

# Randy 'Ratso' Reece lives in a world of music

*"It's as if I became a musician by accident. My mother had always told me that musicians were bums."*

Randy (Ratso) Reece, who has been a sax player for nearly every leading Eugene band for the last 14 years, was sitting in my cluttered living room on 14th Avenue after the usual

Taylor's Monday night blues jam.

He was bushed from having played with James T. And The Tough at the Hult Center and the WOW Hall on Saturday night, and with the Church o' de Blues at Taylor's on Sunday night.

Reece has been thought anorexic by some; a tall, thin man with hair thinning in front and a ready smile. He was born Randolph William Reece in Iowa City, Iowa, on Sept. 27, 1951.

Story by William Homans  
Photo by James Marks

His father Dick Reece was already an accomplished jazz and Dixieland drummer by the late 40s. By 1948, he had already sat in with Sidney Bechet, the great jazz clarinetist and soprano saxophone player, in Chicago.

Dick Reece was an active musician from the 40s through the early 60s. He was a member of the St. Louis Folk Music Society in the 50s, and played with several jazz trios. When he lived in St. Louis at sixteen, Reece says that he ventured out with his father to the local jazz hotspots "dressed in a suit and

tie" so that he would look old enough to be bar hopping.

"My father was the greatest musical influence in my life. He exposed me to everything musical," Reece says. "By the time I was ready for first grade, I could keep the beat on Louis Armstrong Dixieland tunes."

I started playing clarinet at nine. I was a terrible sight reader then, and I still am today. I haven't even tried to do it since 1976," he adds. (This seems hard to believe for anyone who has heard him play.)

"Summertime" was the very first blues song I ever played instrumentally, with the clarinet. But I knew what a one-four-five (the basic blues chord progression) was when I was six. I've still got a picture of me at home from when I was one year old, with my mother holding me, and me hitting the drums."

I listened to jazz as a kid. I didn't even listen to rock'n'roll until I was a teenager. The first rock album I ever bought was Sgt. Pepper's, in 1967. And even then, I got much more into the Rolling Stones," Reece says.

"When I was in the fifth and sixth grade, I'd be listening to Gerry Mulligan and Paul Desmond (sax player for Dave Brubeck). Those two were my main influences on saxophone. The kids thought I was a little strange, and I was very shy at that time. Maybe they were a little jealous."

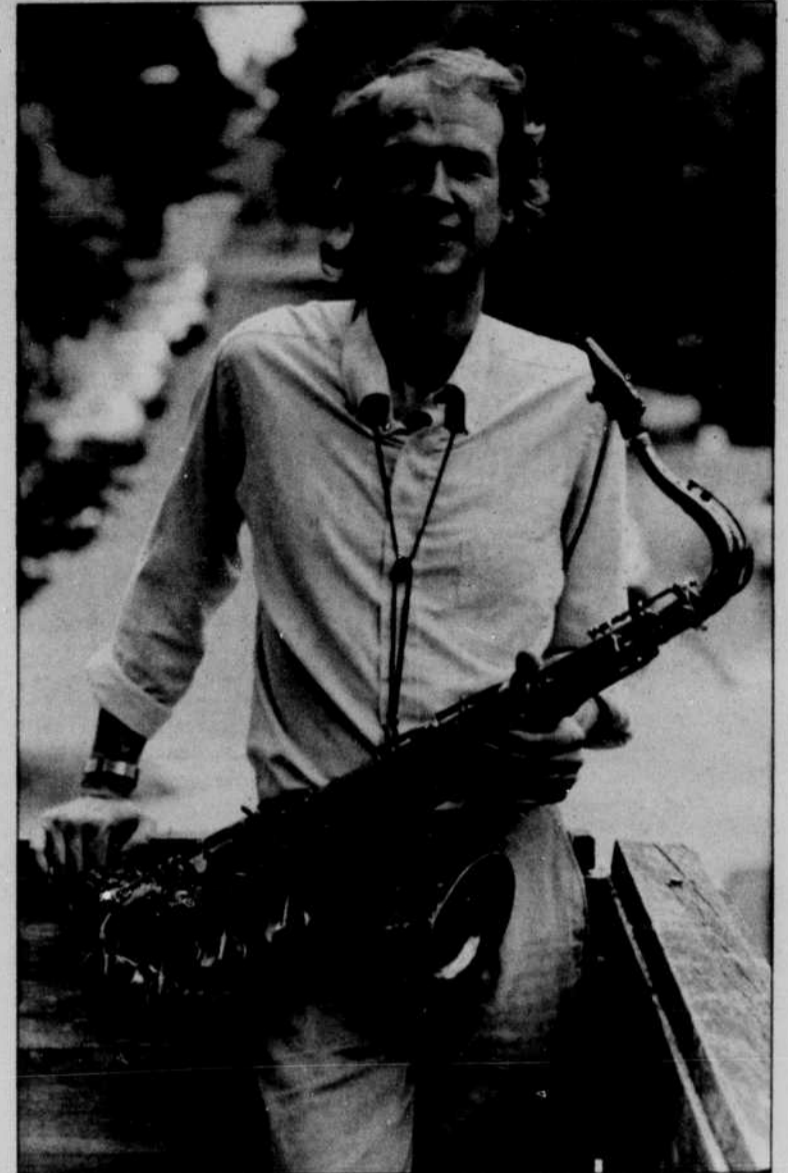
Reece spent the 60s learning to play the many instruments upon which he is proficient — drums, clarinet, saxophone, flute, vibraphones, guitar, and bass. He is probably best known for his emphatic rhythm 'n' blues solos on the sax.

"I won't say I've done it alone. My dad and my friend John Campy (who was an important supporter of many of the seminal bands in Eugene) are my mentors," Reece says. "They pushed me in the beginning, and all the way to the present. It's like being an athlete with a coach. And the women in my life have been mentors too."

My dad's an administrator at a mental hospital in Holbolt, Minnesota now," he adds. "When I was a kid, he was a severe stutterer. When he got out of the hospital, he went and got his bachelor's degree in psychology, specializing in speech therapy. It's weird: he got over his stuttering by becoming a speech therapist."

Dick Reece later received his Masters, and came to Eugene to work on his doctorate. After graduating from high school in St. Louis, Reece followed his father to Eugene in 1970.

"I had played with bands in high school before, but the day I arrived in Eugene, I resolved to be a professional musician. I was immersed. I guess that's



Although saxophone is Randy "Ratso" Reece's main instrument, he is also proficient with the drums, clarinet, flute, vibraphones and guitar.

why this place is magic to me. I guess that's why I've hung around Eugene for so long."

Music is not the only thing Reece has been heavily involved in. "My draft number was 335, but I registered as a conscientious objector. I got six supporting letters from teachers in my senior year in high school because I was an antiwar activist," he says.

Reece continued to take part in antiwar activities until the war had pretty much left the ground for the air. He was one of the Eugene 37, arrested for his part in a riotous demonstration over the mining of Haiphong Harbor in April of 1972.

"I got a job as an X-ray orderly in Sacred Heart Hospital in 1970. The depressing stuff I saw there strengthened my resolve to make it in music," Reece says.

In 1971, he had been working at Sacred Heart for a year when Dave Stewart, a fine local piano player, came in with a severely injured back. Ratso helped him in his convalescence. He and Tom Ross, an acoustic blues guitarist, closed the curtains and played music in Stewart's hospital room.

Stewart later was an integral

part of Reece's first major band, Three Fingered Jack.

"When Dave got hurt, he got a settlement big enough to set up a complete sound company. With that, Three Fingered Jack had all the best equipment, enough to carry in a 16-foot truck," Reece says.

Three Fingered Jack was Reece, Bob Beisser on drums, Rob Thomas, rhythm guitar and electric violin, Joel Rice on lead guitar, Steve Mosher on bass, Dave on piano, and Curtis Salgado on harmonica and vocals.

"It was the first serious band for all of us. Dave was the oldest of us, and he was only 24 or 25 when we started," Reece says.

Three Fingered Jack worked quite steadily from 1972 to 1974, primarily at the old Roman Forum in Eugene.

"We had some times there," he says. "We really connected with the audience. Picture this: we were at the Forum, playing this original instrumental tune, and suddenly this woman starts dancing and takes off her blouse, and then her skirt. She was dancing in bra and panties. But the barmaid told her to stop. Eventually, it turned out that she was the wife of a sheriff."

Continued on Page 3B

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