

Robben Ford

Robben Ford is famous for his melodic, soulful and expressive style. He is rooted in the blues but sometimes reaches into jazz for a few ideas.



Line-up

Robben Ford - guitar, vocals

Jimmy Earl - bass

Tom Brechtlein - drums

Jeff Bako - keyboards

On Stage: 4

Travel Party: 5

Website

www.robbenford.com

Biography

Robben Ford is one of the premier electric guitarists today, particularly known for his blues playing as well as his ability to be comfortable in a variety of musical contexts. A five-time Grammy nominee, he has played with artists as diverse as Joni Mitchell, Jimmy Witherspoon, Miles Davis, George Harrison, Phil Lesh, Bonnie Raitt, Claus Ogerman, Michael McDonald, Bob Dylan, John Mayall, Greg Allman and many others. Born in 1951 in Woodlake, California, and raised in Ukiah, Robben was the third of four sons in a musical family. His father Charles was a country and western singer and guitarist before entering the army and marrying Kathryn, who played piano and had a lovely singing voice. Robben's first chosen instrument was the saxophone, which he began to play at age ten and continued to play into his early twenties. He began to teach himself guitar at age thirteen upon hearing the two guitarists from The Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Michael Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop. In the late 1960's, Ford frequented the Fillmore and Winterland Auditoriums in San Francisco to see Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Cream, Led Zeppelin, Albert King, B.B. King and all of the progenitors of blues. "It was an incredible time for electric guitar," Robben recalls. On his interest in jazz, Robben says, "I fell in love with the sax-playing of Paul Desmond and The Dave Brubeck Quartet, and before long found Ornette Coleman, Archie Shepp, Yusef Lateef, Roland Kirk, John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, and of course, Miles Davis." These influences have stayed with Robben, playing a large part in his particular blend of jazz and blues that define him as a guitarist and allow him to play in a wide variety of settings. After high school, Robben and his brothers Patrick (a blues drummer) and Mark (a blues harmonica player) formed The Charles Ford Blues Band (named after their father), and recorded for the Arhoolie label. Robben (on sax and guitar) and Patrick went on to tour the U.S. with Chicago harmonica player Charlie Musselwhite, again recording for Arhoolie. Robben's first attempt at forming his own jazz

quartet was picked up by legendary blues singer Jimmy Witherspoon, which brought Robben to L.A. He toured the U.S. and Europe with Witherspoon and was seen by Tom Scott and members of The L.A. Express, who were about to begin a promotional tour with Joni Mitchell for her recording "Court and Spark." Robben was invited to play guitar on the tour and played on two recordings with Mitchell and The L.A. Express. "The two years I spent with Joni were the most formative of my musical life. Joni was just brilliant and very accessible, and the members of The L.A. Express became good friends and teachers. It was great." Beatle George Harrison invited Robben to join him on his "Dark Horse" tour of the U.S. and Canada, raising his musical profile even further. Shortly after the two month stint with Harrison, Robben moved to Colorado to take a much-needed break from music and to study with Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa. In 1977, he was approached by Elektra Records, which produced his first solo recording "The Inside Story" with a group of musicians who went on to become The Yellowjackets. Elektra closed their doors in the early 1980's, leading to a time of uncertainty. Robben moved to San Francisco to be close to family and his early musical history. Soon his career would take another upward swing, recording and touring with Michael McDonald, securing a recording contract with Warner Brothers Records, and meeting his soon-to-be wife, actress Anne Kerry. After moving to New York with Anne, he was called to play with musical icon Miles Davis. "Producer Tommy LiPuma played Miles my work with the Yellowjackets, then three days later, Miles called me personally to join his band. Shocking!" Robben lamented having to leave Miles after only six months because of recording commitments with Warner Brothers, but was told by Miles that if he ever wanted to come back, "just come back." Robben's 1988 release for Warner Brothers, "Talk to Your Daughter" brought his first Grammy nomination (Best Contemporary Blues Recording) and he started touring the world under his own name. Still based in New York, he backed David Sandborn on the television show "Night Music," in which Sandborn hosted a variety of musical acts. Robben toured with Sandborn in 1990, then moved back to southern California shortly thereafter to be closer to his own band. After leaving Warner Brothers, Robben signed with Stretch/GRP records, where he finally found a real home for his creativity, recording three CDs for them with his band "The Blue Line" (Tom Brechtlein on drums and Roscoe Beck on bass). After a very fruitful eight years, Robben disbanded the group and recorded two more CDs for the label which had then become Stretch/Blue Thumb: "Tiger Walk" (an instrumental recording produced in New York with Keith Richard's rhythm section) and "Supernatural," his most accomplished work up to that point as a songwriter. In 2000 Robben was invited to tour with Phil Lesh and Friends on a co-bill with Bob Dylan, reuniting him with Billy Paine and Paul Barrere of Little Feat, as well as drummer John Molo. "This experience gave me new respect for Jerry Garcia as a musician and songwriter. The songs and musical context were pure pleasure--real guitar music! When his contract expired at Stretch/Blue Thumb, Robben signed with Concord Records, the largest independently-owned record company at the time. In 2002, he released "Blue Moon" and in 2003 "Keep on Runnin," a recording full of the 60's blues/R&B feeling with which he grew up. His third release for Concord was entitled "Truth". "I feel this is the best work I have done in terms of a solo recording. It is my most realized work as a songwriter, and I feel like I am reaching higher ground as a guitarist. "Truth" represents the blues as they are today; some of the songs are sociopolitical in essence, but not without humor, and the musical setting is fresh." Robben's fourth release for Concord, "Soul on Ten" is a "live" recording performed in San Francisco. "People had been requesting a live recording for years and I had the right band, music, and venue to pull it off." The CD also includes two studio tracks which feature Larry Goldings on B3 organ and John Button on bass. Most recently (2010) Robben released "Renegade Creation," with a group of musical friends who have played in different combinations and contexts over the years and decided to focus on a project together recording for Mike Varney's Shrapnel label. This is a rock band, Robben's first, and the results have people talking: "Dare I say everyone who hears

it, loves it!" The other members are guitarist Mike Landau, bassist Jimmy Haslip and drummer Gary Novak. Robben has been touring the world off and on with the legendary guitarist Larry Carlton, the two producing "Live in Tokyo", and an "unplugged" DVD from Paris. Projects with John Scofield, Michael McDonald, and touring and recording with fellow Miles Davis alumni saxophonist Bill Evans, as well as Randy Brecker and Rolling Stones bassist Darryl Jones. Robben also collaborates with his wife Anne on various musical projects including her recent CD "Weill", which Robben produced on their own Illyria label.

Discography

1972 Discovering the Blues - Rhino
1976 Schizophonic - MCA
1979 The Inside Story - Elektra
1988 Words and Music - Warner
1988 Robben Ford - Warner
1988 Talk to Your Daughter - Warner
1992 Robben Ford & the Blue Line - Stretch
1993 Mystic Mile - Stretch
1995 Handful of Blues - Blue Thumb
1996 Blues Connotation - ITM
1997 Tiger Walk - Blue Thumb
1998 The Authorized Bootleg - Blue Thumb
1999 Supernatural - Blue Thumb
2001 Tribute to Paul Butterfield - Blind Pig
2002 Blue Moon - Concord Jazz
2003 Keep on Running - Concord Jazz
2006 City Life - Westwind
2007 Truth - Concord
2009 Soul on Ten - Concord

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Tel: +33 553585256 - wolf@novaconcerts.com - www.novaconcerts.com
