

John Harrelson

1950 - 2013

John William Harrelson was born September 28, 1950, in Gadsden, Alabama, to Doris Elizabeth Harrelson (Martin) and John Pershing Harrelson. He graduated from Chaffey High School, Ontario, California, in 1968, received his undergraduate degree from Pitzer College and his master's and doctorate degrees from Claremont Graduate University. His doctorate was in ethno-musicology and he taught music and music history at numerous colleges, his last position being on the faculty of Santiago Canyon College in Orange County, California.

However, if you had gone out to hear live music, almost any kind of music in the Southern California area (and sometimes beyond), between 1965 and 2013, you very well may have heard John Harrelson play.

John opened for Led Zeppelin, Creedence Clearwater, Janis Joplin, Canned Head, Fabulous Thunderbirds, Davey Graham, Louisiana Red, Koko Taylor, and Creedence Clearwater Revisited (talk about your full circles), among others.

You might have heard him with such bands as The Southe, Hard Luck Boy, Rock-a-Bye and Blue Highway. Late in his career he fronted his own band, John Harrelson and The Revelators, and was in the studio up until his death (except for a brief period when he died the first time in 2006, but that is another story!) where he recorded 6 albums over eight years on the Rubicon label.

John Harrelson was a working musician for over 47 years and learned to play 13 instruments with a great degree of competence and 7 more with varying degrees of competence, by his own account. John began as a bass player and then began to play guitar. Listen to his guitar playing—arguably one of the elite guitarists—if, those who review and those who play, could hear his CDs or could have seen his live performances.

Few musicians were as doggedly dedicated to their music as John was to his. John had a grasp on musical theory and development and he could articulate it. John had skills in arranging and producing that were equal to any. John was a guitar stylist that can be recognized as a major contributor to the guitar tradition. John was one of the best songwriters this country has produced. John can communicate a song in the tradition of a Ray Charles or a Howlin' Wolf.

John Harrelson passed away at the age of 62 in Upland, California on June 26, 2013, from complications of heart disease and diabetes.

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