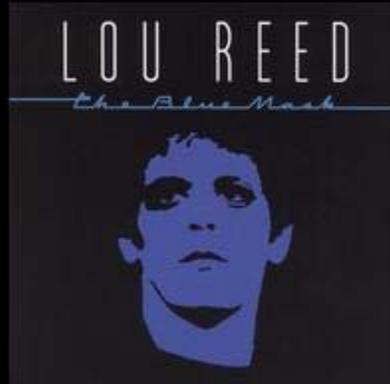


Perfect Sound Forever

online music magazine presents...

Robert Quine



Interview with drummer Doane Perry

Q: What kind of person did you think Robert was?

He was kind of a remote person and hard to know on certain levels I would say. He kept a lot of things quite private. Robert was a quiet person. He was a very interesting guy. Hard to get to know on a verbal level because he wasn't hugely communicative that way. I remember he came into the sessions and he always wore his sunglasses. He had them on all the time. Which I actually probably believe they were prescriptions glasses because I think I asked him one time and he said his eyes were very sensitive to light. Regardless of the time of day, he had on these fairly dark glasses. I remember him taking off his glasses a couple of times for me and looking at him thinking, "he looks so different without them." Whether that was a deliberately conscious look or really something where his eyes were shielding the light, I don't know. It was also a way perhaps of keeping people at a distance I think.

He was always very polite, very quiet except when he picked his guitar up! (laughs) He used to come in almost every day with a little sushi box that he would eat during the session. We rarely left the studio. It was just the four of us in the studio and the engineer. Nobody else was allowed in, so it was a quite an intense experience but mostly a non-verbal experience between all of us. Lou was not really specific and direct, I think for very deliberate reasons. I think he wanted to see what everybody would instinctively come up with. Robert and Lou were great foils for each other in terms of the way they played. But at times, it was complete anarchy in the guitar department, which is what I think Lou was after. Robert was able to give him that foil so that when Lou would go off, Robert would be kind of holding things down in that kind of anarchist way that he did. And vice versa.

But again, Robert was very reserved and seemed to keep his own counsel about most things. Occasionally, he would offer an opinion about whether or not we should do another pass at something or try something a little bit different. But I think what Lou was after was that he wanted us to all follow our initial gut instincts. So as a result, he didn't give us any of the music written... He gave me some very rough demos of him with an acoustic guitar and rough vocals and a lead sheet with the lyrics printed out that I listened to. But they really bore little resemblance to what we ended up playing. I think Lou didn't want us to be overly familiar with the music. He wanted to capture that initial excitement and the feeling all of us really, really listen because we didn't know the music that well. He did a good job of capturing that between the four of us. It wasn't really discussed that much how we would approach it. He trusted Robert's instincts and Fernando's and mine to serve the music. Most of the time, I was just reading a lead sheet. There was a number of things that were in unusual time signatures that we really didn't discuss. Lou didn't realize that the phrases were this long and I followed the lead sheet rather than counting bars or anything like that.

I have to say that what Robert and Lou did together was something that I really appreciated much more after the fact, after the record was done. They were both very, very different in terms of guitarists that I had worked with up until that point in terms of their approach. At times, they had an interchangeable musical personality. You could tell who was playing what but they created this kind of sonic wall of sound between them. I had played with Lou before because he had asked me to play after he saw me play live with another group. So I did *the Blue Mask* with him and then a song for the soundtrack of the movie *Get Crazy* with the same aggregation. Lou must have heard something in my playing that was kind of exciting and maybe unpredictable. At that time, I was doing a lot of studio sessions, I was coming from a very different place at that point in time. In fact, I even remember suggesting that perhaps we should start working with a click-track. Lou just gave me this look like... "you can't be serious." I think I remember later on seeing Fernando and heard that he got into using drum machine type deals and he kind of saw the value in that. But he really wanted something that was a real departure, which I think he got. Again, I appreciated it so much more after the fact because when we were doing it, we were tracking and what I was hearing from Lou and Robert was just this crazy kind of guitar playing that was so different from the guitar players that I would normally play with. Fernando and I were just at different times kind of holding the fort down so that they could go up on these tense tangents. But other times, we all jumped in there together.

So it was such a different experience for me, making that kind of record that I had to get a distance from it to fully appreciate the vision that Lou had for this record. Robert helped to serve him very well, to be this guitaristic foil to bounce his own style of playing off of. Yet as soon as the guitars came off, Robert was again very quiet and introspective. Very thoughtful and HIGHLY intelligent person 'cause anytime we talked, he gave a lot of consideration to his answers. He was not a person who enjoyed engaging in small talk. That was not him at all. He didn't laugh very much. I remember that but at times, the sessions could be very tense and intense alternately but I think we did get something quite special. It was a kind of unique blending of all of our styles, which were fairly disparate. And none of us knew each other and none of us had played together before, which I think was something Lou was looking for in way. He didn't want people who were comfortable in working with each other, that knew all the in's and out's of each others' playing. He wanted of individuals who were really on their toes because we didn't know what to expect from the other person. So I think that was very deliberate and quite wise on Lou's part to select people that were very different musical personalities. And in combining that, that rub, that friction is what gave the record its intensity. Because it was a sense that we were all experiencing what

we were doing for the first time. I think, if I'm not mistaken, some of those tracks that you hear are first takes. We had a very short rehearsal period and then, we said "we're to go for... (these songs)." For some of them, it was the first take or we would go back to the first take and that would be the one that was used. But there was no piecing things together. We tracked it live as a rhythm section with only the rare occasional overdub. It did not seem to me that there was much in the way of overdubs. So what you hear is very much exactly what was happening at that moment in time. For me, it was an interesting way of making records because I was coming from a much more polished studio kind of mentality and this really went against all that. And really, it was for the good and I'm glad that I had that experience because it really gave you a point of focus and you REALLY had to be on your toes to listen to what was going on. And it was also quite loud too, because those two guitars together formed one ENORMOUS sound between them. And at times, you didn't know who was playing what because they just had this sonic wall of guitar anarchy coming at you (laughs). But it was fantastic and listening back to it, I can people responded to it in the way they did.

