



## Jim Byrnes

### A Lifetime of Blues

**A**fter he returned intact, physically, from the Viet Nam war, Jim Byrnes thought he was home-free. But on February 26, 1972, while he helped a friend move a stalled truck from a highway, he was struck by another vehicle and lost both legs at the knees. During a difficult recovery, he found solace in music – specifically, his guitar. Byrnes had been playing since childhood and had some success as an actor in college and in his hometown of St. Louis. After the accident, he continued both pursuits and in 1987 won a role on NBC TV’s “Wiseguy” followed by a run as Jim Dawson in “The Highlander” series on TV, film, along with other work including a variety series, “The Jim Byrnes Show.” His latest album is *Everywhere West*.

Now living in Vancouver, British Columbia, Byrnes has won two Juno Awards for Blues Album Of The Year, as well as the Maple Blues Awards Male Vocalist of the Year. Byrnes spent his teens haunting the blues and R&B clubs in St. Louis at a time when the races, black and white, were expected to remain on their

respective sides of town. What he experienced then impacted his life and music.

“I met Muddy Waters when I was 15,” he said. “We went to the Schlitz

**“Music is a great healer, and people are only just now discovering what music can do for you and how important it is.”**

Lakeside Club, which was a rough place. The guy at the door was wearing a gun. Then in walks Otis Spann, with Muddy and his band. Muddysaw these two dumb white kids standing there. So he came over and said, ‘What are you guys doing here?’ I said, ‘I got your record, blah, blah, blah. I want to play like you, blah, blah, blah...’ He got us a card table and folding chairs, sat us down, and bought us a Coke. That was ‘62 or ‘63.

“A couple years later, I was going to school in Boston, and he played at the Club 47. I told my friends, ‘Hey, we

gotta go. I know Muddy!’ Everybody was going, ‘Yeah right.’”

**After Boston, you headed north, right?**

I was in Toronto and played some music there, but things didn’t work out. A guy I’d met overseas was living on Vancouver Island, which looked like the end of the earth. That appealed to me at the time. Then I had the accident.

**Which was more important, music or acting?**

I was playing music because acting jobs were few and far between. My earliest memory is of running around the house singing Roy Acuff’s “Wabash Cannonball” when I was a three. Music has always been important, but I majored in acting, and that’s what got me in trouble. I quit school because I figured I knew everything. Then I got drafted.

**How much did playing guitar figure in your recovery?**

It saved my life. There were times when I felt I couldn’t go on. I didn’t know what I was going to do. When I started feeling pain, I could take my guitar down to the end of the hall and play. And for that time, everything was okay. It’s still like that. Music is a great healer, and people are only now are discovering what music can do, and how important it is.

**And it has ever-expanding possibilities...**

Which is what I love about it. I’m just starting to hit my stride, find my own voice. But there’s no end in sight. I’ve had those moments when you reach a plateau; every time you pick up the guitar, you play the same thing. Then you’ll be talking to somebody and they’ll play a chord and you’ll say, “Hey, what was that position?” Then you play that and go, “Man! I can sound like T-Bone Walker! I can do that!” You’ll often over think it; you’ll think, “That sounds really difficult” and you’ll make it hard when it’s not. You play three chords, you can rock the world. Sometimes, I turn away from technique. Sometimes,

it’s just an exercise like listening to somebody play scales.

My favorite guys are like Hooker or T-Bone, Roebuck “Pops” Staples, Steve Cropper—he just plays so simply and just right all the time. Bobby Womack was a great guitar player. Curtis Mayfield’s guitar shows up in all sorts of people’s playing. I’m very much into “less is more.” Four notes, and you can play an unbelievable solo. For me it’s never really been about technique. It’s the emotional attachment to a sound or a phrase that gets you. — **Rick Allen**

**I have a tube combo that had an 8-ohm stock speaker and I wonder whether I would damage the amp by running a 16-ohm speaker. The manufacturer’s rep told me it’s safe to run a solid-state amp at higher impedance, but on tube amps, the opposite is true. He further indicated this rule was applicable to amps in general, not just their brand. What is the truth? — Mike Yates**

In general, most tube amps can go from 8 to 16 or 4 ohms with no harm to any of their components. However, this depends greatly on how the amp’s circuit was designed, and of course the specs of the amp’s output transformer. What might be fine for a robust OT on a blackface Fender Showman might not work as well on a Princeton or worse yet, a vintage Marshall (which are often suspected of having OT’s rated too low for the application). And remember, speaker impedance may well play a role in producing the amp’s characteristic sound.

When it comes to the possibility of burning up an output transformer, I would err on the side of safety, and stick with what the manufacture has recommended for your particular amp. Most solidstate amps tend to be fine with higher impedance, but can easily burn up if wired to a cab that is of lower impedance.

**I have a ‘70s MXR Dyna Comp that is making funny noises. It works fine when running on a battery, but starts making noise when I power it on my board with a D.C. battery clip from my power supply. What can I do? — Gavin Spalding**

Because compressors, by nature, amplify quiet sounds, they also tend to accentuate any noise being created in the process. Beyond that, they are also known for being susceptible to D.C. ripple. I spoke with effects designer R.G. Keen, who recommended combatting the issue by adding a 22-mfd cap soldered across the terminals where the battery clip attaches to the board. This should filter out most of the noise. If you do this and continue to experience issues, add a resistor (anything from 10- to 100-ohm) in series with the 220-mfd cap.

