





Richard Townend

GUITARIST SINGER SONGWRITER

VERBALS: CLIVE RAWLINGS VISUALS: KEITH BLUNDY, JOHN BULL, TERRY CROUCH

RICHARD TOWNEND IS A FAMILIAR NAME ON THE BRITISH BLUES CIRCUIT, HAVING PLAYED AT MOST OF THE WELL-KNOWN FESTIVALS AND BLUES VENUES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, EITHER AS A SOLO PERFORMER OR LEADING HIS BAND THE MIGHTY BOSSCATS.

Richard is a prolific songwriter, having written well over 150 songs and produced 70 videos in the last four years alone, always avoiding the obvious clichéd subject matter.

Hello, Richard, thanks for taking time out to speak with us, let's start at the beginning, it all started for you at Leeds College of Music, where you graduated. The only other person I've heard of taking that route is Chantel McGregor, was that a good 'foot in' for you?

It was a good experience and I learned a lot, the standard is pretty high and for everyone you have heard of there are hundreds more who could easily stand in their shoes and walk further with less fuss. It's a question of life style choice, that's why the 'best' competitions aren't really representative. A lot of the people I was at college with have very successful music careers and you have

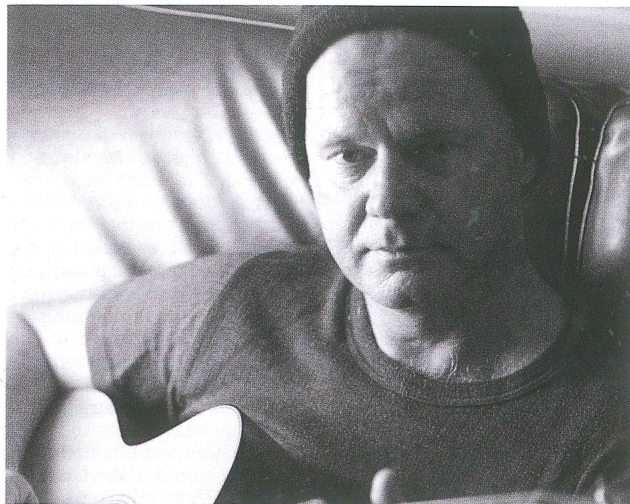
never heard of them, they don't chase the stars, they are happy to just work. You'll find a lot of these student musicians playing during their summer recess, whilst I was there I did a whole season working for Alan Ayckbourn at The Theatre in the Round, Scarborough for his musicals – I did that on bass rather than guitar. It helped me pay my way, move to London and it certainly got my foot in the door but to a totally different room to the one I am in now. In those days I was a hired guitar/bass player doing commercial variety shows, now I am a story teller who adds music to make the stories interesting.

It's more liberating having an embryonic song which you give birth to, nurturing it, seeing it grow into a teenager with attitude then maturing into a CD ready song as opposed to playing the dots put in front of you.

I see you started your career by touring with several diverse household names, not necessarily in the blues, could you amplify on that?

As a professional musician you have to go where the work takes you. I played with several well-known artists, Tony Christie, Dana, Ronnie Corbett, The Platters and a shed load of other cabaret acts. I was on tour with Charlie Drake too, remember dear old Charlie? It was good fun. I was doing music, making a decent living out of it and for a young

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kid it was super. It didn't have a logical career path though, it was summer season, tours, cruises, summer seasons, tours, panto. I wanted something more stable and would have preferred to do my own stuff so I withdrew from the circuit and moved on to a day job and organising gigs on an evening. I had three West End pub venues I ran the music for and played my own music there as well as helping other bands. After a while I changed direction, did some cover stuff and a Police Tribute Band, then jacked it all in. Roll on 10 years and I got the axe out again after attending a few jams and I then decided to form a band to play some SRV and other up tempo stuff again.

What first attracted you to music/blues?

My Dad was a classical pianist, he never met the right people to help him progress and he wasn't really in the right network, so it's in my genes. He was a frustrated amateur, but bless his heart he did pay

for lessons on piano and then guitar for me, he encouraged me to the hilt, he adored music. My brother played drums and as Mum wouldn't allow more than one drummer in the house I plumped for guitar. I liked any guitar music blues, rock, country and now I like any music, any style with a very few exceptions. Stevie Ray Vaughan turned me back on to guitar playing when I resumed, although I am a great fan of Mark Knopfler. Mark's ability to story tell and play the right notes between the right gaps is just awesome. When I first started I was into Hendrix, Brian May, Ritchie Blackmore and Jimmy Page, I just wanted to be any one of them. So probably Led Zeppelin and Hendrix got me into the more rockier side of the blues, Queen into the song writing aspect.

