



# ROBIN TROWER: Living Out of Time

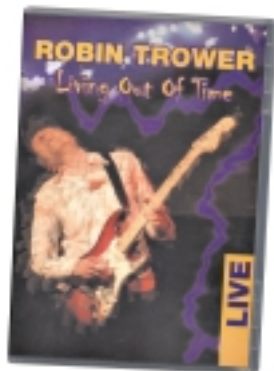
Okay, I have to be honest: When I popped open this DVD last week, I was immediately transported back to 1976 and my high school talent show, where a rag-tag, thrown-together group fronted by yours truly attempted to pull off not just one but two Trower tracks. I had the right gear, so the look was there. The sound? Well, let's just say a long-haired 16-year-old tried his best.

Back in the '70s, post-Procal Harem, Robin Trower became a fixture on the hard-rock scene, playing to SRO crowds across America and Europe. With fluid fingerboard work and a tonal approach that was freely compared to Hendrix, Trower won his place in the upper echelon of guitarism. Fame is a transitory thing, like public tastes. But like a great chef in the kitchen of mojo, Trower has proved time and time again that consistency is the mark of a master.

My first impression is always visual. But I'm certainly glad that the old saying, "You can't judge a book by its cover" has held up over the generations, because the packaging design for *Living Out of Time* borders on the amateur. Whenever I get a poorly executed wrapper for any product, I'm sure to feel I'm bound for some strange intestinal condition. Thankfully this package came with a healthy dose of vitamin A, as in "Ass-Kicking Blues Rock": the prescription for what ails you.

This live Trower concert was shot in a small club called "Harmonie" during the Rockpalast Crossroads Festival in Bonn, Germany. If you expect Deutschland deathrockers clad in leather and studs pumping their collective fists in the air, you'd be surprised. Instead the show begins in a strange way, with the small crowd holding sparklers and singing a decidedly Teutonic rendition of "Happy Birthday" to the sexagenarian rocker. But the fire 'n' brimstone was sure to come, as Trower lay waste to any preconceptions about age and who or who couldn't get it on.

The first track is the iron-clad classic "Too Rolling Stoned." What, you expected an unheard of throwaway song first? Forget it! You want Trower, after all. The chugging 4/4 time signature of some very tight drumming courtesy of Pete Thomsen and "in-the-pocket" bass by Dave Bronze supply the backbone for Robin's liquid notes to come pouring through your surround system. Conjuring up some pure gris-gris like a Delta-blues voodoo shaman, Trower rips into the solo with a carefully mapped recklessness, all proprietary to his planet of rock. Close-ups show the grimacing facial contortions, but Trower never seems to veer out of control. Wow. And that's just the first track. Wait a minute . . . what happened to the crowd? Sure, I know it's a small space, but didn't these people just witness a blazing performance? Come on, make some noise, people! This isn't Kraftwerk you're watching!



Track two sashays out a new song, "Sweet Angel" from the newly released album also called *Living Out of Time*. Conjuring the spirit of one SRV, Trower plays a TexMex groove that recalls the man himself. This is the tone that gee-tar pickers have struggled (and often failed) to achieve. It's the Holy Grail of tone. But what's that I hear? That voice! Where have I heard that before? A quick jog of my memory drives me back to a post-Montrose band called Gamma, fronted by . . . duh, Ronnie Montrose. Yes, it's Davey Pattison! Cool! Okay, now I'm really listening. Davey's sound is perfectly at home with the blues-infused rock of the Trower catalog, providing a perfect side dish to the main course of Robin's sonic leadscapes. Part Ernie Isley, part Gregg Wright, Robin Trower repeatedly strafes the audience with

Vietnam-era napalm runs whilst Pattison moans and yearns like a Percy Sledge or Frogman Henry, albeit with more enunciation. Still, Pattison gives Robin room to shine, as Trower's guitar growls from phrase to phrase. Man, how do I get that tone?