Q: Did you know about Robert's work before that session?

No, I was didn't. I heard his name but I wasn't familiar with his work specifically. We were coming from different areas of music. In a funny way, that might have worked to our advantage. We didn't have this intimate knowledge of each other's work so we had to really be listening more closely.

Q: You were talking about the interactions in the sessions. "Waves of Fear" and the song "Blue Mask" sounded like pretty intense experiences.

They were very intense experiences. It was so long ago to recall specifically... I have such a vivid overall feeling of... I remember when we did "Waves of Fear," there were these moments when we were all hanging in anticipation, waiting for the next time. "Waves of Fear" might have been one of the ones that we rehearsed and then really captured in one take. Sometimes Robert would just play these solos that were... hair-raising. They defied any kind of categorization, I guess you could say, because... he played with the sound of a rock guitar player but sometimes he approached music like a jazz player, particularly his solos. Robert never seemed to me to fall into predictable ways of "I played this lick and now I'll play this lick..." He wasn't that kind of guitar player. He had a real stream of consciousness about his playing, which made every time he soloed entirely different. No two solos were ever alike. I'm not sure if I could point certain elements of either of those songs...

The whole album was very intense to make. It was not easy to make. Also, at that point, I was hearing this wall of sound that Robert and Lou produced just through my headphones and that made it hard the way that headphone mixes did to pick out who was doing what until I went into the control room. And then I remember sitting back and going "Oh, I see..." But what I really appreciated about Robert was his spontaneity as a guitar player and the fact that he never relied on these patterns or riffs that guitar players would pull out of their bag of tricks. There always seemed to be something entirely different, the way he would... weave a solo together.

Q: Did you play with Reed and Quine otherwise?

I never really thought of it as a group outside of doing that record. There really wasn't that much discussion of doing anything much beyond that apart from "Little Sister" some months or a year later. I was just with Lou for that period plus I had a concert with him before that. But I was living in California and working out here primarily. The other guys were all living and working in New York which obviously put them in closer proximity of everything going on. I think it just kind of evolved as much out of geography as anything else. I would have enjoyed doing some more with them but I also had a group at that time and we were signed to Warner Brothers. I was committed to that and other live commitments that really prevented me from joining a group that was back in New York. Had I been asked, I might have considered it but the fact is that I wasn't asked to.

So it was probably a period over two years that I worked with Lou starting with a live concert that we did, which was scary in and of itself simply because I remember having to learn something like 19 songs in a four hour rehearsal and then we did this concert at Columbia with Lou's previous group. It was pretty exciting and I think based on that, Lou thought I would be a good guy to try to work on this new record with him. We talked on the phone quite a lot about that, about the record and it was before he had found Fernando and I'm not even sure he had found Robert. I enjoyed worked with them. Lou is a very intense guy and he knew what he wanted and yet he got out of everybody's way and kind of let everybody... I think he picked everybody for their own personality.

And then, ironically, being out here I ended up joining Jethro Tull, a group that was even farther away in England than being in a group in New York. But that seemed like the right thing at that time. That was maybe two years after we did *The Blue Mask*. Jethro Tull couldn't, in a lot of ways, be more different. I really appreciate both things for what they are, maybe a lot of people who would have heard me with Lou Reed might not have thought I would have been a good choice for playing in a group like Jethro Tull, which has very orchestrated and arranged music. And vice versa, if you heard me with Jethro Tull, you might have not have thought that would have been a pretty good choice for playing with Lou Reed. I also came from a jazz background as well so I had a lot of that in my playing. But I've enjoyed the fortune of completely different experiences playing for different artists.

Once again, with Lou, I have to say that I appreciate more of what we did after the fact. When you're in the middle of creating something like that, it's very hard to see what it is you have because you're in the middle of it and you don't have a very good objective viewpoint to look at it from. Sometimes, I listen to that record and it sounds like someone playing because we were in this moment in space and time where we were all locked in on the same vector and that was great. It would be really hard to recreate something like that. I do think that we did manage to capture something quite special right there.

Q: So you didn't play live with Lou, Robert and Fernando?

No, I didn't. I remember that there was some discussion of an Italian tour that was following somewhat closely after some of these recordings but I ended up not doing that. That would have been the only opportunity I would have had to work with them live, which I'm sure would have been fun and really exciting. I never heard that live record (*Live In Italy*) but I'd like to hear that and hear how they interpreted that stuff live. I've since run into Fred Maher who played drums on that and

he's a guy who came from a very different background (with Scritti Politti)- I think he got Lou into the idea of drum machines and loops and they're not the enemy necessarily. I don't know if that would have really helped us at that time because that wasn't the kind of record that *The Blue Mask* was. So I think the way that we did it was probably the appropriate method.

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