Tell us your influences

Everything, absolutely everything influences me. Reality is based on your own personal perception of things, what you like, what you don't,

all has an impact on how you see things and hear things. Influences are not just related to how you play but also how you think about tunes, songs, lyrics. If we are talking purely guitar playing nowadays it's laid back controlled playing. I have mentioned Knopfler, but anyone who can play melodically. Song wise, anything that's well produced, well played and with a decent hook or makes you reflect on things, is good for me. They can influence you to write something with a similar feel for example.

You took some time out from music for a while, what triggered your comeback?

I have to do the 9 to 5 to earn a crust, but music allows me to be creative. I was missing that aspect of my life. Being creative at work is not the same as being creative with your music. We all have our own reasons for being here and doing things you enjoy makes you a more rounded person. I really work hard at the day job and my music job, both offer different things, the music is my passion though. I came back to it as I enjoy song writing, playing with words, trying to write something which people enjoy and listen to. It really gives me a buzz a decent gig or someone genuinely liking your music, makes it all worthwhile.

In these days of pigeon holed musicians, how would you describe yourself, singer, songwriter or guitarist?

I am songwriter, guitarist and singer probably in that order. I like to write stories and the music is the texture you put around the skeleton to make it warm. I can hopefully hold my

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own in all three disciplines, I just like to get a nice sounding tune with decent lyrics, which make you think a little, and I like to present it to the world with some decent playing and instrumentation. I know some great players who always willing to help out. My solo side I do more acoustic guitar playing so I am pretty much jack of all trades.

Your live work is divided between solo and Mighty Bosscats shows, do you have a preference?

I like doing the band, you get more fluidity in your playing and you bounce off each other, it's more exciting. The more intimate gigs I do solo or with the band in acoustic mode. I would prefer to be in full band mode all the time but the economics don't always pan out and of course the competition for main stage slots is highly intense, depends a lot on the bands competency at PR not just their ability as musicians.

I noticed when I saw your solo performance at Skegness you use

loops and layered guitars. How do you get that great sound?

The loop pedal is really my song writing tool but I use it live to add interest to the sound for people. I record whilst playing, then add a bass line and maybe some more rhythm and finally that leaves me free to do a bit of lead or slide on top. If you get the first loop right you are fine, if your get that wrong you're stuffed, but you have to soldier on. I use various resonators in different tunings and electric to add different sound textures. I can also multi-layer backing vocals which I do on Lordy Lordy in acappella mode (this is a track on Boiling Pot). I supported quite a big band recently and didn't have time for a proper sound check as they arrived late because of van issues, by the time they'd sound checked it was opening show time. When I walked on stage to a 200 seater theatre, my loop pedal wouldn't work. I just carried on and played, you can't be faffing around when you have 200 people looking

at you. I managed to pull it off, but that's what your paid to do, entertain regardless of what pressure you are under.

Speaking of the Mighty Bosscats, how did that gig come about?

Well, I formed a trio called the Bosscats doing covers of SRV and Robben Ford material. Terry Hiscock formerly of Hunter Musket joined and we did a gig and someone announced us as the Mighty Boss Cats and it just stuck. I have had several different line ups since then and the music has changed direction to a more laid back sound. It's certainly transformed the recorded sound of the band but live we can still rock.

What can people expect from a night with the Mighty Bosscats?

They can expect a set list of original songs, we don't do covers and we have a backlog of over 70 songs to choose from. We like to entertain and we play pretty well as a team, it's a good tight band with variety in it. We cover most styles, acoustic blues, electric blues, country rock, and blue grass all mixed together with a pretty cool vibe. You wouldn't be disappointed I can assure you of that, you don't get ten minute guitar solos though. We have a good, entertaining, well produced and balanced show.

For your last Bosscats CD, Seven Deadly Sins, you took the unusual step of getting it reviewed by two clergymen, what was behind that idea?

The blues community are always really nice to each other in reviews and I wanted to break out to see if non-blues orientated people related to the music and the lyrics. You need to be able to take on constructive criticism no

matter how much it smarts. It could have gone two ways, but it went a nice way as they were very complimentary and as we speak I have not been struck by lightning. It's always great to get some positive feedback from non-blues community people, it expands the scene out to people who would not normally have heard the music. I have to say I am not very religious myself, although my family on my dearly departed Dads side is. My cousin Stuart Townend, for example, is a highly acclaimed Christian song writer. Having it described as a good Christian album takes you back to the old gospel blues men, come round full circle!

Your style is often compared favourably with those North Eastern stalwarts Chris Rea and Mark Knopfler, how does that sit with you?

