



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Cray, DeLay and Party Kings offer a Halloween blues treat

Eugene thrives with a talented network of musicians, most of whom spend boring days doing manual labor and tiring nights on the small stage of some over-crowded tavern.

Although very few make it into the limelight, success stories like Robert Cray's are what helps to keep good music alive in this town.

The Robert Cray Band will be returning to the area tonight as headliners for Eugene's ninth annual Halloween Ball at the Hilton Ballroom. Special guests will be Portland's Paul DeLay Band and the Party Kings.

Cray and his band were already local heroes prior to Cray getting a bit part as the bass player for Otis Day and the Knights when "Animal House" was being filmed in Eugene in 1977.

Since then, the Robert Cray Band has released three albums, "Who's Been Talkin'" (1980) on the now defunct Tomato Records label, followed by the highly acclaimed "Bad Influence" (1982) and his recently released "False Accusations" album on the Hightone Records label.

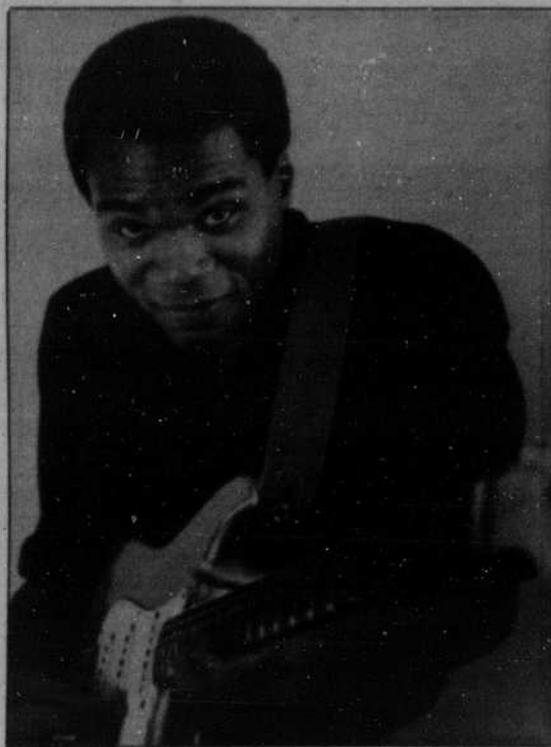
Although "False Accusations" lacks the rough-cut edge that gives Cray's other two releases the flavor of a man playing on the bitter end of sweet success, the slick professionalism of his latest release pays homage to the claim that Cray is indeed a forerunner in setting the pace for contemporary blues.

The album is so slick it shines, which is a rough gamble for musicians to play. A powerful mixture of originality and sheer talent is the only thing that can save an album produced in this manner from becoming another predictable piece of boring melodies.

Luckily, the musical expertise of the Robert Cray Band puts this album at the top of the list for originality. Cray's silky voice and smooth vintage Stratocaster guide you through nine tunes — all new. Because the album is so fresh after not hearing any releases from the band since 1983, it takes a while for the tunes to grow on you. However, the clever lyrics of the songs are the type that will imbed themselves in your brain and follow you all day.

"False Accusations" already is topping many contemporary blues charts across the country. The album's success can only be expected after Cray virtually took over the 1984 National Blues Award Show in Memphis, winning contemporary blues artist of the year, album of the year ("Bad Influence"), single of the year and song of the year ("Phone Booth"). Fans, old and new, were ready and waiting for a new release from the Robert Cray Band.

Cray's story has not always been successful. The unfortunate folding of Cray's first record label in 1980 set him back a few years. Former band member and popular Eugene musician Curtis Salgado eventually left the group and has since gained quite a name for himself on the East Coast. Cray, undaunted, regrouped and landed a contract with Hightone, which swung the mercurial temper of fate in



Robert Cray

his favor.

In a recent interview Cray said that determination is the key to a band's survival, adding that the fall to the bottom is a lot shorter than the climb to the top.

"You've got to stay with it and not give up. It's hard for musicians to get ahead, especially blues artists. Because the music isn't 'pop,' you can't expect a major record promoter to call you with a million dollar contract offer."

Cray said that things do not get any easier once you are successful because it takes a lot of dedication to keep up with the pace. "A lot of musicians end up quitting when they realize how much work it takes. We are on the road about 250 days out of the year."

Cray said that he will never stray from the blues roots and succumb to the temptation of compromising himself to commerciality to increase his popularity. "My heart is in the blues, and that is where I want to stay."

Cray said the best way to keep from being labeled as commercial is to keep contributing fresh material to the contemporary blues market rather than rely on remakes of old blues standards as many musicians do.

"When you hear someone play a B.B. King tune, you still think of B.B. King, not the musician playing. It's never the same," Cray said. "I want to make my own music. It's the blues of today. Maybe someday, way in the future, someone will play a Robert Cray tune, and the audience will be thinking of me."

KZEL-FM 96's Halloween Ball at the Hilton begins at 8 p.m. Showtime is 9 p.m. Tickets are \$6.96 in advance at Everybody's Records or \$7.96 at the door.

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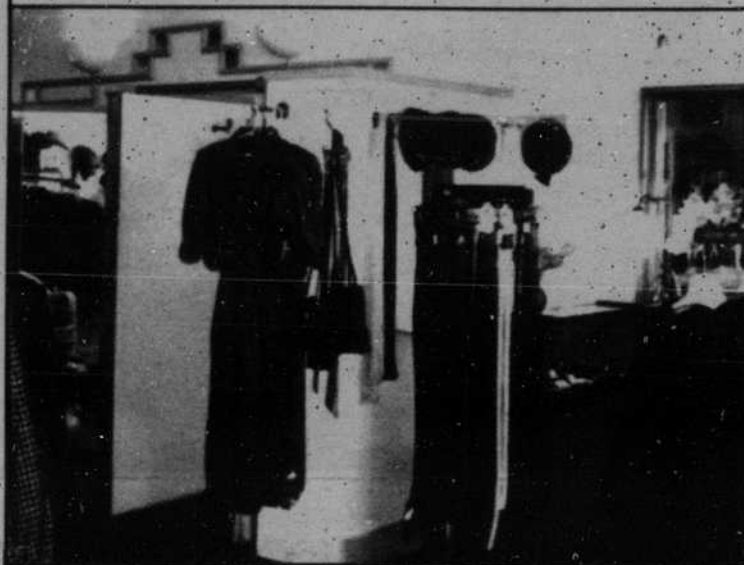
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