

## RICK PAYNE

Rick Payne is perhaps as widely known as a guitar tutor as he is as a performer. He has spent the past decade teaching all guitar styles, at all levels, to an average of 150 students per week. In addition he leads workshops and master classes in conjunction with his live performances.

Rick has used this wealth of practical experience to produce a number of very comprehensive and interactive, Blues fingerstyle and slide, tuition CDs as well as a series that covers folk, rock and Django jazz.

### **BM: So, how did it all start Rick?**

**Rick:** I've been playing guitar since I was nine years old. Before that, I used to dance around with a tennis racket and pretend to be one of The Beatles - we all did! My brother had a guitar but never used it. It was a typical sixties guitar with a floating bridge and terrible action. I picked it up and played made up chords and stuff - it must have sounded awful. At last a friend of the family came round, tuned it up, and showed me the first three chords, G, C and D7 - and that was it! I was smitten. I taught myself everything I could hear, even the odd classical tune; I had a good ear I guess. I ended up studying for guitar exams at the Royal College of Music, London, and then later had to re-learn how to play the simple stuff like strumming. The Blues and slide came much later. I listened to Robert Johnson and was determined one day to figure out how to play, and I'm still trying! I listened to Ry Cooder a lot and he had managed to work it out, so he was a great teacher in a distant sort of way. Blues has been a great challenge since those early days.

### **Was the guitar your first instrument?**

First guitar was an old 50s catalogue monster with nylon strings and a banana neck! I still have it in fact and it reminds me of how difficult it was to learn at the time. My first instrument was in fact the clarinet, then the uke and then I progressed to guitar. I've got about 18 guitars in my collection, but my work horse of a guitar is the 1970s Takamine, in all but name a Martin with the best pick up anyone could wish for - an early Fishman. I'm endorsed by Variax guitars and have been messing around on their Line 6 acoustic modeller.

### **What about your first gigs?**

I remember my first little show was a two number set at the old Red Lion Pub in Sutton, near London. I went down with my mate Nick and we played a couple of folksy tunes that I'd written. I remember the guy in charge, Cliff Aungier, shouting 'That's enough boys' and pulling us off - we must have been pretty sour. Cliff played some mighty fine ragtime and Blues so I must have logged that one in the musical head, but I didn't start playing that kind of music until years later. I've just learned that Sutton is on the map as being part of the British R&B trail. The Red Lion was the venue for early Stones gigs. Long John Baldry and Rod Stewart

played there in the early 70's. We played there a few times after, so we must have got better. I was part of the British R & B scene without even knowing it.

### **...and then you added to your line-up?**

Yes, Nick and I formed a band after those days called, JJ Jameson. This was the evil guy in the Spiderman comics - he was always out to nail Spiderman or Peter Parker - anyway, a crazy name, but it kind of worked at the time. We played all over the London scene; Marquee, Dingwalls, Rock Garden, loads of places. We were around just at the start of punk at the same time Dire Straits were just beginning to kick off. Charlie Gillett, at Radio London, used to plug their records and ours too. We got a chart placing at that time, tying 5th place with Blondie's Denis - oh those heady days! We toured a lot and ended up behind the iron curtain in Poland, and basically burnt ourselves out - busted and broke!

### **What happened next?**

After the crazy band days I went back to my acoustic roots and picked up the classical guitar again which I'd been learning whilst at school. Finger style was far cooler than just strumming a few chords. I really got stuck into it. I wrote my first ragtime ditty called 'The Deptford Cakewalk', which was named after the place I lived for a time. That was a crazy place in the late 70's. We had Dire Straits, Squeeze all living on top of each other - a buzzing town indeed. Music wasn't really paying the bills though.