Well, they are super musicians and players so it sits pretty well with me. To me they smack of quality which, to be compared to, is just great. If you look at all my work since 2011 – 150+ songs written, 70+ videos made, 7 albums completed with another 2 on the way – 70 songs recorded and another 19 in the pipeline, you will find that not all of them sound like these guys, I do have a variety. A lot of these albums never got air play as I didn't really know about the IBBA when I released them, so if any DJ wants more tracks I am having some of the older stuff re-mixed and re-mastered for a compilation CD which will be out next quarter, just drop me an email.

Your lyrics, in good Blues tradition, relate very much to real life, do you feel you have to 'live the life' to write a good Blues song?

Yes and no. You need to have

experienced life to some degree, not necessarily the actual life experiences you write about. I have a song about WACO, remember when the FBI attacked the WACO compound in Texas in search of David Koresh. I can write about betrayal and being sucked in which is what the song is about, I've experienced it, but I haven't experienced being at the end of a particularly aggressive FBI swat team ...yet. I don't subscribe to the 'you have to live it rough and do your own truck maintenance and not sleep for 10 hours cause the next gig is 500 miles away' view point. Writing is about conveying stories and emotions through your music you can do it from your sofa if your imagination is tickety boo, you just need a few scars on your soul to give it authenticity.

If you were given a blank sheet of paper and asked to put yourself in a dream band, living or dead, who would you pick?

I like the Eagles, Dire Straits, Led Zeppelin, bit of Deep Purple and any drummer and bass player that can groove, any of those guys would do for me. In addition I'd like to have J S Bach and Mozart somewhere in the team, they wrote some pretty cool stuff. But in reality the guys I play with are a great team, premiership class.

Do you get to see any of the new generation of Brit blues, blues/rock bands, if so what do you think of them and the future of the genre?

I have seen a few, I see a band probably once a week. There are some really good quality ones out there, I love Dan Owen's voice and style. The future is really dependent on the peripheral players in the

“WRITING IS ABOUT CONVEYING STORIES AND EMOTIONS THROUGH YOUR MUSIC.”

game, the DJs, the festival promoters, the live music pubs and of course the public. These really are the important people, it's their collective taste and efforts which shape the future and of course the PR people have a huge influence. The musicians and bands just do what they do, their sound is either in vogue or not, that's why I try and involve other people outside of the blues community to get engaged. So long as some form of music is live and in vogue we can't complain.

Would you have any advice for these artists/bands?

I am not sure I am qualified to offer advice to be honest, but if I were pushed I'd say hold back on your 10 minute guitar solos, it's been done, write and play from your heart, don't believe your own hype and be humble, you're just a musician like everyone else trying to do something we love. I'd say write your own stuff and don't rely on covers, we want to hear your pain or views on things not the pain of someone else.

Do you think reality TV shows are stifling real talent in any genre of music?

It's creating a totally wrong perception of what music and being an artist is. It's not about queuing up and then getting world famous in a few

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months only to be dropped like a stone when the new series is about to come on. It panders for today's throw away music for free society and perpetuates the ethos that everyone is a star. There are also really cruel elements to it when they ridicule people who aren't up to the scratch. There's so much talent out there in real life, people need to explore it rather than sit in front of their telly on Saturday watching what in effect staged entertainment is.

What do you reckon you'll be doing in ten years' time?

In ten year's time I'll probably be doing another album, but nothing new in that. I would have liked to expand my network of musical friends and work with other people in different genres. I'd also like to expand on the videos I currently produce, may be expand into more film work. I

will definitely be doing music full time again though, that's for sure.

Can we get any updates on what you're up to, either solo or with the band?

I am doing two albums at the moment, laid back songs and a Mighty Bosscats one. I am also working on a film project around the 7 deadly sins and have planned to do some work with Andres Root, a super slide player from Estonia, this guy can really play. I am also doing some resonator songs. I do a lot of writing and recording. I also love to play live. I have a few more festivals booked in this year and several live venue gigs. All info is on the web site.

Finally, my signature question... what's your favourite biscuit?

Well, that's a toughie, I should really say Rich Tea and show a little bit of nepotism to my

names sake. But I don't like them - they are so not a REAL biscuit in my eyes too dry and not sweet enough. I do like a good old Fox's chocolate biscuit or a chocolate Hobnob, which pretty much cover all bases, they just need some raisins in them and then they'd be biscuit heaven. 

CHECK OUT WWW.RICHARDTOWNEND.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION

DISCOGRAPHY

STUDIO:

- Bossman 2015
- The 7 Deadly Sins 2014
- Boiling Pot 2014
- Take the Sunshine 2012
- We are Where We are 2011
- Old New Borrowed and Blues 2011
- 78 RPM 2011
- Ticket of Life 2011

