

he whispered, “Mama.” He groaned again. More blood pooled around his midsection.

“Get on your knees with your hands behind your back. *now!*”

But the kid couldn’t move. He lifted his head up again and stared at his wound and lay his head back down. He was looking up at the sky as if he’d been dropped from a star. “How can I ... Oh fuck ... somebody help me ... I’ve been shot.”

“Jesus, Cannon, you shot the shit out of him,” Polk said softly, stepping up beside the body. It was hard to tell if he was impressed or upset. “Guy brought a knife to a gunfight,” someone said loudly, and then chuckled. “Bang!”

I finally stood up, dusted off my pants, and walked back over to the bar, shaking, needing to talk to someone. An ambulance came and wheeled the kid away. The crowd at the front entrance lingered, as if watching the credits roll after a movie. No one seemed particularly shook up. They looked jazzed and content, as if they’d just been given a Christmas bonus. I looked for Toussaint, or Chuy, or even Susie, but all I saw were strangers. I downed a quick shot of Jim Beam, disgusted, still trembling, sick to my stomach, and I stumbled out the door, past the puddle of blood on the ground near my car.

I started my van and slowly drove onto I-580. There were almost no cars, just some taillights through the mist in the distance. As I drove, I had the eerie thought that I could go anywhere from this portal, that the freeway went on for hundreds of miles and led to other freeways, and that without looking back I could drive forever, and never on the same road twice. I never wanted to see the Point Marina Inn again, and I didn’t want to go home.

I purposefully missed my exit, driving in the slow lane, the radio tuned to a jazz station, a nameless saxophonist playing a haunting, sultry, mid-tempo blues.

RICHARD BENNETT

Trio, 2013
Oil on Canvas 36 x 48 in



Washington D.C. native **Joel Harrison** is a guitarist, composer, arranger, vocalist, and songwriter. Named a Guggenheim Fellow in 2010, he has released seventeen CDs on seven record labels since 1994. Called “protean” and “brilliant” by *The New York Times*, Harrison has spent his career taking risks, where each of his projects takes on a different challenge and character. He has written numerous music journalism pieces and is completing a memoir of his lifelong search for new sounds.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST