

Three Fingered Jack broke up in 1974; actually they became the Nighthawks, with the addition of Jimmy Cochran and Frank Speaker on guitars. Ratso went to San Francisco, and points east, for a number of months, and came back to play flute with an original rock band, Aaro, which included his brother Rick on drums and Ed Campy on bass, who was later with Curtis Salgado and In Yo' Face.

"At that point, I was told that since I wasn't black, the blues would be too tough. I decided to show 'em they were wrong," Reece says.

He also met the superb bluesman from Tacoma, Washington, Robert Cray, and his bass player Richard Cousins, brother of local drummer Butch Cousins. This was before there was actually a Robert Cray Band.

After playing with a number of other shorter-lived ensembles, and establishing a relationship with the Robert Cray Band, Reece joined his second major band, Shinola.

Shinola was Robert Bailey, piano and vocals, Mark Spangler on guitar, Wayne Friday on second guitar, Bob Jones on bass, Kip Richardson on drums, and Reece.

"Robert Bailey had the very best voice I ever heard, let alone played with. He eventually became avidly Christian, and has three gospel albums out now. That was my one and only adventure into doing the old soul and Motown stuff," Reece says. "We were the most popular band in town, and we were getting some publicity in places like Billboard Magazine."

From the end of 1974 through 1976, Shinola played to Northwest audiences. Then, the band broke up at the beginning of 1977.

"At that point, I started doing a country gig, playing drums locally. That was real steady money for about six months, (also, I was) trying to get another seminal band, Full House, off the ground. I spent several years in the late 70s backing up bands all over the

Eugene-Portland corridor," Reece says.

"Then, local guitarist Chris Porter, then 'roadieing' for Robert Cray, called me up and asked me to audition for bluesman Pete Karnes, in Portland. I played one night with them, and was hired on the spot.

"It was just like jumping on a merry-go-round. This was the most widely travelled band I have taken part in to this day. We played the entire Western United States, from Missoula, Montana to Sun Valley, California. The travelling and separation ended up costing me my marriage. No lingering regrets, I guess. It happens to touring musicians," he adds.

For a year after leaving the Karnes Band in late 1980, Reece came back to Eugene and played with local guitarist Ricky Johnson in the King Snakes.

"I first met Ratso in 1972," Johnson says. "He's been instrumental in bringing a lot of people together in this town. Even when he's been playing top-40 and rock 'n' roll, he's always had a feeling for the blues. He's introduced me to practically every good musician I've ever met."

"One thing," adds Johnson. "He can't move on stage to save his life. He's all hands and no feet on the stage. If you want to line dance with Randy, forget it!" he grins. "And that's a paradox, because he's such a fine drummer. And he's a loyal friend, that's a fact."

"I've been free-lancing ever since then (playing with the King Snakes)," Reece says. "I've been playing with Joey (Pepper) and The Allnighters, the Los Falcons, and others. Then, about the end of 1983, I decided I was going to have to follow the money, and signed on with the Little Big Band, a top-40, hard-rock lounge band."

In Little Big Band, Ed Demarteau played rhythm guitar and keyboards; Steve Cochran on guitar — "I was like a second lead guitar, except I was playing sax. Steve and I REALLY got tight together" —

Dave Cooper, who has a great voice, was the lead vocalist and bass; and Drew Fife played drums," he says.

"Little Big Band was probably the most well-known band around the Salem area. We did a lot of original material as well as top-40 covers. They wanted me to move to Salem; but when Steve left the band, I just never felt it worked for me as well. We did get one song on the KZEL Rock Album, released in 1985."

From there, Reece helped the McConnell brothers, who play as RMS McConnell, get off the ground. "I was playing bass on about half their tunes, but realized that I really didn't want to play bass full-time. And besides, I decided that, after all this time, the blues is really where my roots lie," Reece says. "I also feel now that it's hard to put all my eggs in one band's basket. I'm no whore, but I'll play with anyone that plays good music, especially the blues, now."

Looking back, Reece considered what he has sacrificed for his peripatetic musical existence.

"I know I have lost my wife, and my financial security. But I haven't sacrificed the political and musical ideals I started with. I didn't want to waste my time in a 9-to-5. Mom (a school teacher for 25 years in the St. Louis school system, who will be retiring next year) wanted me to be anything but a musician. My father supported me in it totally, though," he says.

"If I had it to do over again, I would probably be more businesslike, and take some of the emotional involvement out of it.

"Advice for young musicians coming up now? It used to be that bands were more able to find business. All these loose, half-assed bands I see around today — not counting us, of course — are failing to get their scene together, partly because there's less work around, but I think partly because they're less inclined to hustle."

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