned he wanted to record a complete album of blues, without the r&b and jazz influences of his work to date.

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Petersen was interested; Virgin gave the go-ahead, and the resulting album, **Duke's Blues**, earned rave reviews. It was so successful, in fact, that Virgin soon licensed the record from Stony Plain and released it around the world (except in Canada, where it continues in the Canadian company's catalogue).

In the years since his relationship with the Canadian label has been astonishingly fruitful. As a solo artist, he has released five records with the label — including his latest "all-blues" outing **Living With the Blues** to be released in early 2002.

Just as remarkable have been the projects he has produced (and played on) for Stony Plain, including two albums with the late Jimmy Witherspoon, two with Kansas City piano king Jay McShann, comeback CDs for Billy Boy Arnold and Rosco Gordon, a swinging confection with the Canadian band The Rockin' Highliners, and a superb album of guitar duets with the jazz legend Herb Ellis.

As if this growing catalogue was not enough, he has found time to share studio gigs with Bob Dylan (the Daniel Lanois-produced Time Out of Mind sessions), Ruth Brown, the late Johnny Adams, John Hammond, Pinetop Perkins, and Ronnie Earl, among many others. He now has his own 24-track studio in his home, and he has become deeply involved in graphic design and photography as well as record production.

Duke Robillard is a man in command of a full range of creative talents — unique in the blues, and rare in the music industry as a whole. He is, in fact, a complete artist at the height of his powers.



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Duke Robillard has been widely acknowledged as one of the great blues guitarists for years, though lately he's been keen on jazz. On *Living With The Blues*, however, Robillard is squarely situated in the blues once again. He's chosen to record several tunes that have been a part of his concert repertoire, in the process seizing the opportunity to pay his respects to the likes of B.B. King, Guitar Slim, and Little Milton. He pays homage to Tampa Red with a terrific acoustic cover of "Hard Road" and to Willie Dixon via his classic "I Live the Life I Love." Robillard's versatility is a matter of record, so it's not surprising to find him working country, jump, and Chicago styles. Also, check out his gritty vocal on the swampy original "Buy Me a Dog." As always, Robillard's guitar work is immaculate. — *PVV*

Latest album: „**Duke Robillard's World of Blues**“ (Dixie Frog)

Duke Robillard – guitar / vocals
Doug James – baritone sax
Bruce Bears – organ piano
John Ross - drums
Mark Teixeira – drums