



COCO MONTOYA
h a r d t r u t h

*"STRATOCASTER-FUELED, FIERCE SLASH-AND-BURN GUITAR WORK...DRAMATIC,
SMOLDERING SOUTHERN SOUL-ROOTED INTENSITY. MONTOYA'S VOICE IS AS
EXPRESSIVE AS HIS GUITAR." -WASHINGTON POST*

COCO MONTOYA **hard truth**

"MONTOYA IS A SHOW-STOPPER...HEARTFELT SINGING AND MERCILESS GUITAR WITH A WICKED ICY BURN...HE SWINGS LIKE A JAZZ MAN AND STINGS LIKE THE ICEMAN, ALBERT COLLINS. HE IS ONE OF THE TRULY GIFTED BLUES ARTISTS OF HIS GENERATION."—LIVING BLUES



The old Willie Dixon adage, "blues is truth," perfectly describes the searing, contemporary blues-rock of world-renowned guitarist and vocalist Coco Montoya. Taught by the "Master of the Telecaster," Albert Collins, but with a hard-edged sound and style all his own, Montoya mixes his forceful, melodic guitar playing and passionate vocals with memorable songs, delivering the blues' hardest truths. He earned his status as a master guitarist and soul-powered vocalist through years of paying his dues as a sideman with Collins (first as a drummer) and then with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, before launching his solo career in 1993. Five years of constant touring with Collins and ten years with Mayall turned him into a monster player and dynamic performer. Montoya has released eight solo albums—including three for Alligator between 2000 and 2007—and has played at clubs, concert halls and major festivals all over the world. *Guitar Player* says Montoya plays "stunning, powerhouse blues with a searing tone, emotional soloing, and energetic, unforced vocals."

Returning to Alligator with his new album, *Hard Truth*, Montoya delivers one career-topping performance after another, the music immediately ranking among the best he's ever recorded.

Produced by drummer Tony Braunagel (Eric Burdon, Curtis Salgado, Taj Mahal, Bonnie Raitt), the album features eleven songs, each delivering a hard truth of its own. From the radio-friendly, gospel-inspired celebration of love, *I Want To Shout About It*, to the haunting *Devil Don't Sleep* to the icy-hot cover of Albert Collins' *The Moon Is Full*, *Hard Truth* covers a lot of emotional ground. Montoya's unpredictable guitar playing and smoking soul vocals blend effortlessly with a backing band featuring renowned musicians including bassist Bob Glaub (Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Jerry Lee Lewis), keyboardist Mike Finnigan (Jimi Hendrix, Etta James, Taj Mahal), guitarists Billy Watts (Eric Burdon) and Johnny Lee Schell (Bonnie Raitt), and Braunagel on drums. Slide guitar master Lee Roy Parnell guests on *Lost In The Bottle*.

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 eventually becoming an in-demand drummer.

In 1969, Montoya saw Albert King opening up a Creedence Clearwater Revival/Iron Butterfly concert at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. He was transformed. "After Albert 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."

Then fate took over. In the early 1970s, Albert Collins was booked to play a matinee at the same small club in Culver City, California where Montoya had played the night before. The club owner gave Collins permission to use Montoya's drums. Montoya continues the story: "I show up to pick up my equipment and I see that someone had been playing my drums and I got a little angry with the club owner. So Albert called me up at the club and was real nice and apologetic. I went down to see his show 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 few months later, Collins desperately needed a drummer for a tour of the Northwest and he called Coco. "When he called," recalls Coco, "I figured we'd rehearse for a few weeks before the tour. Instead, he told me he'd pick me up in three hours." During the tour, Albert took Montoya under his wing, teaching him about blues music and life on the road. After the tour ended, Montoya remained in the band for five more years. It was during this time that Coco began doubling on guitar. And Albert went out of his way to teach him. "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 taught me to tap into an inner strength. What a great gift he gave me." As Montoya's guitar playing improved, his relationship with the blues legend kept growing. "He was like a father to me," says Coco, who often crashed at Collins' home. When he 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. Montoya often pays tribute to his mentor, recording a Collins song on almost every album he's made. But he will only cover an Albert Collins song if he can make it his own. "One of the things Albert taught me is to interpret a song your own way," Montoya says. "He was never impressed with people who would imitate him note for note."

As disco began to take over and gigs began to dry up, Montoya left Collins' band, but the two remained close friends. Montoya worked as a bartender, figuring his career as a professional musician was over. But luck was still on his side. One night in the



early 1980s, Montoya was jamming in a Los Angeles bar when John Mayall walked in. Thinking quickly, Montoya launched into *All Your Love I Miss Loving* as a tribute, and Mayall took note. Soon after, Mayall needed a guitarist for the newly reformed Bluesbreakers, and he called Coco. 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 blues legend. For the next ten years he toured the world and recorded with Mayall, soaking up the experience of life on the road and in the recording studio. Along with fellow Bluesbreaker guitarist Walter Trout, Montoya was a featured member of the band, and often opened shows with his own blistering blues.

By the early 1990s, Montoya felt ready for a change. He put his own band together and hit the road, proving himself night after night. His debut as a leader, 1995's *Gotta Mind To Travel* (originally on Silvertone Records in England and later issued in the USA on Blind Pig Records), became an instant fan favorite. Blues fans, radio programmers and critics sent praise from all corners. The album immediately made it clear that Montoya was a guitarist and vocalist who ranked among the best players on the contemporary blues scene. In 1996, he was nominated for four Blues Music Awards and walked away with the award for Best New Blues Artist. Two more Blind Pig albums followed, and Coco was well on his way to the top of the blues-rock world.

In 2000, Coco'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 Alligator releases—2002's massively popular *Can't Look Back* and 2007's *Dirty Deal*—Montoya signed with Ruf Records, cutting both a live and a studio album.

Back home on Alligator with *Hard Truth*, Montoya will hit the highway, playing his heart out night after night for fans hungry for the real thing. Still an indefatigable road warrior, Montoya continues to pack clubs and theaters around the world, and brings festival 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, Czech Republic and Canada. *Vintage Guitar* says, "Coco just keeps getting better and better...rockin' blues with guitar that cuts straight to the heart of the matter. His guitar playing is funky and blistering; it's perfect. Whatever he plays, he does it with fire and passion rarely seen in this day and age."



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