

COCO MONTOYA

WRITING ON THE WALL

"One of the most prodigious and gifted electric bluesmen on the planet...a deeply soulful singer and incendiary guitarist [with] a seemingly endless penchant for invention." -AllMusic

"Smoking songs and heavy hitting guitar full of fire and passion...Montoya's rough-edged voice is filled with feeling. Bluesy, powerful and unpredictable...[It]really gets the blood flowing." -Blues Music Magazine

"Montoya is a show-stopper...heartfelt singing and merciless guitar with a wicked icy burn. He is one of the truly gifted blues artists of his generation." -Living Blues

"Just play what you feel, be real about it, and enjoy yourself. That's what Albert Collins taught me," says the award-winning guitar virtuoso and soul-deep singer Coco Montoya. The self-taught, left-handed Montoya mastered his craft under Collins' tutelage. Incorporating lessons learned from his mentors, the iconic Collins (for whom he originally drummed), and UK legend John Mayall, Montoya puts his own stamp onto every song he performs. Since his first solo album in 1995 (which won him the Blues Music Award for Best New Artist), Montoya's endlessly inventive guitar work and passionate, hard-hitting vocals have kept him at the top of the blues world. With his new Alligator Records album, *Writing On The Wall* (his sixth for the label), Montoya delivers what he is already calling one of the best records he's ever made. For the very first time on Alligator, he decided to bring his road-tested band—keyboardist and songwriter Jeff Paris (Keb' Mo', Bill Withers), bassist Nathan Brown, and drummer Rena Beavers—into the studio with him. Between the camaraderie of the long-time bandmates and the sheer talent of all involved, the results have left Coco, in his words, "over the moon."

Produced by Grammy Award-winner Tony Braunagel (Bonnie Raitt, Taj Mahal) and co-produced by Jeff Paris, *Writing On The Wall* is a tour-de-force of memorable, hook-filled songs, sung with passion and fueled by equally memorable, top shelf musicianship. The 13 tracks include five written or co-written by Montoya. The set opens with a signature, career-defining performance of the soul-baring *I Was Wrong*, written for Coco by songwriter Dave Steen. From the blistering *Save It For The Next Fool* to the enjoy now/pay later philosophy of Jeff Paris' (*I'd Rather Feel*) *Bad About Doin' It* to the



riveting reinvention of Lonnie Mack's *Stop*, Montoya delivers each song with heart-pounding emotion. Special guest Lee Roy Parnell adds his well-seasoned slide guitar to the smoldering *A Chip And A Chair*. And Coco's friend, guitarist Ronnie Baker Brooks (son of late Alligator star Lonnie Brooks), joins in for some good-natured fun on the droll *Baby, You're A Drag* and adds his blistering playing to the searing cover of Bobby Bland's *You Got Me*.

"I am so proud of this one," Montoya says of *Writing On The Wall*. "We recorded in Jeff Paris' studio and everything just gelled together. And the band inspired me; they all gave extra effort at every turn. Jeff, Nathan and Rena played so great, they ended up making me play even harder. They made me sound better than I am!"

Henry "Coco" Montoya was born in Santa Monica, California, on October 2, 1951, and raised in a working-class family. Growing up, Coco immersed himself in his parents' record collection. He listened to big band jazz, salsa, doo-wop and rock 'n' roll. His first love was drums; he acquired a kit at age 11. He got a guitar two years later. "I'm sure the Beatles had something to do with this," Montoya recalls. "I wanted to make notes as well as beats." But guitar was his secondary instrument. Montoya turned his love of drumming into his profession, playing in a number of area rock bands while still in his teens and becoming an in-demand drummer.

In 1969, Montoya saw Albert King opening a Creedence Clearwater Revival/Iron Butterfly concert at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. He was transformed. "After King got done playing," says Montoya, "my life was changed. When he played, the music went right into my soul. It grabbed me so emotionally that I had tears

welling up in my eyes. Nothing had ever affected me to this level. He showed me what music and playing the blues were all about. I knew that was what I wanted to do.”

The next chapter of Montoya's story was kick-started by a chance meeting in the mid-1970s with legendary bluesman Albert Collins. Montoya says, “Albert was coming through Los Angeles and needed to borrow my drum set, which I left at the club where he was going to be playing. I went down to see his show that night and it just tore my head off. The thing that I had seen and felt with Albert King came pouring back on me when I saw Albert Collins.”

A short time later, Collins hired Montoya as his band's drummer. With Albert mentoring Coco on the guitar during the band's downtime, Coco soon became Collins' second guitarist. “We'd sit in hotel rooms for hours and play guitar,” remembers Montoya. “He'd play that beautiful rhythm of his and just have me play along. He was always saying, ‘Don't think about it, just feel it.’ He was like a father to me,” says Coco, who often slept at Collins' home. When Collins declared Montoya his “son,” it was the highest praise and affection he could offer. In return, Montoya learned everything he could from the legendary Master of the Telecaster.

Needing a more regular paycheck, Montoya left Collins' band after two years and took a job tending bar, jamming on weekends at Los Angeles clubs. One day, legendary British musician John Mayall heard Coco playing Otis Rush's *All Your Love (I Miss Loving)* onstage. Soon after, Mayall called on Montoya to join his famous Bluesbreakers. Filling the shoes of previous Bluesbreaker guitarists Eric Clapton, Peter Green and Mick Taylor would not be easy, but Montoya knew he could not pass up the opportunity to play with another legend. For the next ten years he toured the world and recorded with Mayall on seven albums, soaking up the experience of life on the road and in the recording studio.

Montoya's recorded debut as a bandleader came with 1995's *Gotta Mind To Travel* (originally on Silvertone Records in England and later issued in the USA on Blind Pig Records). The album became an instant fan favorite. Blues enthusiasts, radio programmers and critics sent praise from all corners. The album immediately made it clear that Montoya ranked among the best players on the contemporary scene. Two more Blind Pig albums followed, and Coco was well on his way.

In 2000, Montoya's Alligator debut, *Suspicion*, quickly became the best-selling album of his career, earning regular radio airplay on over 120 stations nationwide. Montoya's fan base exploded. After two more highly successful and massively popular Alligator releases—2002's *Can't Look Back* and 2007's *Dirty Deal*—Montoya signed with Ruf Records, cutting both a live and a studio album. Returning to



Alligator with 2017's *Hard Truth* and 2019's *Coming In Hot*, the guitar master continued to blaze his trail. “Montoya unleashes one career-topping performance after another,” declared the UK's *Blues Matters*.

Still an indefatigable road warrior, Montoya continues to tour virtually nonstop, bringing audiences to their feet from New York to New Orleans to Chicago to San Francisco. Across the globe, he's performed in countries including Australia, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Norway, England, Brazil, Argentina, Spain, Mexico, Ecuador, Italy, Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic and Canada.

Now, with the dynamic *Writing On The Wall* and a tour calendar busting at the seams, Coco Montoya is as excited as he's ever been to perform the new songs live with his burning-hot band. Montoya's well-earned reputation as an eye-popping live performer precedes him. *Vintage Guitar* states, “Coco keeps getting better and better. He plays with fire and passion rarely seen in this day and age.” *Billboard* declares, “In a world of blues guitar pretenders, Coco Montoya is the real McCoy. He exudes power and authenticity. Be prepared to get scorched by the real thing.”



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