

Tony Coleman

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Tony on his Music

What I've tried to do with my blues music, is put more of an emphasis on the rhythm, the beat. That's why, as a drummer, I put the drums up front, and the band centered on me.

A lot of people don't realize that some of the greatest guitarists were originally drummers Albert King, for example, played drums with Jimmy Reed. If you hear Albert Collins play guitar, he plays in the «pocket,» where you play on the down beat. His phrasing always starts on the down bit, with the notes always hitting the beat. A lot of guys play scatter blues, where they play all the notes they know, and they go off on the guitar. B.B. King can play by himself, and have you dance. Those are my favorite type of blues guitarist.

The blues is based on rhythm, and a lot of people don't understand that, and that's why I can tell when people are playing with feeling or they're just playing with technique. As a drummer, I'm going to always have a hot guitar player in my band that plays the blues, but he's got to play it within the groove.

I remember the first band that really turned me on, as far as the drummer being out front, was Karen Carpenter of the Carpenters. I used to really like Karen Carpenter, because she was a drummer. I personally feel she should have kept playing the drums, singing from behind the kit, the way she was doing until they decided she needed to be out front. I think she was really, really nervous singing out front. I bet if you asked her brother, he would probably say she was nervous. When I'm behind the kit playing, I feel real confident, I can sing a lot stronger from behind the drums. No different than a piano player that sings from behind the piano.

The next drummer that turned me on, vocal-wise, was Buddy Miles. When I saw Buddy Miles, that was it. He had a powerful band. I was his biggest fan. I always said I was going to put me a band together like Buddy Miles- drum kit out front, horn section on a riser behind him, rhythm section beside him- he had the Buddy Miles Express. I always wanted to have a band like Buddy Miles, but I went to see a Buddy Miles concert, he cursed at me for yelling his name so loud, he couldn't sing because I was so loud down in front. I was like 14 at one of his concerts, and he was headlining a show with Ginger Baker opening for him. When Buddy came out, he had the drums in red, white and blue, with the American flag on the front of the kit. I mean, that's my hero, and the man's trying to sing, and I was yelling, trying to get a drumstick. Now I realize sometimes when people do that, it can be annoying. He shouted at me «Shut the f*** up! ». He yelled at me, and I shut up the remainder of the show. I never did get my stick either. But now, I know the man, and I sit in with him and his band. When I told him this story, he seemed to get a little bit sad about it. But Buddy is still my biggest influence.

I'm the only drummer in this world that can say I have played with B.B. King, Bobby Bland, Buddy Guy, Albert King, Ike Turner, Albert Collins, Otis Clay, Etta James, Ruth Brown, Charlie Musselwhite, Frankie Lee, Johnnie Taylor, Katie Webster, James Cotton, Z.Z. Hill, James Brown, O.V. Wright, Kenny Neal, Lucky Peterson. I played with pretty much all the legends in modern blues. No other drummer can say that or any musician. And I think that's something to be proud of. No other drummer will be able to say that, because so many of them are gone now. I think that means something. I am proud and honored to be able to have worked with these great people.

I want to pursue my acting career too- I don't want to just be a musician only. I want to cover it all, just like B.B. Everything I learned in the industry, as far as being a professional, I learned from B.B. King. There's no blues artist in this world more professional than B.B. King. Never, Nowhere. He is the best. Everything I do with my band, my career, is based on B.B., what I learned from watching B.B., how to be a professional.

I get real upset about the image of the bluesman, being a bunch of alcoholics, drug addicts, ignorant, can't-read-or-write kinda people. That has got to stop. That's one thing I like about Robert Cray. Robert Cray doesn't portray that image at all. I think it's the stereotypes of blues I don't like. There's a lot of bad jokes out there- «a blues man drives a beat-up Cadillac or Buick, has a name like Bubba Joe,» and stuff like that. It's supposed to be entertaining, but I find it very racist and ignorant for people to make fun of blues men like that. They didn't want to be ignorant- they just weren't allowed to go to school. When you see a guy on the porch with no teeth and all that, with the overalls on, picking a guitar, looking all broken, hungry and stuff, these people didn't want to be like that. That was the only way they could be, living in a racist, rural world that they did, and still maintain some form of dignity. That takes a strong willed person. People should look more at the positive things about the blues, and stop trying to make the blues to be some kind of joke. Blues is an African American gift to the world.

As a black man, it seems like the only way you're going to be a success in the blues is when you've got one foot in the grave. An old black man or you're a young, white kid. All these great blues artists that are black, they don't seem to get the popularity, or even the chance to really make it. Makes me wonder.....Damn!

I want to shift gears with blues music. I don't want to stay in the same place where blues has already been, I want to be blues-based but more into the groove. I've got some shuffles, some funk, some jazz and some rock on here. I want it to be like a box of candy, where you've got an assortment of different flavors. I don't want it to be just one thing. That's why I was happy to use different types of musicians on this record, like Lucky Peterson, members of Earth Wind and Fire, also Jim Pugh from the Robert Cray Band, just to give it different flavors. So I hope you enjoy my music, blues power to you, where ever you are and whomever you are.