

STREET SCENE

Cray's 'Sweet Potato Pie' has Memphis flavor

R&B singer Robert Cray feels for children who are growing up in the late 1990s.

"I was reading in the newspaper and watching situations on TV where young kids go out and do crazy things. Then the first person who's interviewed is the kid's parents who commit the crime, or the victim's parents. It's like, 'Don't you see what you're doing?'"

"I can't even envision the things that are going on. When I was coming up, I'm glad I had a guitar. This is a whole dangerous world out here with the kids. That's the terrible thing."

Cray, who has no children, included a song on his latest album "Sweet Potato Pie" (Mercury) called "Back Home," which warns youths about the dangers of street life.

For "Sweet Potato Pie," which was released last year, Robert Cray and his band — keyboardist Jim Pugh, bassist Karl Sevarid and drummer Kevin Hayes — traveled to Memphis to record.

"First of all, we wanted to get out of the Bay area. I figured we could concentrate a little bit more on the music rather than we're going to have for dinner every night," said Cray who had



Playing Ann Arbor: The Robert Cray Band — from left, drummer Kevin Hayes, guitarist/singer Robert Cray, keyboardist Jim Pugh, and bassist Karl Sevarid — perform as part of the Ann Arbor Summer Festival on Monday, June 22, at the Power Center for the Performing Arts.

just returned from a Brazilian tour.

"I've often dreamt about what

it must have been like to be in the studios in Memphis when many of my musical heroes like

Otis Redding and O.V. Wright were recording. I must say the spirit of that time is still there

somewhat and making this album in the city was a great experience for all of us."

While in Memphis, Cray took advantage of the location and invited his old friends the Memphis Horns to play on "Sweet Potato Pie."

"For us and our love of that Stax sound, there's no better people to have on your record than the originators of that sound."

Credited with a major role in the resurgence of blues and roots music, Cray scored his first hit, "Smoking Gun," in the late 1980s. Since then, he has performed with Chuck Berry, Keith Richards, Eric Clapton and Tina Turner. In 1986, Cray performed in "Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll," a concert and film tribute to Berry. A year later, Clapton covered "Bad Influence" on his album "August" and invited him to play on subsequent albums "Journey-

man" and "24 Nights." The duo co-wrote "Old Love," which appeared on Clapton's 1992 Grammy Award-winning album "Unplugged."

Cray will return to the area to perform as part of the Ann Arbor Summer Festival on Monday, June 22. He explained that fans can expect a variety of material. "We're mixing it up pretty good. We're going way back and doing some things from 'Sweet Potato Pie.' We're traveling as a quartet so it should be a lot of fun."

Robert Cray Band performs at 8 p.m. Monday, June 22, as part of the Ann Arbor Summer Festival at the Power Center for the Performing Arts, 121 Fletcher St., Ann Arbor. Tickets range from \$18-\$27 for the all-ages show. Call (734) 764-2538 for more information. To read more about Cray, visit his Web site at <http://www.rosebudUS.com/cray.html>

Ann Wilson puts her 'Heart' into tour

Ann Wilson of the rock band Heart was itching to get back on the road. There was one problem, however. Her sister Nancy couldn't make it.

"I had just been climbing the walls wanting to go out for a while now but my sister is really trying to have a baby. Finally I just kind of said, 'Well would you mind if I just go out without you?' She said, 'Make yourself happy!'"

This is the first time that Heart will tour without Nancy Wilson. Ann Wilson admitted that she would have done it sooner but she wasn't confident enough to do it.

"I guess it took me until now to feel I could do it by myself. I wasn't sure if people would accept just one of us without the other. That's why we're calling it 'Heart featuring Ann Wilson.' I wanted people to know before they buy their tickets that it's just going to be me."

Wilson described the show as "amazing" but it will be a little "different."

"We're not going to do all the songs that rely on (Nancy's) acoustic guitar playing — 'These Dreams.' Things like that are Nancy's domain. I really want to respect that. I don't want to hire some guy to play her parts."

Included in Wilson's set list will be "Barracuda" and a new rendition of "All I Wanna Do is Make Love to You."

"We're doing an acoustic version of that. It's a little bit softer because the one that came out on the record was more of a radio type of song. This one's a little more intimate."

Besides the hits, Heart will also perform a new song, "There's a Strong, Strong Wind" that will be included on "Heart Greatest Hits" (Epic). "It has all the hits of the 1970s. It's not going to have the Capitol-era hits, just the early

stuff. That should be kind of cool to hear that stuff again."

On stage Wilson will be joined by guitarist Howard Leese, a 22-year member of Heart, guitarist/vocalist Frank Cox, drummer Ben Smith, bassist Jon Bayless, and rhythm guitarist Scott Olson, Nancy Wilson's former guitar tech.

"People should expect to see a vital and living band that's still evolving. I see some people are coming out and playing the same old stuff one more time to get their buck. I want to be real clear on that. We're not only playing Heart classics. We're asking people to expand their minds."

Wilson will also bring along her 7-year-old daughter Marie and 7-week-old baby boy John Dustin.

"I wouldn't do it any other way. I just believe in keeping families solid. I see a lot of other artists going out on tour and leaving

their kids somewhere else. This crack forms between them and they start growing apart then they have a dysfunctional family."

Wilson said that as soon as her sister has a baby she will rejoin Heart.

"Nancy and I have been talking about it. As soon as I get back and the summer tour's over, we're going to start writing again."

Heart featuring Ann Wilson, with special guests The Tubes featuring Fee Waybill, have two arena appearances — 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 23, at the Toledo Zoo in Toledo. Tickets are \$20 and \$24.50 for the all-ages show; and 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 24, at Pine Knob Music Theatre, 1-75 and Sunnyside Road, Independence Township. Tickets are \$22.50 pavilion and \$12.50 lawn for the all-ages show. For more information about either show, call (248) 645-6666.

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