



Dale Robertson

HARMONICA BLUES MAN

"The harmonica is the mother of the band."

Otis Spann,
Pianist for Muddy Waters

He is considered by his peers to be one of the finest harmonica players in the Midwest. He plays with a soulful, bluesy style borne out of a lifetime of hardship and challenges.

As a young child in Detroit, Dale was surrounded with music. While living with his grandparents he used to play around with the family's baby grand piano. His aunt and uncle, who were involved in the Folk Music scene, often hosted music legends like Joan Baez and Jose Feliciano at their house. But it wasn't until 4th grade that Dale became formally involved in music. After the family relocated to Ann Arbor, Dale entered Middle School and took up the trumpet. He became a member of the concert band and played for 6 years. But at the age of 14, his life took a bad turn. Caught with drugs, he was kicked out of his house by his step-father and left to fend for himself out on the streets. It was a defining experience.

Dale found himself homeless and helpless. With no money, no food and no place to sleep, Dale struggled. To provide a short-term option, a music friend gave him a harmonica and showed him where he could play on the streets of Ann Arbor to earn tip money. So for the next few months, Dale sat in the archway of a building on State Street near the University of Michigan campus playing songs for passersby. He not only survived the ordeal but he mastered his musical craft and earned enough money to get by.

"When you are hungry, you get good quickly."

Eventually, Dale landed a job at a nearby deli but he continued to play the harmonica for tips on the streets.

From 1974-76, Dale jammed with local musicians and even played with James Cotton and Junior Wells at a local club. Then one day he decided to completely change his life.



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In 1976 Dale made a complete pivot from his "street" lifestyle and joined the U.S. Navy for a 3-year enlistment. While stationed in the Philippines, he continued to play the harmonica at nightclubs near his base in anticipation of continuing in music upon his return to the States. When he finally returned in 1979, he did just that. But not in Ann Arbor. Instead, he hitchhiked to California and began playing gigs at clubs up and down the Pacific Coast Highway from San Diego to San Francisco.

In 1981 Dale traveled to Miami for a short stint. Then he headed off to Europe – playing gigs in Germany, France and Italy as a trio with a pair of guitarists. While there, an entrepreneur offered him an opportunity to transform one of his buildings into an American-style disco. He performed there as a regular for a full year.

In 1982 Dale returned to Ann Arbor and reverted to his life as a street performer. For two years he struggled with alcohol and drug abuse. Then he had his second transformation.



In 1984 Dale quit alcohol and drugs and entered an AA program. He also decided to stop playing the harmonica. Instead, he enrolled in school and earned degrees in Robotics and Computer Tech at Washtenaw Community College and Eastern Michigan University. Upon graduation he immediately landed a job teaching CAD/CAM software at a division of General Electric. A few years later he got married.

In 1993 Dale's passion for music returned. He decided to leave his tech career and began playing at jam sessions in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. Then in 1995 he ventured off to Alvin's Nightclub in Detroit where he met up with the great Thornetta Davis who helped introduce him to the local music scene. He continued to play at club jam sessions for the next 5 years and then joined the "Shindig Band", a Pop / Oldies band that performed at nightclubs, yacht clubs and weddings. But Dale's first love was Blues so in 2002 he formed the self-titled "Dale Robertson Band" and decided to get serious.

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In 2003, Dale played a gig in Las Vegas. While there, Dale picked up a vintage "zoot suit" to wear on stage. It quickly became a trademark image for him. Soon veteran musicians were taking more notice and more groups began inviting him to open for or perform with them.

Over the past decade, Dale and his band have been performing in the greater Detroit area at places like Bert's Place, The Detroit Blues Café, Harbor House, The Blue Goose, and major events like Arts Beats & Eats, The Taylor Blues Festival, The New Year's Eve D-Drop, and Tour Detroit. As head of his band, Dale not only plays harmonica but also sings lead vocals.

During the course of his career, Dale has played with legendary musicians like James Cotton, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Taj Mahal, Luther Allison, Junior Wells, and The Butler Twins.

The Harmonica is Dale's first love because it was his first instrument and it carried him through his life journey. But he is also experienced on the trumpet, guitar and keyboards.



"Playing the harmonica is the highest form of inspiration for me. With it I can tap into audience emotion. I can make people laugh, cry or celebrate. Most of all, I can express things with my harmonica that I can't do with my own voice. It's special."

To hear the bluesy, soulful sounds of Dale's harmonica, visit his Facebook site for upcoming performances. In the meantime, enjoy this video of The Dale Robertson Band making Magical Music.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NfFeIPjR4M>