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Ray Manzarek opens door to blues future

By BRUCE SMITH-PETERS - Correspondent

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In his long and legendary career, Ray Manzarek has had the good fortune to work with a host of artists, from Philip Glass to Iggy Pop and just about everyone in between.

"It's a nice position to be in," he said in a recent telephone interview from his home in Napa, "to collaborate with anyone. It sure is. Plus the fact that Dorothy and I have a couple of bucks in the bank makes it easier. You can't beat it, the artistic freedom it affords me to do what I want. It's a great position to be in."

That position, of course, comes from his status as the keyboardist for the Doors, who famously combined various musical styles with the poetry of Jim Morrison. Manzarek has taken that same approach on his most recent collaboration with the great slide guitarist — and Chico favorite — Roy Rogers. The duo has, in Manzarek's words, "evolved into a full-on, kick ass blues band" with the addition of Steve Evans (Elvin Bishop Band) on bass and drummer Kevin Hayes (Robert Cray Band). North State fans get a chance to catch their act on Feb. 17 at the Paradise Performing Art Center thanks to North Valley Productions

"We took poetry," he explained, "and decided to expand the idiom of the blues, the basic structure of the blues. We took the poetry of Michael McClure, Jim Carroll, Warren Zevon and some lesser known writers, and put it to the blues; expanding the blues. This — I don't predict — but this is the blues of the future. Now, not everyone likes what we've

done. We've been criticized for expanding the blues: 'You can't do that, you can't expand the blues. It is what it's always been.' Well, if it's set in stone it's dying. But the blues is not dying. It's viable and alive. And we've expanded the basic, 1 4 5, 12 bar blues"

The result is "Translucent Blues," a 12-song set that also includes collaborations from Manzarek and

Rogers. "There's no significance to the title," he insisted. "None. It's translucent. It's not opaque; it's not transparent. It's Translucent. It's the blues."

One of the stand-out tracks on the album is Warren Zevon's "River of Madness."

"Warren Zevon I've known a long time — L.A. guy. I ran into him at Barney's Beanery, a local hangout of one Jim Morrison... and I said to Warren, 'Hey got any blues songs? I'm putting together a blues album and I'm looking for something different, something dark. Raymond Chandler, film noir, Los Angeles, kind of thing.'

"He said, 'Yeah, you know me. But my time is limited, though. I'm dying. Lung cancer.' He said, 'I'll get you what I can.'

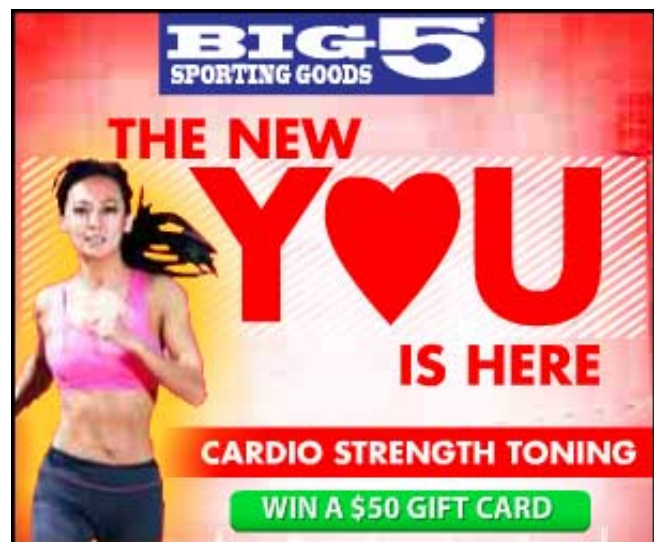
"I said, 'Just the lyrics, I'll write the music.'

"And he said 'Solid.'

"So I got two stanzas from Warren and the great chorus to 'River of Madness: 'There's a river of madness runnin' through L.A./There's a river of sadness deep inside the clay.'

"I turned to (manager) Stephen Gordon and his writing partner saying, 'We need more words to fill it in.' I told him the feel of film noir, 1940s and '50s "L.A. Confidential." And we cut and pasted it together.

"Jim Carroll I'd known for a long time too. Danny Sugarman, who wrote (the Doors biography) 'No



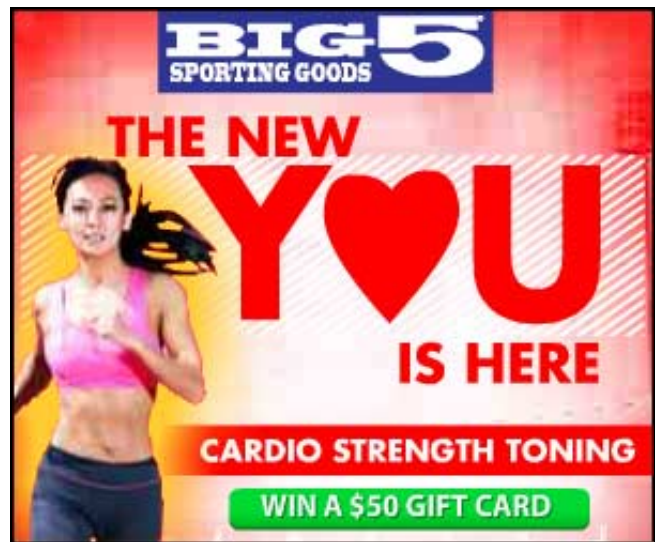
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'One Here Gets Out Alive,' put us together. Jim had a bunch of lyrics and songs he never got to complete before he died.

"Michael McClure I've been playing with for 20 years now. He wrote 'Kick,' about kicking the white powder habit. It's jazzy blues with a different structure — it's got a bridge. Expanding the blues. 'You can't do that!' Still offending people after all these years. And you can't say 'higher' on national television. Ed Sullivan showed us that."

And, yes, show goers can expect to hear some blasts from the past as well as the new stuff. "We're going to play the (expletive) out of 'Translucent Blues' and some Doors songs," he assured.

"What, Ray Manzarek and no Doors songs?" he joked in mock horror. "So we'll play some. Satisfaction guaranteed."



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