

The **Walter Trout Band** will be touring in Europe and the UK in November. **Fran Leslie** called **Walter Trout** at his home in California, just after he had done the school run, taking his boys to school. He was writing material, for a new album, which he was about to record and looking forward to touring the UK with **Popa Chubby**. Photo: **Steve Lally**

Hi Walter!

Hi! It's a long time since I've seen you Fran.

I was thinking that. It was probably at the Tampa Bay Blues Festival that I last saw you to talk to.

I'm going to be back in the UK, in November. You're in London right? Come and see us then. I am going to be touring with **Popa Chubby**. He and I are old buddies; we go way back. We toured Holland together probably fifteen, may be sixteen years ago. I was younger; he was really young at the time. I think it will be good. We'll be playing at the **Islington Academy**; I don't know what that is like. Is it seated or stand up?

It's an all-standing venue, with a bar, like a proper blues club.

I like it when they can kind of drink and fall over and get into fistfights and all the stuff they need to do at a blues gig, you know.

They don't have a wire screen across the stage to protect you from flying bottles, like in the movies.

Well that's normally the country music gigs that do that. When I first started, I played those places in the States. That movie is not too far wrong, with the chicken wire. There are actually places like that.

I have yet to experience one of those.

You are not missing much. Watch the movie. That's all you need to know.

What is new on the recording front?

I am about to record an album, in two weeks or something. I'm going to start on 14th October. We'll be in the studio for two weeks, this time just doing a blues album. I'm trying to write original blues songs, instead of the eighty-fifth cover of "Hey, Hey, The Blues Is Alright" or something. There seems to be ten to fifteen blues songs that there are a hundred and thirty five versions of; I don't think we need another version on "I've Got My Mojo Working" because nobody's beat the original!

I'm trying to make it an album of originals but blues songs. I'm writing it now. It's a little more difficult than I thought it was going to be. I don't want to write, 'My baby left me and I bummed out' songs. I want to do the **Mayall** thing, where you write blues songs but they have some message or they have something to say, you know.

What sort of topics appeal to you?

In this day and age, I seem to have written a lot, on my last few albums, about the struggle of the working man, especially in the United States in the assault on unions and, you know, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting it up the rear end in this country. I've tended to do a lot about that and I'm trying to stay away from that; I think I've kind of said it. I did a song with **Jeff Healey**, "Working Overtime", and I did one called "They Call Us The Working Class But We Aren't Working Any More". I've covered it, I think, and I'm running out of ways of saying the same thing.

So what are you turning your mind towards?

You'll have to wait until the record comes out because I'm kind of in the midst of it right now. I'm going to do it in LA, in a studio up in North Hollywood. It's going to be recorded and mixed by **Eric Corne**, who did *Full Circle*, the album I did with **John Mayall**, **Joe Bonamassa**, **Jeff Healy**, **Guitar Shorty**, **Eric Sardinias** and **Coco Montoya**. I had a guest on each song. **Eric** did that album with me and he's going to do this one.

I'm gonna use my band. The last couple of albums I've had kind of big time studio guys and they're good friends of mine. I love recording with them but I want this one to have more of the way we sound when we play live.

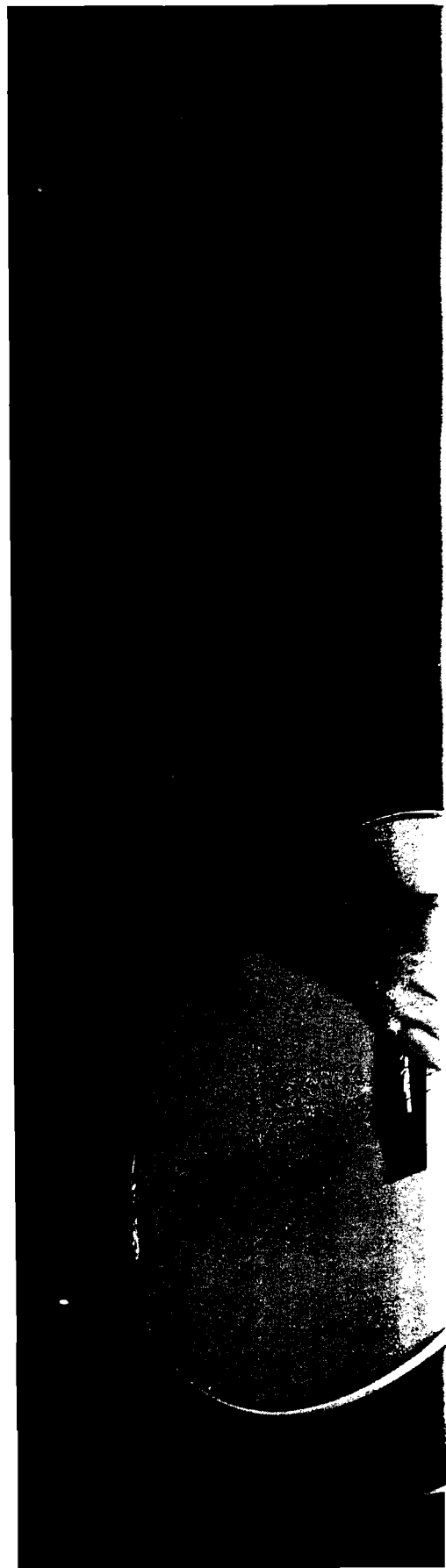
I have a really good band right now, probably the best I've ever had. They're not studied, schooled musicians like the studio guys. They are more street guys and I'm more of a street guy. There's a little more kind of grittiness, nastiness to the way my band plays and I want to see if I can capture that on this CD.

