



**MUSIC** BY BEN FOGELSON

## Surviving

A talk with bluesman Robert Cray.

**EW:** Your new album *Time Will Tell* opens with "Survivor," a blues song that echoes from a deep well. You don't sound like B.B. King, but I found myself thinking of him during your crooning. What inspiration do you draw from King, and what other modern artists inspire you?

**RC:** Well, what I like about B.B. is that he talks to you and not at you. Once you get to meet the guy you're already under his spell. His personality is so congenial. He's real down to earth, and I like that about his music. He doesn't smash it over your head, he welcomes you into it. That's not what I like about everybody. There's Albert Collins, who had a completely different style, Buddy Guy, Magic Sam, who did minor keys, a weakness of mine. I'm a big fan of a lot of R&B singers with a gospel influence.

**[Muddy Waters] seemed wise, and he looked like a Buddha ... it was like you just wanted to go hug his head it was so beautiful.**

**EW:** In your previous albums, why are so many of your songs about sleeping with the neighbor's wife and breaking hearts?

**RC:** (Laughs) That's my good friend songwriter Dennis Walker. The man had troubles! But we sang a lot of his songs. It was our challenge and took daring to tackle those songs.

**EW:** Does it feel pretty cool coming back to Eugene? What kind of ties do you still have here?

**RC:** I don't think I have any ties left. A lot of people have moved on. We're here so infrequently, everything is so rushed. It's not like I'm going home anymore. It's been so long since I've lived there. I might take a walk around the mall, check out how things have changed, what's stayed the same.

**EW:** You completed *Time Will Tell* before signing the album to any company. In what ways did that affect your creative process?

**RC:** Well it hasn't changed anything 'cause

we've always had creative control. But if we had been signed, maybe someone would have come out from the label to check progress, and that could be stunting. Otherwise, things were the same.

**EW:** Did you sell your soul down at the crossroads?

**RC:** No. It's a cool story though, ain't it? They even questioned Robert Johnson about that. I've been down on that road, Hwy. 61 down in the Delta. They say that Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil to get so good.

**EW:** Your song "Distant Shore" deals with war. If you could hammer out one mighty bar-chord and teleport all the coalition forces right out of Iraq, right now, would you do it, and what chord would it be?

**RC:** Yeah, I would do that. I would get an open big E string, turn the volume up so there's a lot of feedback, and I'd get 'em all out of there. Now that Saddam's running and hiding I'd get 'em out of there and let the people get back to their lives.

**EW:** What's your one musical performance that you'll never forget? Why?

**RC:** That's hard to say. There's a lot of cool ones. One was an opportunity to play with Muddy Waters, which was a gas at the Sacramento Blues Festival, some 20 some years ago. We played like eight shows with him, and we chatted before and after sets, talking about everything under the sun. I was invited out to sing "Mannish Boy" every night. Muddy was in his 70s. He seemed wise, and he looked like a Buddha. The big head, and that face, it was like you just wanted to go hug his head it was so beautiful. **EW**

—Robert Cray plays at 8:30 pm, July 3, McDonald Theatre.

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## SATURDAY, JULY 5

DOORS OPEN 8:30PM • SHOW 10PM-2AM  
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Organic Pizza, Pasta  
Beer & Wine  
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**David Kelly (juggler)**  
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### The Courtesy Clerks

In 1998, the Eugene music scene evolved when the Courtesy Clerks crawled from their pool of primordial ooze up onto a big, punk rock. The trio, comprised of Mark Rogers (guitar, vocals) Mike B. (bass, vocals) and Ron "topofyou" (drums, vocals) has fused its talents into a sound that is truly their own. The Courtesy Clerks have developed a fanatical following. Make sure to check them out this Saturday night. Visit Eugene Weekly's clubs page and [www.thecourtesyclerks.com](http://www.thecourtesyclerks.com) for further details.

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