### **How did you cope with that?**

I had to get a job and ended up working for the BBC as an Orchestral Assistant. Basically, this meant being an in house roadie for the likes of The BBC Radio Orchestra and The Concert Orchestra -all based at the Maida Vale studios just off Paddington. It was an incredible job, as I got to meet some of the finest session guitar players on the London scene. I remember Dick Flick coming in. He was the guy who played the guitar part for the original John Barry score for the James Bond soundtrack. I sat there with him and he showed me the famous Em/major9 chord at the end of the score - they were great days and I learned an incredible amount about reading session charts and comping chords, all really useful stuff, which came out in my teaching later.

### **Then there was the Scandinavian tour...**

Around this time I started going out and playing an acoustic set which was a mixture of a whole load of styles. There were covers and a little Blues and ragtime. I became a bit of a troubadour, travelling around playing bars and clubs in London, then signing up with an agency and ending up in Scandinavia. I began to pick up more finger style tunes and messed around with slide guitar. I had begun to listen to Ry Cooder and was totally blown away by his incredible bottle neck playing. By the time I reached places like Copenhagen I had become a bit of a celebrity playing this style. Danish Radio would turn up outside the gig and make a live broadcast and newspapers and magazines were always running stories about me - another crazy time, thanks to the slide guitar.

### **You mentioned teaching guitar - it's a big part of your musical life...**

It was something I always wanted to share, especially the roots styles of Blues and ragtime. I produced a finger style book for a Danish school which became the inspiration for other courses I have written since. In fact, quite a lot has come from that course. I've got several video CD courses like "60 Day Fingerstyle Blues Camp" which takes you through finger picking styles and techniques and acoustic slide. You get an interactive PDF manual with loads of video and audio elements – you can see what both hands are doing at the same time - and there's a power tab too. Another one is "Blue Notes"; that one deals with pentatonics and the diminished connection and so on. Truefire.com, based in the US, picked up on it and all my stuff is available through them now as well as from my own website and at gigs. Another thing that came out of it was Peter Finger's Acoustic Music Records in Germany have published a book/CD called "Rick Payne's Finger Style Blues". More recently I've produced "Blues In A Day" which is my tribute to Bert Weedon, "Folk In A Day", "Rock In A Day" and "Let's Django" and again Truefire has taken them on. I've just finished "Chicken Skin Slide" It's a slide guitar course that looks closely at the acoustic and electric styles of one of my all time heroes, Ry Cooder. It was a big job to take on because he really is a slide guitar master. In a funny kind of way I feel I learned a lot about the techniques of bottleneck by listening to his albums and am a stage in my own playing now where I feel confident to pass it on to other players. Also, by listening to Ry Cooder you can hear and therefore learn from all the greats. It's all there, from Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters through to Tampa Red. It's called 'Chicken Skin' because the hairs on the back of your neck can stand up you hear that slide!

I still do a lot of hands on teaching too and often do workshops in conjunction with gigs.

### **"Blue River Blues" is probably your most important CD so far; how did that come about?**

I met some guys in Denmark, from the states, who were touring with their band, The Foothill Fliers. One of the band, Paul Emery, ran a small roots label in Grass Valley California, and invited me over to record a Blues record for them and play at the North Columbia Folk Festival. This is where "Blue River Blues" was born, recorded in the stifling heat of an Indian summer.

They were great sessions and I was especially blown away by the guy who was booked to play on a few tracks with me. This was John Girton, from one of my all time favourite bands, Dan Hicks And His Hot Licks. He's a great player who wrote 'Slow Dancer', a song taken to the US number one spot by Asleep At The Wheel, and he worked his magic on one of my tracks 'Cafe Blue'. I owe him a lot, especially watching him play and learning so much. I wrote and recorded the title track after I got back to the UK and it turned out to be one of my most popular CDs. Check out those early Hicks records - he really is a cool player.

