

Robert Cray on his Animal House Appearance, and the Beginning of the Blues Brothers

By Jimmy Leslie | (www.guitarplayer.com)

“It’s a classic now, but back when the movie Animal House was shot, nobody had any idea it was going to be so big,” says Robert Cray. “My band and I were living in Eugene, Oregon, at that time, and some lady came up and asked me if I wanted to be in a film. I sarcastically said, ‘Yeah, right.’ But, sure enough, she called back a few months later to ask if I could make rehearsals. They needed black guys to play the members of Otis Day’s band, the Knights. We got fitted for outfits, and we were on the set for three days. That’s me on bass, although I’m not really playing.

“We also had something with the Blues Brothers. You see, Curtis Salgado was the frontman and harmonica player for another band in Eugene called the Nighthawks. We had a splinter band that worked Monday nights called the Crayhawks that consisted of Curtis, myself, Richard Cousins on bass, and Dave Olson on drums. John Belushi came in, and we invited him up on stage where he did the Joe Cocker impersonation he used to do on Saturday Night Live. Curtis and John became pretty tight while John was in town making Animal House, and Curtis was schooling John all the time with his great blues and R&B record collection. Curtis wore prescription Ray-Ban sunglasses, and he had a little growth of hair under his bottom lip. Right then, Belushi got the idea to start the Blues Brothers, basing his character on Curtis. They credited Curtis on the first record, and when Paul Schaeffer introduced the Blues Brothers for the first time on SNL—doing his impersonation of Don Kirshner from the Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert program—he said, ‘And with the help of Curt Salgado and the Cray Band, we give you the Blues Brothers.’ It’s crazy to look back, but that’s how it all started, and it lives on to this day with things like the House of Blues and Elwood’s radio show.”