

**Peace Stream Records**

Bookings and press inquiries: [jeffraymusic@gmail.com](mailto:jeffraymusic@gmail.com), 651-283-0465  
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**Jeff Ray & the Stakes**  
**“In The Fire”**

(PSR2201-2 ♦ Release date: June 9, 2022)

**Focus Tracks:**

4. Hard Times (3:39)
2. Rounder Around (3:02)
6. Friend of the Devil (4:36)

*Midwest roots jam band revives  
“album” experience with “In the Fire”*



With a music style based on live performance and improvisation, Jeff Ray and the Stakes used front yard house concerts during the pandemic to develop the songs on their new album **IN THE FIRE**. Their improvisations recall everything from early blues and rock, to British folk and Indian Carnatic - sounding equal parts Ry Cooder, Grateful Dead and RL Burnside. Resonator slide-guitar songwriting pioneer **Jeff Ray** gels with bassist **Nick Salisbury** (*Ryan Bingham, Brian Fallon, Sonny Knight*), washboard pioneer **Mikkel Beckmen** (*Charlie Parr, Brass Kings*), and blues harp veteran **Harold Tremblay** (*Cool Disposition, Doug Otto*) to create a groove unmatched.

The band released **IN THE FIRE** at the Hook and Ladder Theater in Minneapolis, the epicenter of 2020 civil unrest following the murder of George Floyd. The band's leader, Jeff Ray, is not only deeply connected to the neighborhood, but was also deeply involved in the pandemic as a health care worker. On the album's single **“Hard Times”**, Ray reflects on life as a health care worker simultaneously impacted by both the pandemic and civil unrest. **“Hard Times”** reflects on our shared experience and emphasizes human connection, showing that music can transcend division and bring people closer together.

Recalling his years in Memphis, Ray also draws on his love of American roots and blues in **“Rounder Around”**. A romanticized ode to the West Bank roots music scene of Minneapolis, at times sounding more ‘Mississippi’ than ‘Minneapolis’. The singular cover on the album **“Friend of the Devil”** showcases dual slide-guitar / harmonica solos, conjuring Duane Allman and Little Walter, reminiscent of an early 70's blues festival. The LIVE studio recording of **IN THE FIRE** expertly captures the band's energy and soul, solidifying their role as an emerging leader in the American roots rock music scene.

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*“The clarity and precision of Ray’s bottleneck playing is so well-honed and has such an alluringly liquid quality that it puts him in a league with the best on the planet”*

**-John Ziegler (Duluth News Tribune, Duluth MN)**

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**About the band:**

Jeff Ray is an avant-garde resonator slide-guitarist and songwriter based in St Paul, MN. His music is rooted in the traditions of acoustic blues and American fingerstyle guitar, but Ray quickly departs from tradition: his songs integrate flavors of Indian classical music and West-African guitar under the guise of cryptic alternate guitar tunings.

Ray left Minnesota for Memphis when he was just 17. There he developed his guitar skills and evolved into an innovator of alternate guitar tunings and slide-guitar. He returned to the Midwest and embarked on a 20+ year career as a solo performer, releasing 6 albums and receiving accolades in Europe and North America.

Throughout his career, Jeff Ray has shared the stage with Chris Smither, Justin Townes Earl, Indigenous, Spider John Koerner, Earl Greyhound, Black Diamond Heavies, Pat Donohue, Retribution Gospel Choir, Dawes, and Charlie Parr, among others. He has also earned recognition as the 2010 first-place winner of the Greater Twin Cities Blues Music Society "Road To Memphis" competition and as a 2009 second-place winner of the Trocadero's Spotlight Songwriter Competition. Ray has also performed nationally at notable venues including Bayfront Blues Festival, Taste of Minnesota, Roots Rock and Deep Blues Festival, Highland Fest, Porcupine Mountains Festival, Folk Alliance Conferences, Summerfest, Acoustic Sounds Cafe (NPR), and Radio Heartland (NPR).

Currently, he splits his time performing as a solo or duo artist, or with his band "the Stakes". Jeff Ray & the Stakes released their 2nd album **IN THE FIRE** at the Hook and Ladder Theater (Minneapolis, MN) on June 9, 2022. The album is Ray's 7th full-length release and his 2nd with the Stakes.

"The Stakes" are Mikkel Beckmen (washboard), Harold Tremblay (harmonica) and Nick Salisbury (bass guitar). They are all closely connected to the Minnesota blues community and the historic West Bank music scene of Minneapolis. The band first played together sometime around 2010 on NPR's Radio Heartland. They had never rehearsed together prior to this performance, but they had all played with Jeff Ray in some form or another as a duo or live accompaniment. By 2015 the band had enough grease in their gears to record a debut album "Valhalla", released to critical acclaim. They continued performing as often as possible while members also toured with other acts. By late 2021 they felt the calling to jump back into the studio and do it again.

"The Stakes" actually began as a duo with Jeff Ray and Nick Salisbury. They used to joke that the combination of Jeff's miked foot stomping board and Nick's homemade foot shaker gave the duo enough rhythm to sound like a live band, thus naming the duo with the band moniker "Jeff Ray & the Stakes". Sure enough, they were landing gigs at venues that normally booked trios and quartets, and fans routinely spent the evening looking for another band member, sometimes asking if they used a backing track.

