

## Walter Trout

Walter Trout's 20th album is called *Common Ground*, but for the visionary roots singer, songwriter and guitarist that's more than a title.



It's where Trout's compelling music resides — in a territory that unites the worlds of blues, rock and pure sonic adventurism, where inspiration and technique meet to create a unique, soulful language. In a sense, the title also describes Trout's personal geography. Although he lives in California, he spends much of his life on the road bridging the U.S and Europe, where he's so well-known and respected that the United Kingdom's BBC Radio One placed the Stratocaster master at number six on their list of the Top 20 guitarists of all time. Legendary BBC disc jockey, Bob Harris, in his book "The Whispering Years" calls Trout: "The world's greatest rock guitarist." (p. 186)

"I always feel like my latest album is my best," Trout allows. "But that's because I feel like I'm always improving. The more you learn about playing music, the more you understand that you have so much more to learn. With music, the journey is the joy. The destination, I think, can never be reached."

For Trout the journey began in 1965 when his brother brought the first album by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band into his family's New Jersey home. "On the back cover it said, 'Play this album loud,' so we cranked it up and we literally had to sit down and stay there with our jaws on the floor."

The twin guitars of Mike Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop, and Butterfield's juggernaut harmonica and voice, worked their magic. And the direction of Trout's life was determined. Of course, it helped that his parents were musically informed; raising their kids on a diet of sounds that included Hank Williams, John Lee Hooker, B.B. King, John Coltrane, Bo Diddley, Ray Charles and more.

Trout played in local bands after getting his first guitar, but truly became steeped in blues after moving to Los Angeles in 1973. There he supported legends like John Lee Hooker, Big Mama Thornton, Finis Tasby, Pee Wee Crayton, Lowell Fulson, Percy Mayfield and Joe Tex, assimilating a wide variety of blues.

In 1981 Trout joined the remaining members of the formative '60s blues-rock group Canned Heat. But the real turning point in his career was his five-year tenure with British blues giant John Mayall's Bluesbreakers.

The affable Mayall — who has a well deserved reputation for spring-boarding the careers of great guitarists going back to the 1960s apprenticeships of Eric Clapton, Peter Green and Mick Taylor in his group — drafted Trout in 1984 and paired him with fellow six-string virtuoso Coco Montoya. Their twinned attack and Mayall's leadership provided the Bluesbreakers a renaissance that took the group and its members to the apex of the international blues touring circuit.

"Without a doubt, working with John was the single most important experience I had coming up as a sideman," Trout relates. "He is truly a great bandleader, in the tradition of Count Basie and Duke Ellington. He knows how to run a group with firm rules, but at the same time how to make you relax and play your best on stage every night. He knows how to put the right people together and how to be generous, and then there's his ability as a songwriter and performer. I learned so much from John when I was in his band."

Emboldened and encouraged by Mayall, Trout began his solo career in 1989. He was immediately embraced by European audiences and released his first album, *Life in the Jungle* that same year. Despite his prolific recording schedule, Trout's first U.S. release was 1998's critically heralded *Walter Trout*, which immediately established him as a staple of the American blues scene as well.

And the rest is, quite literally, blues and rock history still in the making.

"In a sense, I've almost created my own genre," Trout says. "I've assimilated so many styles and so many influences from the great adventure of American music. I love Jeff Beck just as much as I love B.B. King. I believe in telling stories and honesty and searching for truth. And I have no interest in stifling my creativity. If I have a song in my head or I'm playing a solo and it gets a little outside of the box or off the beaten path, I'm going to let it flow and come out, or take me where it leads me. My quest in all of this is that I'd really love to be able to do it all."