

Roanoke Times

Fans snatched up tickets to soul/blues show

Robert Cray and his band will perform for a packed crowd tonight at Jefferson Center.

By [Tad Dickens](#)



Robert Cray is a seasoned guitarist of many styles.

Time breaks some. It seasons others.

Put Robert Cray in the latter category. Nearly a quarter-century after Cray hit the pop chart with his blues-rocking tune "Smoking Gun," his guitar playing and his voice sound better than ever. Listeners have obviously noticed -- his show at Jefferson Center tonight was sold out well in advance.

Guitar breaks on his new release, "This Time," show a guy who knows just where his fingers should go and just how fast or slow. You might catch a B.B. King-style glide up the neck, a flash of T-Bone Walker blues-box playing or an Albert King-like string bend, but he has all that stuff so deeply ingrained into his own style that it's wrong to accuse him of being a copycat.

Cray, 56, has nailed the art of the gutsy clean rhythm tone, and with his band -- recently returned bassist Richard Cousins, longtime keyboardist Jim Pugh and new drummer Tony Braunagel (Taj Mahal, Bonnie Raitt, B.B. King, Buddy Guy) -- has produced a disc that incorporates as much Stax/Volt-era soul as it does blues. His seasoned voice works great on all of it.

Podcast Interview-

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"We like a lot of different music, and so we play it," said Cray, who spent his teenage years in Newport News. "That's just how we are."

Still, many people think of blues when they hear Cray's name. It doesn't bother him.

"I'm a huge blues fan, as everybody knows," he said. "But I'm also a huge R&B fan, and I'm a Jimi Hendrix freak, and I like Thelonious Monk and Bob Marley. I can't help it."