Nick Salisbury (electric bass) has been a fixture of the Minnesota music scene for decades. He splits his time between touring internationally with acts like Ryan Bingham and Brian Fallon, as well as performing regionally with a multitude of Minnesota-based artists. Nick broke into the rock and R&B scene as the bassist for Mick Sterling, GB Leighton, and Sonny Knight. Keeping busy as a producer

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and session player, Nick found respite with Jeff Ray - playing music that is free and expressive, open-minded and a fertile testing ground for new ideas.

Ray and Salisbury share a common love for the greats of American rock and R&B bass: Carl Radle and Jack Cassidy, to name a few. It is only natural that the two would eventually found a band as musically progressive as the Stakes. Nick Salisbury has shared some very big stages with notables including Willie Nelson, Rich Robinson, Gary Louris, and so many more.

Mikkel Beckmen (washboard and percussion) got his start playing washboard with his friend Charlie Parr. He has traveled the world and developed a reputation as the steadiest hand in the washboard business. Inspired by the stylings of Washboard Sam, Mikkel likens his unique style to imitating the syncopation found in the right-hand of a fingerstyle guitarist.

Jeff Ray and Mikkel Beckmen met and performed together at the 331 Club in NE Minneapolis, and haven't looked back since. Mikkel's syncopation tethered to Ray's slide-guitar improvisations keeps audiences intrigued and moving. It's no wonder Mikkel's list of recording and live performances is long, including the likes of Charlie Parr, the Brass Kings, Siana Matuzungidi, Corpse Reviver, Mike Munson, Dakota Dave Hull, Phil Heywood, Pat Donohue, and so many more.

"Hurricane" Harold Tremblay (harmonica) has been studying and playing the harmonica since his early high school years. Originally influenced by Bob Dylan and Neil Young, Harold heard a Sonny Terry & Brownie McGee record and the blues called him to his destiny. Upon hearing James Cotton play live through an amplifier, Harold set out to recreate that 'big' sound. He studied blues masters and respected contemporaries, forming his own sound and style. Not to be confined to just blues, Harold also covers bluegrass, country, singer-songwriter and, of course, the jam band sound of the Stakes.

As a founding member of the popular blues band Cool Disposition, he has played festivals around the upper Midwest and opened for national/international touring bands. "Hurricane" has an All Star Blues Revue featuring some of the best Blues musicians in the Twin Cities and has released an album with his duo partner Doug Otto while also keeping busy as a sideman. Harold has also been hosting a weekly blues/roots music show called "House Party" on KFAI (Minneapolis, MN) for 17+ years.

Harold Tremblay met Jeff Ray at one of Jeff's solo performances at their local neighborhood coffeeshop (the two later discovered they were neighbors!). Harold invited Jeff to perform on his radio show and, soon enough, the two were performing live as a duo and developing their unique chemistry together. In 2011, the duo recorded an album "Carriage House Sessions" and represented Minnesota in the solo/duo category at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis, TN. Soon thereafter, the duo joined forces with Nick Salisbury and Mikkel Beckmen and formed "Jeff Ray & the Stakes".

It is very apparent at every live performance that Jeff Ray & the Stakes is a band of friends with pure chemistry. Their anticipation of each other's moves coupled with a shared love of improvisation makes them one of the most exciting live acts around.

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**Quotes:**

“Jeff has a warm singing voice and plays some stinging slide guitar work...The overall result is impressive” -**Norman Darwen (*Blue Matters, UK*)**

“No mopey re-creations; Ray’s take on the genre is fresh and original... The guitar is hyper-animated and jumps out of the mix. Ray has mastered the ability to go speedily from fretted notes to glassy slide in a nanosecond. It provides the feel of two guitar players at the same time. The clarity and precision of Ray’s bottleneck playing, as it swoops and dives through his vocal lines, is so well-honed and has such an alluringly liquid quality that it puts him in a league with the best on the planet. Folks such as Ry Cooder, David Lindley and Bob Brozman have nothing on this young virtuoso.” -**John Ziegler (*Duluth News Tribune, Duluth MN*)**

“Another great artist that we should not lose sight of.” -**witteMVS ([www.rootsville.be](http://www.rootsville.be), *Belgium*)**

“Thousands of miles may separate Indian music from the Memphis blues, but slide guitarist Jeff Ray has found a way to blend the two” -**David Henke (*Northfield News, Northfield MN*)**

“Ray’s honeyed vocals and deft slide guitar stylings offer blues fare more contemplative than gritty, with a vibe that’s equally indebted to Ravi Shankar, Nick Drake, and Greg Brown. Simply lovely.”  
-**Susannah Schouweiler ([mnartists.org](http://mnartists.org))**

“Jeff Ray is a rising musician... The various influences and mixture of sounds resembles so much, and yet becomes something very unique.” -**Andrew Olson (*Reader Weekly, Duluth, MN*)**

“a quality that could only come by blending the birthplaces of Bob Dylan and the delta blues.” -**Joe Lawler (*Des Moines Register, Des Moines, IA*)**

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