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Guitar Blues at the Mondavi Center: Jorma Kaukonen, Robben Ford, Ruthie Foster

Davis, Calif.—**Guitar Blues** brings three outstanding musicians to the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts** at UC Davis: Rock and Roll Hall of Famer **Jorma Kaukonen**, founding member of Jefferson Airplane and Hot Tuna; four-time GRAMMY nominee **Robben Ford**, native of Ukiah and founder of the Yellowjackets; and “Austin City Limits” star **Ruthie Foster**, remembered by Mondavi Center patrons for her stellar set opening for Bo Diddley in 2006. These unique artists will present several shades of blues in **Jackson Hall** on **Wednesday, March 4**, at **8 p.m.**

Says **Don Roth**, Mondavi Center executive director, “The blues, that great 20th-century American invention, has produced numerous players who rightfully have earned the title ‘virtuoso.’ This Guitar Blues program is a thinking person’s blues show, featuring some of the most interesting artists around.”

Pricing is \$45/35/25 for regular tickets and \$22.50/17.50/12.50 for students and children. Purchase tickets online at MondaviArts.org, through the Mondavi Center box office at 530-754-2787 or 866-754-2787 (toll-free), or at the door. Accommodations for persons with disabilities are available upon request. This event is presented as part of the Mondavi Center’s **American Heritage Series**, which concludes with **Bill Frisell’s Disfarmer Project** on **April 4**.

In a career that already has spanned nearly half a century, **Jorma Kaukonen** has been the leading practitioner and teacher of fingerstyle guitar; one of the most highly respected interpreters of American roots music, blues and Americana; and at the forefront of popular rock and roll. A founding member of two legendary bands—**Jefferson Airplane** and the still-touring **Hot Tuna**—Kaukonen is also a **GRAMMY nominee** and the founder of **Fur Peace Ranch Guitar Camp**, which he and his wife Vanessa operate in Southeastern Ohio. Along with the other members of Jefferson Airplane, he is a 1996 inductee in the **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame**.

The son of a State Department official, Jorma Kaukonen Jr. was born and raised in the Washington, D.C., area. He was a devotee of rock and roll in the Buddy Holly era but soon developed a love for the blues and bluegrass that were profuse in the clubs and concerts in the nation’s capitol. After losing interest in other instruments, his father bought him a new Gibson guitar. Soon after, he met Jack Casady, the younger brother of a friend and a guitar player in his own right. An increasingly skilled Kaukonen was introduced to the capital’s burgeoning folk-blues-bluegrass scene and many of its players. After moving to New York, he decided to join a rock band. He invited Casady to join the band, and though they could not have known it then, they were beginning a musical partnership that continues to this day.

The Kaukonen-Casady duo created much of Jefferson Airplane’s signature sound, and Kaukonen’s lead and fingerstyle guitar playing characterizes some of the band’s most memorable tracks. Kaukonen and Casady would jam whenever they could and sometimes would perform sets within sets at Airplane concerts. A record deal was made and Hot Tuna was born. Kaukonen left Jefferson Airplane after the band’s most productive five years, and Hot Tuna became a full-time job. Over the next three and a half decades, Hot Tuna would perform thousands of concerts and release more than two dozen records.

In addition to his recordings with Jefferson Airplane, more than two dozen Hot Tuna albums and numerous recordings with other legendary artists, Kaukonen's solo recordings began with 1974's "Quah" and continues through GRAMMY-nominated "Blue Country Heart" in 2002 and "Stars in My Crown" in 2007. His newest, "River of Time," was released in February 2009. In it, Kaukonen explores some traditional and contemporary songs, some he's played for years but never recorded, and some that are new to his repertoire. Read more at jormakaukonen.com.

Four-time **GRAMMY nominee Robben Ford** has distinguished himself in a variety of genres, from R&B to jazz-fusion. Born in 1951 in Ukiah, California, Ford was the third of four sons in a musical family. His first chosen instrument was the saxophone, but after hearing Michael Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop from the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, he began to teach himself guitar at age 13.

Ford's earliest musical steps were in the blues, playing with his brothers in the Charles Ford Band, backing harmonica great **Charlie Musselwhite**, and then joining the legendary **Jimmy Witherspoon**. But his career took an unexpected turn in 1974, when he was discovered by saxophonist Tom Scott. He began to perform and record with Scott's jazz-fusion band, **L.A. Express**, and joined them in backing songwriter **Joni Mitchell** for two years. He played on her Court and Spark tour and double album "Miles of Isles" (1974), as well as contributing his guitar work to "The Hissing of Summer Lawns" (1975).

On the strength of his live work with Mitchell, Ford was drafted to join **George Harrison** on what would be the ex-Beatle's only solo tour ever. In the program book for the Dark Horse tour, it is noted, "Only once in a blue moon is there an artist so natural to the blues and to jazz as Robben Ford."