Who is in your band now?

Well I have **Sammy Avila**, he's been there eleven years on the (Hammond) B3. And I have **Rick Knapp** who has been there since **Jimmy (Trapp)** died, my old bass player, so he has been there for six years. I have **Michael Leasure**, on the drums; he's been there for four years. He's a powerhouse. I stole him from **Edgar Winter**. It's a good unit. There is a lot of good chemistry and communication. It works.

Do they collaborate with you on the musical arrangements?

A little bit; we're gonna rehearse for three days



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before we go in the studio. I don't really want them to be all that arranged. I want to be able to say, 'Here's the song, let's play it!' We're doing a blues album. It's gotta be sort of spontaneous, a lot of it, (so we) use the song as a format. The songs that I have been coming up with are sort of straight-ahead. There's not a lot of little things that we need to go over or work on. It is going to be the energy and commitment that we play them with, as opposed to little arrangement tricks or anything like that.

I'm in there for two weeks. I have two weeks to do everything. I warned my band, I might bring some people in for a couple of tunes. If I do one song and I think it needs a piano on it, I'm in LA, so there are a hundred piano players. If it needs a horn line, there are some great horn players. So I might bring some guys like that in.

I'm leaving for the European tour I'm doing on the 2nd of November, so Eric Korn is gonna mix it while I am on tour. He's gonna be sending me mixes and I'll have to be listening to them while I am on tour. We can drive in the van, I'll put the mix on the iPod and play it in the van and then get four different opinions!

On my last album, I had a couple of different mixes of one song, played both mixes in the van. One of the guys in my band, I won't say who, just went off, 'The first one is better. The instruments sound better. The drums have more power. The guitar has a deeper tone.' He just went into all this stuff and the only difference in the mix from one to the other, was the vocal was up or down half a decibel. They were exactly the same! So I foresee a couple of weeks of mild amusement and a little bit of hell, trying to run mixes by these guys.

My band is not a democracy! I was in bands that were democracies. I was in a band in the seventies that was a spectacular band. We were called Midnight Angel. Everybody in the band was a lead singer. We had three songwriters. The keyboard player (Danny Timms) went on to play with The Fabulous Thunderbirds; he went on to play with Bonnie Raitt, Paul Simon, Johnny Cash. This guy was amazing! We had five part harmonies. Honest to God, we were like The Eagles of R & B! But it was a democracy. We'd be on stage and we had a house gig, we did six nights a week at this club, here in California, and we couldn't even agree on what song to play next. We'd be on stage ten minutes arguing with each other about who gets to sing the next song. I came out of it going, 'When you are dealing with a bunch of artists, democracy isn't working!'

So in my band, I am il duce, the fuhrer and that's just the way it is. I decided that the only way I was going to have a career was to call the shots. I have certain rules; if they can't follow the rules, they're gone. Anybody drinks on the day of the gig; they're out of the band. They've got to be stone sober on stage. Anybody uses drugs; they're out of the band. It's just my rule and they are welcome to go work with somebody else, I just don't care. It's actually worked for me and I'm about to do my twenty-first record. I've been gigging and recording constantly since 1989. As much as I am a political left wing wacko and believe deeply in democracy, it doesn't work with artists!

When will the new album come out?

The album will come out in April 2012, when I will be over to do a (European) tour again.

Will you be playing the new material from the album, when you are on tour here in November?

No, in the days that we live in, with YouTube, if I come out with a new

song, it will be on YouTube and by the time the record comes out, everybody has already heard it. It's a great tool. I think it is a great thing but I have to watch what I say on the mic and which tunes I play. I used to play in Poland or somewhere they didn't speak English and I used to make up ridiculous lyrics, just to make the band laugh. Can't do that any more; it all turns up on YouTube.

If you have a great gig that turns up on YouTube, you go, 'That's cool!' If you have a complete shit gig, you can't play, you can't sing, that turns up there too. I have nights that are better than others, you know, inspiration wise. For instance, if the audience is really responsive, I pick up their energy and I play better. I just play with more passion. That level is dependent on many variables, audience, stage, sound, things like that. If I have a rough gig, and I do have them, that turns up too. Although, I watch it later, nobody knows I'm having a rough gig but me.

Are you still enjoying it?

I certainly am! I feel very blessed, especially in this day and age. I could have said, 'No I don't want to throw all my eggs in one basket and be a musician'. I could have gone to college and gotten a degree and gotten a good job and now be unemployed. It's crazy out there.

It seems that people still want to go out and hear music and purchase CDs and be entertained. A friend of mine, a long time ago, used to say, 'If you can get an audience for what you are doing, you will always have a job, even in bad times.' He used to tell me about the first guy who sold a million records, in the thirties. It was during the depression in the States and it was a country singer called Jimmy Rodgers. All these poor farmers and people who were broke still were coming up with 25 cents or whatever it was then to buy one of this guy's records. That says a lot.

Walter Trout and various artists: *Full Circle*.

The Walter Trout Band is touring in Europe 4th – 27th November.

UK dates with Popa Chubby are:

23rd at Wulfrun Hall in Wolverhampton; 24th O2 Academy, Islington London N1; 25th City Hall in Salisbury; 26th The Picturedrome Holmfirth; 27th Queen's Hall Edinburgh.

