

## Robert Randolph & The Family Band Biography

Colorblind

Robert Randolph - guitars, vocals

Danyel Morgan - bass, vocals

Marcus Randolph - drums

Jason Crosby - Hammond organ, piano

"We wanted to take our time and find ourselves," says Robert Randolph. "Find out what was really inside of me and the band and bring that out. Really try to come up with the best songs, dig deep within, and let all of the experiences that we have had in the last three years come out in the music."

With Colorblind, Randolph and the Family Band have taken the difficult leap from being great performing artists to being great recording artists. Since emerging from a House of God church in Orange, New Jersey steeped in the "sacred steel" tradition, Randolph's astonishing pedal steel playing has had a revolutionary impact. Like a mere handful of musicians – Louis Armstrong, Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Wonder – he has actually been able to redefine the sonic possibilities of his instrument. Randolph's string wizardry is the focal point of the Family Band's legendary live appearances, and led to guest spots with artists ranging from the Blind Boys of Alabama to Ozzy Osbourne.

But even Randolph admits that the Family Band's previous recordings have focused more on capturing their onstage magic than on making an album for the ages. "On the last record (2003's *Unclassified*)," he says, "we had some ideas, wrote as we went along, and we were out of there in three weeks – and that's cool. But in working with so many people and getting advice from Eric Clapton, Steven Tyler, and the guys from Dave Matthews Band – they all say, 'We'd love to see your talent showcased within the context of a great song.' I was always caught up in the show, because I'm comfortable as a performer," he continues. "But Carlos Santana said to me, if you ask fifty people which they remember most, a show or a record, 48 of them will say a great record. Because you live with a record, you can pick it up fifty years later and still listen to those songs."

So Randolph set some new goals for his second studio album – something he wanted to stand on its own, not just be a souvenir of a great concert. For inspiration, he went back to some classic sources. "I listened to Sly Stone, a lot of Hendrix, Zeppelin, Stevie Wonder," he says. "Then I'd go back to a church service and I'd think, I want Colorblind to be a mixture of all of these things."

The big step this time around was the decision to collaborate with other songwriters. The talent assembled was immense, including Tommy Sims (who has written songs with Eric Clapton, Bonnie Raitt, and Garth Brooks), Jeff Trott (Sheryl Crow), Mark Batson (Dave Matthews Band, Gwen Stefani), and the team of Drew Ramsey and

Shannon Sanders (India.Arie, Heather Hedley). "We're fortunate to be good musicians," says Randolph, "and we were able to channel into that foundation during the collaboration process, and grow as songwriters."

Not that it was easy for such a pure player to make the emotional commitment required to craft and shape new material. "At first, it was kinda weird," he admits. "You put up this wall, like, this guy is going to try to change me, make me write a song that I wouldn't be comfortable performing – that's automatically what you think. So at first I wasn't being as open as I should have been."

The breakthrough, he says, came with a ballad called "Stronger," written with Steve McEwan, who has scored country hits with the likes of Faith Hill and Kenny Chesney. "He was more of an aggressor, like, 'Let's go, we gotta write a song here!' And that was really the first step, the song that got everything glued in. Then I knew I could hold my own as a songwriter."

Randolph says that he began to feel growth that was both musical and personal. "I learned a lot about myself," he says. "You get into that mode and there's so much uncharted territory, it's like discovering a whole new country. That confidence helped feed myself and the band."

As the album's title indicates, the results on *Colorblind* range from infectious R&B to timeless ballads. "Ain't Nothin' Wrong with That" is a sure-fire party-starter, while "Blessed" presents Randolph's more spiritual, introspective side. And, there is a blistering version of the Byrds' "Jesus is Just Alright With Me," featuring Randolph and Clapton – who became a close friend and mentor to the younger artist when they toured together – in a blazing guitar battle recorded live in the studio.

Though Randolph has been defined by his jaw-dropping pyrotechnics on the pedal steel, he notes that the studio time devoted to this album led to an evolution in his playing as well. "Now instead of playing over the top of everything, I'm learning to play within the melodies and the concept of the song," he says. "It doesn't have to be the most fancy lick, but everything needs to work together – the melodies and the lyrics and the music."

Having grown up in urban New Jersey and making the leap from playing in church to headlining rock festivals, Randolph's aspirations go beyond expanding his own musical boundaries. "I'm trying to create a new field and a new style that'll influence some kids to go, 'wow, I can be Black and be from the inner city and I don't have to be a rapper,'" he says. "I look at Sly Stone, how he came in and just ripped the music industry apart – I think music fans are ready for that again."

Having broken through to a new level of creativity, Robert Randolph now finds that he can't turn it off. "I'm still writing today," he says. "It's like being Willy Wonka – this is that first door that opens up and all this other stuff comes out. We've definitely stepped into some new dimension."