
Walter Trout



All of us are broken. But no one is beyond repair. It's a philosophy that Walter Trout has lived by during seven volatile decades at the heart of America's society and blues-rock scene. Even now, with the world more fractured than ever – by politics, economics, social media and culture wars – the fabled US bluesman's latest album, *Broken*, chronicles the bitter schisms of modern life but refuses to succumb to them.

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"I've always tried to write positive songs, and this album is not quite that," considers the 72-year-old of an all-original track listing that rages and soothes. "But I always hold on to hope. I think that's why I wrote this album." For the last half-century, however rocky his path, hope and resilience has always lit the way. The beat of Trout's unbelievable story are well-known: the traumatic childhood in Ocean City, New Jersey; the audacious move to the West Coast in 1974; the auspicious but chaotic sideman shifts with John Lee Hooker and Big Mama Thornton; the raging addictions that somehow never stopped the boogie when he was with Canned Heat in the early-80s. Even now, some will point to Trout's mid-80s guitar pyrotechnics in the lineup of John Mayall's legendary Bluesbreakers as his career highpoint. But for a far greater majority of fans, the blood, heart and soul of his solo career since 1989 is the main event, the bluesman's songcraft always reaching for some greater truth, forever surging forward, never shrinking back. It's a peerless creative streak underlined by the guitarist's regular triumphs at ceremonies, including the Blues Music Awards, SENA European Guitar Awards, British Blues Awards and Blues Blast Music Awards. The iconic British DJ 'Whispering' Bob Harris spoke for millions when he declared Trout "the world's greatest rock guitarist" in his 2001 autobiography, *The Whispering Years*. If he were a less questing artist, Trout could mark time and dine out on those past glories, leaving the polemics and calls-to-arms to a younger generation. But that's not enough, considers the still-hungry veteran. "I have to grow. I want to be a vital contributing artist. I feel young. I know I'm not. But in my head, I'm still 25, wanting to get better and do something I haven't done before. I have more to say." The album was recorded at Kingsize Soundlabs in LA with producer Eric Corne. "This is our 15th album together," calculates the bluesman. "Eric and I just have a way of working, man. A friend who came into the studio and watched us and said, 'Man, you guys are like a machine'. It's unspoken." A few collaborators joined Trout for the first time. "I thought my friend Beth Hart could relate to the title track, *Broken*," he says of the warrior princess whose fiery vocals coil with his own. "Dee Snider from Twisted Sister put up a live cut of me on his Twitter and said: 'Listen to this fucking guitar hero'. We started talking and became friends. He came into the studio, and I knew I had to write him a song. *Bleed* came about when we were pretty much done. My drummer Michael Leasure said to me, 'Hey, Walter, you played with John Lee Hooker and Canned Heat, this is your 31st album and you've never played a boogie. What's the deal?' So I said, 'OK, fuck it, let's do a boogie'. I can kinda play harmonica, but I thought, 'Let's elevate this thing'. There's a young harmonica player in England who's the best I've ever heard, Will Wilde. He has the soul and the power of Paul Butterfield but couples that with blinding virtuoso technique." Elsewhere, the wistful *Talkin' To Myself*, Trout took inspiration from the hits that crackled from AM radio in his youth, and no words were required for the tender instrumental *Love Of My Life* ("Of course, it's about Marie"). With gallows humour, Trout notes that his new album opens with a track called *Broken* and ends with one called *Falls Apart*. He can't deny the link between the personal and the socio-political mood in the air, and as such, between those two book ends lie some of the most raw and bruised songs of his career. Still hope leads the way with the notion that music can help us overcome brokenness - one note at a time.