Continuing through the tracks, the unusual voicings and chord structures of "What's Your Name" lend a groovy discordance to the verses in an otherwise easy-to-digest straightforward rocker. This is great, that is until you get to the end of the song. What is this? One person clapping again? Come on, Germany! We know the food ain't that great, but drink some Bitburger or Jager and get with it. (Now I understand why canned applause was invented.) Somehow I wish Robin would reach out and just simply, eloquently screamed, "WAKE UP, PEOPLE!" Moving quickly into "Rise Up Like the Sun," Trower and Company rip through this 130bpm progression in a non-pretentious manner. And yes, the crowd finally does awaken from their trip down Narcoleptic Lane. We follow the band into "Daydreams" (from the first LP) as projected multimedia imagery adds some interest to what is becoming a wee bit boring show. Thankfully, it's the urgency of Pattison's voice on the next track, "Living Out of Time" that awakens me with a more mature-sounding version of the Black Crowes' crooner, Chris Robinson. This ain't no arena-rock production lads, this is four men showing the young dudes what real playing is all about. No crazy threads, no incense burning near a stack of faux-wrapped Marshall stacks. No alternate tunings. Hell, Trower never changed guitars once! And intonation? If you can tell me you hear one note out of key, I'll send you a PhD certificate from the University of Intonation Ineptitude. And did you know Robin sings? This guy stands up to the mike and belts out a gutsy vocal on "Breathless." Great rough vocals over those occasional 7th/flatted 9th chords, all with facial contortions. Yeah, baby!

What happens next is what I've been waiting for. Trower and the boys blast into my all-time fave, "Day of the Eagle," trashing me for once and for all. For some reason it seems like this song is done a half-step lower on this disk, but hell it sounds huge. Flying out from the "Eagle," a trilled D to E segues into the hall-of-famer, "Bridge of Sighs." Named for the infamous hallway in Venice where prisoners were escorted to their forgotten destinies, one can almost hear the cries of those tortured souls. Once again, Davey Pattison's vocals are superb. The next three tracks evoke the sounds of B. B. King, Debbie Davies, Albert King and Bourbon Street-influenced bluesmen of the '60s, with a fatness that belies a four-piece band. Closing the concert, Robin lets loose with "Little Bit of Sympathy," which is something the German crowd definitely would not get from me right now. Fantastic mix, pure frequencies and a perfect upbeat tempo, the track sounds every bit as fresh now as it did more than 30 years ago. Big open chords and a nasty, slippery guitar solo, coupled with bassist Bronze gnashing out the big wound strings with his freakin' teeth à la Hendrix on the last verse! This is totally cool, but at the same time it's a mature display of Trower's restrained prowess. It's also historical souvenir that will satisfy Trower fans in the knowledge that Robin and friends can still shake a leg. Now if only they could remix this thing with a more appreciative and cacophonous crowd!

The Reverb-O-Meter gives this one:

3 picks (out of 5) for Overall Video Performance

4 picks for guitar work

2 picks for the "je ne sais quoi" of that concert experience.

Hint to post-production editors: Next time you should amp up the crowds by offering free Jager shots hours before the show, or use some creative editing.

**MATT TOUCHARD** Matt Touchard has been named one of the top 40 "Creative People to Watch in 2006" for North America by national industry publication GDUSA. As a creative director, brand-builder, designer, writer and illustrator for his firm, Zermatt based in New Orleans, Matt is known for defying convention with aggressive design, poignant writing and results-oriented visual communication. Matt is the recipient of over 100 awards ranging from his 26 GDUSA awards to a Clio, Gold Accolades, ADDYs, Lucie and the Grand Reggie for the Nation's Number One Promo of the Year. Matt's portfolio has showcased projects for Pat Benatar, Neil Giraldo, Hangface, Cirque du Soleil, Sony BMG, EMI Records, Welk Music and Cherry Red Records UK. He was recently selected as one of New Orleans' "People to Watch." In addition, he is the recipient of 13 International TELLY Film and Video Awards for Music Composition. Matt collects vintage BC Rich and Gretsch guitars and is busy writing his first book about the passion and devotion towards the guitar. Matt can be reached through email: touchard@bellsouth.net or www.zermattdesign.com.