The year 1979 saw the release of Ford's solo debut album, a fusion-flavored excursion called "The Inside Story." Out of that recording came the legendary group **Yellowjackets**, who would go on to record two albums for Warner Records. In the late 1970s and early 80s, he worked with so many different artists that he was labeled a "fusion guitar player." Ford says, "It just wasn't true. Not in my heart, anyway. And it wasn't until my second album, "Talk to Your Daughter," in 1988 that I got to make my first blues offering." That album received a GRAMMY nomination for Best Contemporary Blues Recording. The promotional tour ultimately led to the formation of a full-time blues-based band, **Robben Ford and the Blue Line**, with Roscoe Beck on bass and Tom Brechtlein on drums. The trio recorded a string of landmark albums, including a self-titled debut in 1992, "Mystic Mile" in 1993, and "Handful of Blues" in 1995. The albums garnered two more GRAMMY nominations for Best Contemporary Blues Recording.

By the second half of the decade, Ford was again ready for a change. After an amicable split with the Blue Line, he recorded "Tiger Walk" in 1997, backed by Keith Richards' rhythm section. "'Tiger Walk' was an instrumental rock and R&B record, which was nothing that my audience expected at the time," says Ford. "And the next record, 'Supernatural' (1999), was an even further departure." That album was well received, and the track "In the Beginning" was nominated for a GRAMMY in the Best Instrumental Rock category.

Returning to the blues, Ford recorded "Blue Moon" in 2002 and "Keep on Running" in 2003. His 2007 release "Truth" reached No. 1 on Billboard's Top Blues Album chart and received a GRAMMY nomination for Best Contemporary Blues Album. Read more at robbenford.com.

The remarkable **Ruthie Foster** will be spreading her "Truth" from coast to coast this year in support of her new CD, "The Truth According To Ruthie Foster" (Blue Corn Records). Calling the recording "a full-on blast of soul and blues," Blues Revue raves that "the truth, according to this remarkable album, is that Ruthie Foster is one of America's finest soul-blues artists." On stage, as on her CD, Foster takes things up a notch or two (or three) with her fiery and unmistakable mix of folk, soul, blues, gospel and R&B.

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Following the path of critical acclaim and artistic triumph blazed by her audaciously and appropriately titled 2007 breakthrough “The Phenomenal Ruthie Foster,” the new CD was recorded in Memphis, where Foster set up shop at the legendary Ardent Studios and had an impressive cast of characters bring her music to fruition. Roots music producer **Chris Goldsmith**; guitar icon **Robben Ford**; and Memphis legends **Jim Dickinson** on keyboards, **Charles Hodges** on organ, and trumpeter **Wayne Jackson** and the legendary **Memphis Horns** all added their distinctive touch. The result is “The Truth” as Ruthie knows it.

Raised in Gause, Texas, a small town 180 miles southeast of Dallas, Foster grew up surrounded by the rich, soulful sounds of gospel and blues. Even as a young girl, she was taking in a wide variety of music, whether through the hymns her mother taught her, the Beatles songs she analyzed in a book given by her guitar teacher, the 45s her truck-driving uncle would drop off during visits, the old-school country she heard while watching country variety shows on TV with her grandfather, or the pop songs that crackled through the family radio.

Even before her debut at age 14 as a soloist in the choir her uncle conducted, Foster knew that her life would revolve around music. Her musical journey took her from McClennan Community College in Waco, Texas, to a four-year tour with the U.S. Navy Band “Pride,” to New York City and a recording contract with Atlantic Records.

Since that time, Foster’s career has progressed through a steady regimen of hard work, whether fronting a full band or working solo, writing at her digs in Austin or taking it to the people. Her shows have inspired a string of reviews in which the essential points are made repeatedly: Ruthie Foster merits comparison to the legends that inspired her, even as her unique contributions stake out a place of her own in the spotlight. As the Austin Chronicle wrote, “When she sings a cappella, the heavens part.”

Foster’s career highlights include the PBS syndicated show “**Austin City Limits**,” nominations for **Blues Music Awards** in 2007 and 2008, an appearance at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival in 2008, **NPR’s “All Things Considered,”** and the **Austin Music Award** for Best Female Vocalist in 2008. Her songs are heard in the new feature film “Gospel Hill,” starring Danny Glover and Angela Bassett, and in the new Tyler Perry film, “The Family That Preys Together.” Read more at ruthiefoster.com.

- **Guitar Blues: Kaukonen, Ford, and Foster**
- **Wed., March 4, 8 p.m.**
- **Mondavi Center, Jackson Hall**
- **9399 Old Davis Road, Davis, CA 95616 (GPS)**
- **\$45/35/25 regular; \$22.50/17.50/12.50 students, children**
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