**There have been a lot more recordings since then, including “The Bridge” and “Impressions”...**

“The Bridge” was my latest project with my band, The Blues Cowboys. I wrote those songs over several years and recorded them between 04-05. They’re an eclectic mix of folk and blues leaning heavily towards slide guitar. The title came from notes I made on scraps of paper while touring Norway. A number of guest musicians were called upon ... Harmonica ace, Keith Warmington, who’s guested on numerous albums ranging from Dr. John to John Martyn ... Stuart Gordon who’s worked with The Incredible String Band, he brings some haunting violin to the mix, John Cornick plays some fine trombone and The Blues Cowboys add a very special touch of class. ‘Thanks guys!’ That one got quite a lot of airplay...Paul Jones Show,,,,Belgian and Australian radio. “Impressions” is a collection of acoustic instrumentals in the form of sketches or impressions. The first track is my tribute to Big Bill Broonzy and there are a couple of ragtime titles along with extracts from some of my film scores, eleven tracks in all including an out take from “The Bridge” – a tune called ‘Thing’ that features acoustic bass from Cliff Thorne.

**Tell me about the film scores...**

Bristol, over the years, has become a Mecca for film post production and I've been lucky to be involved in many film soundtracks for the BBC. Whenever they want some slide guitar I always seem to get the call. These credits have been for a variety of projects from “Whickers World” to “The Natural World”, “Ray Mear’s Bushcraft” and “Nick's Quest”. Making music for polar bears and killer bees was great fun and doing “Holby City” a few years ago with my own band – miming to my own playing – that was a cool way to earn a living. I've also completed a score for an American short film called “John Doe and the Anti” once again loads of slide! It stars people like Hector Luis Bustamante who was in “NYPD” and even Bruce Willis, and is done in true Hollywood fashion. The music is like a road movie style aka Ry Cooder, “Paris Texas” and was premiered at the Cleremont-Ferrand Short Film Festival, it was shown at a few others too like the Phoenix Film Festival.

**You’re known primarily as a bluesman but you have played in folk clubs and festivals too....**

Yes I do. The early blues songs come from the same traditions as folk music. They were field hollers, work songs and so on, so they fit in with the folk genre. I enjoy playing all kinds of music; blues, folk, jazz, classical. My Cd the Elizabeth Suite is my version of the lute styles of old England, I wrote the tunes based on the dance music of the time, the Gavotte, minuet and so on. A few years ago I got together with Gloucestershire poet Peter Wyton and we toured festivals and arts centres as Rhythm and Muse, I played loads of different styles to fit the poems, Blues and ragtime and also Spanish, mediaeval, celtic, traditional

American folk. We got together again this year at the request of the Three Choirs Festival

**So, what are your plans now?**

I'm still playing, exploring new styles, techniques, writing courses, recording, and I'm still totally blown away by the guitar. I've learned so much in all the years I've played. It's still a long road to go and always new stuff to learn. I've settled near Bristol which has always been a great scene for blues and roots music and I've just about worked with everyone here, Keith Warmington, Andy Sheppard and Chris Jagger to name a few. It's been a busy time for me here and because of my contacts in music I became Music Coordinator for the Bristol Old Vic Theatre, running a series of shows for them, called The Acoustic Alternative. It was a time when I could make sure all my old heroes like Bert Jansch, Martin Simpson and Eric Bibb could pass through Bristol keeping roots music alive.

Right now I'm working on a new CD called 'Radio City'. It's all acoustic blues and has a funny angle to it in that virtually every track has a reference to a radio in it somewhere. I heard about an organization called 'Wireless For The Blind' that helps provide really user friendly sets and other resources to the blind. In the past I'd done a show for the Bristol Eye hospital high-lighting the fact that so many early blues greats were blind. It's a long story but I feel I've gained so much from this kind of music – inspiration from players like the great 'Blind Willie Johnson' and many others - that I would dedicate this new CD to them and at the same time make a donation from the album to 'Wireless For The Blind'. Time to give back, without sounding too coy I hope. Should be out later this year.

**Any advice for other guitarists?**

I think if there was one piece of advice I'd give to players it would be 'Keep it simple, clear and easy, then build from there. Enjoy!'