

About.com Robert Cray - This Time (2009)

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By [Reverend Keith A. Gordon](#), About.com



Robert Cray's This Time
Photo courtesy Nozzle Records

Fans of [Robert Cray](#)'s unique style of guitar-driven soul-blues can breathe a sigh of relief as the bluesman releases his first studio album in four years with *This Time*. Recorded at Santa Barbara Sound Design in Santa Barbara, California the album was produced by Cray himself. The guitarist has also shuffled his band roster somewhat since the release of *Twenty*, his 2005 album, bring his old friend and former bandmember, bassist Richard Cousins, on board along with veteran blues drummer Tony Braunagel to join long-time Cray keyboardist Jim Pugh for this recording.

Cray's sound has always been a unique blend of blues and soul, but as shown by *This Time*, it's also much more than that. "Every time somebody asks me about where my music comes from, I give them five or six different directions - a little rock, soul, jazz, blues, a little gospel feel," says Cray in a press release for the album. "Then there are some other things that maybe fall in there every once in a while, like a little Caribbean flavor or something.

You just never know. I always attribute it to the music we grew up listening to, and the radio back in the '60s. It's pretty wide open. It's hard to put a tag on it."

Robert Cray's This Time

The songwriting on *This Time* is a true collaborative effort, with Cray and his band members all contributing to the pot. Cray's soul-drenched "I Can't Fail" is a slow-turning, 1970s-styled R&B beauty featuring one of Cray's most passionate vocal performances, some tasteful gospel-tinged keyboards (courtesy of Jim Pugh), and a crying Cray solo that hits your heart like the biggest, baddest arrow that Cupid has in his quiver. The song is a good example of Cray's confident songwriting skills, a talent that is often overshadowed by his dynamic fretwork.

Cray follows "I Can't Fail" with Pugh's "Love 2009," a soul-blues burner with assured vocals, a silky soundtrack vibe, and an insistent recurring riff. I'd say that these guys were definitely listening to some old-school jams in the creation of *This Time*, and your ears will thank them for it. The jazzy "That's What Keeps Me Rockin'" is an up-tempo blues stroll that showcases an underutilized, [Duke Robillard](#)/Amos Garrett side to Cray's guitarplay. Drummer Tony Braunagel keeps a steady beat with some fine brushwork and subtle drums above which Pugh lays down some infectious keyboard riffing.

Soul-Blues and Island Sounds

Cray dips back into the endless soul-blues well for the title track, another heartfelt vocal performance that benefits from ringing guitarplay that echoes and amplifies each word of the lyrics. With sparse instrumental backing, including a staggered drumbeat and scraps of keyboards and bass, Cray's guitar tone is both jarring and considered, an emotional response to his tearjerker vocals. It's a damn fine song, full of heartache, passion, and joyous sound.

Cray's original "Trouble And Pain" treads lightly into blues-rock territory with a robust beat, louder keyboards and guitar, the singer belting out the lyrics

above a spry soundtrack that includes a couple of assured, inventive solos that one could use to chip granite with. There's a slight island flavor in the background of "To Be True," found mostly in the loping rhythm and subtle keyboard washes.

The Reverend's Bottom Line

At nine songs and a runtime of slightly less than three-quarters of an hour, *This Time* is a couple of songs short of perfection, Cray and his talented crew skipping out before they wear out their welcome. In an era where a lot of artists feel the need to cram every corner of an 80-minute CD with music, Cray errs on the side of caution, leaving the listener wanting (much) more.

This Time is a solid collection of blues, blues-rock, and soul with jazzy overtones that display the guitarist's immense six-string skills without dominating the strong and talented accompaniment of his band. There are few barn-burners here, just emotionally-measured performances where blues and soul slowly pour out of your speakers. The songs work together in creating a finely-crafted whole that evokes a beauty and quiet dignity that has come to define the work and vision of Robert Cray. Highly recommended.... (Nozzle Records/Vanguard, released August 11, 2009)

Robert Cray - *This Time* Tracklist

1. Chicken In The Kitchen
2. I Can't Fail
3. Love 2009
4. That's What Keeps Me Rockin'
5. This Time
6. To Be True
7. Forever Goodbye
8. Trouble And Pain
9. Truce