*Zac Childs is a professional guitar tech based in Nashville. If you have a question about guitars, anything from nuts and bolts to historical or celebrity-related inquiries, drop a line to him at [zac@askzac.com](mailto:zac@askzac.com).*



# Roxanne Potvin

## Guitar Party Québécoise!

**R**oxanne Potvin is known to an ever-growing number of fans as a sharp blues and R&B player. Her recent album, *Play*, shows the Telecaster-wielding Potvin operating in an expanded musical landscape.

### How is *Play* different from your other records?

It's probably more pop than soul or R&B. I've moved more into a songwriter role the last couple of years.

### In the timeline of your development as a musician and a music lover, is that a step forward or a step back?

As a kid, I had my New Kids On The Block phase, but also a '50s rock-and-roll obsession. I listened to jazz, my dad would play rock and roll, and my mom liked classical radio. But music in whatever form was a huge part of the family.

### Do any other Potvins play?

Many of us play—guitar, piano, violin, drums and/or sing. There's always singing and jamming at family reunions.

### How did you go from listener to a guitar player?

I've been singing since I was seven or eight years old. When I was 13, I watched the *Beatles Anthology* series with my parents. By the end, when they were breaking up, I was crying. It was that strong. I was crazy about them and I wanted to play

their songs. I started buying CDs and albums, and that's when I started writing songs. When I got a guitar at 14, it was expressly to support that.

### What was your first guitar?

I was very particular. I wanted a classical because I like to play with fingers—I liked the sound. And I wanted an unvarnished finish. So I got a La Patrie, and I think my baby brother later threw a bicycle on it.

### How did a French-Canadian girl growing up in the '90s become a blues lover?

I loved early rock and roll—Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, the Everlys when I was seven years old. I still love it. But I had no idea that blues was such an influence on those guys. I didn't even know what blues was. I remember hearing Stevie Ray Vaughan, I asked, "Dad, is that blues?" He said "Yes." Eventually, he gave me a Howlin' Wolf record. That scared me! But I became curious about the blues. I saw Jonny Lang on television and I thought he was so cute. We were the same age and he was talking about blues. I never heard people my age talking about blues. I started reading everything I could, looking up guys like B.B. King, Albert King, and Albert Collins and buying their records. It was

like a treasure chest, finding gem after gem. It was really special—not only blues, but R&B, soul, gospel, everything.

### You did *Time Bomb* with Deborah Coleman and Sue Foley. Were they influential?

I can't say Deb is a big influence because I wasn't familiar with her music before I met her. But Sue was a big inspiration. I admire how she goes up there so confidently. We had fun making *Time Bomb* and touring with it, we supported each other. I learned a lot.

### Who was your main guitar idol?

I loved the stinging tone of Freddie King or Johnnie Guitar Watson, Guitar Slim... that raw sound. My playing has always been really rough; some people like it, some don't. But that's the only way I knew.

### Did you have a teacher?

I learned by experimenting. I would sit down and try to learn the licks. I discovered later that I had been practicing the wrong way, not really focusing. Practice is a matter of repeating things. I just had to learn how to practice.

### Why a Telecaster?

Jonny Lang played a Telecaster, so I wanted a Telecaster. But I remember seeing a Sheryl Crow "Win This Guitar" contest in a magazine. It was a white Tele, and I thought, "That's the guitar I want." The neck fits well in my hand, where the Strat neck is a lot wider. I always had a hard time playing a Strat. On *Play*, I do only one guitar solo on my blue Tele. All the rest is Steve Dawson, the producer, who's an amazing guitar player.

The fact I'm more in the songwriting mode these days makes me play less blues guitar than I used to, but doesn't mean I've put it aside. Whenever I do play it, I have as much fun as ever. —  
**Rick Allen**

## VINTAGE GUITAR ON facebook

*Vintage Guitar's* page on the social-networking website Facebook includes a Discussions forum where followers exchange stories and tips about a host of topics. And just for fun, there are always topics posted by *VG* where fans chime in for a chance at cool prizes. In July, we asked fans "As a six-stringer, what stylistic approach do you prefer in a bassist." Some of the responses include;

"Just do what's best for the particular song or moment. Above all, *don't* overplay (that, of course, is when it becomes too much...oh, and watch your volume)!" —**Patrick Flanagan**

"Pocket is all that matters to me. It's not when they play, but when they *don't*." —**Scott Chapin**

"When it is appropriate for the tune or a part in it, embellishment from the bassist really transforms the whole musical context of a song—and won't be overplaying." —**Scott A. Zurr**

"The drummer and bassist are the one-two punch that makes the song work. The combination works on the best songs ever produced—even when the band is featuring a fabulous guitar player!" —**Augustine Foglio**

"It is all about the pocket; if you can keep it, you can also stretch out and go anywhere you like." —**Brent Stewart**

"I like to listen to virtuoso bassists, but I prefer to play with ones who can hold down the groove and just keep it in the pocket" —**Brent Johnston**

"If the groove isn't there, the rest of the song doesn't work. I have no problem with the bassist venturing beyond root notes *if* they do it musically and make it work within the structure of the song." —**Jeff Rumbaugh**

To see more, maybe chime in on the prize Discussion topic, or simply chat with other fans about vintage gear, guitars, amps, or players, go to facebook.com and search for *Vintage Guitar* magazine.