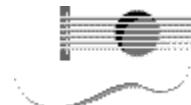


**Gary James' Interview With Mark Tulin of
The Electric Prunes**



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The Electric Prunes. Now there's a band name for you. In late 1966, early 1967, this group enjoyed considerable success with a song called "I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night". Only in the 60s. The story of The Electric Prunes is very interesting and bassist Mark Tulin is a hell of a nice guy.

Q - OK Mark, what's the current update on The Electric Prunes recording, touring plans? (2005)

A - Basically, we're in the process of recording another CD. It's a little more garagery than the other ones we've done so far. Really back to where we started. Touring plans, we're looking at some options. We've been offered some stuff in Europe, possibly South America, the Far East. We don't have much going on in the United States. There doesn't seem to be much interest.

Q - Why would that be?

A - You know, the problem is, we get an offer here and there to play someplace. It's just so expensive to take a band somewhere. Three dates over a weekend might work. But, just to fly in for a one night gig is kind of expensive. What we found is, unfortunately the interest that we thought was there for the older bands, just isn't there - as far as people showing up. Everybody tells us they want to see us, but, it doesn't seem like they want to go out.

Q - What type of venues would you be performing in?

A - The European dates we played were a combination of theatres and larger clubs, with some little clubs thrown in the mix. And it was usually 750 to 1000 in the venue. And we did well in Europe. We draw well when we play. We just haven't had a promoter put anything together where they said, listen, we can get you on the East Coast for two weeks and this is where you're gonna play.

Q - Don't you have an agent?

A - We have an agent. The problem we have is what it always was before. Agents, for the most part, are really good if they're calling in and want you. Then they're great. Then, they're a good intermediary. But, most agents don't go out and hustle business, they wait for it to come in. We're not interested in being an old band that had some hit records in the 60s, and doing that and walking offstage and saying

"Thanks so much. We're glad you liked our hits and we're done." You know, we're still alive, rather than just existing in '67.

Q - Are all the original members alive?

A - No. As a matter of fact, we have three of the originals, which is James Lowe, myself and Ken Williams are around. Both of the guitar players we had primarily in the 60s, Weasel, who is James Spagnola Jr. and Mike Gannon...I know Mike died way back after coming back from Vietnam. Actually during R and R in Hawaii. Weasel just fell off the face of the earth and we just heard recently that he died. The drummers ironically, we have the same problems we had in the 60s, they don't get along with some band members.

Q - So, this band was together for how long in the 60s...a couple years?

A - Yeah. What happened was, we started really when I was in high school. "Too Much To Dream" was recorded sometime in the Summer of '66 and released towards the end of '66. I'm not clear on when I quit. But, it was sometime in '68 I believe.

Q - Was the group together long enough to develop a following in the United States?

A - Yeah. Most of our action happened in the United States. We continually get e-mails from people in various cities saying "when are you gonna come and play?" The problem we've run into, and we talk to other bands when we're on the road, is there seems to be a difference in mentalities between Europe and foreign audiences and American audiences. European audiences seem to have a longer memory. They seem to have a greater respect for bands that created or were the parents of another sound or another era. Whereas here, it seems mostly American audiences are hot to see a band that was really huge. I think Aerosmith can tour forever. But they don't really support other bands, even if they know who they are. It's always been a problem here. We go to Europe and we have people show up and younger kids come who know our stuff, which is really gratifying.

Q - You think the name draws the interest of the people?

A - Well, you know, the name stuck. In other words, if you heard it, you remembered it. And it's paid off in spades in that way. The United States doesn't seem to care that much about bands that were back in the 60s, including the people who were there during the 60s. I don't know what they're doing. I guess they're all listening to Celine Dion.

Q - Someone told me recently that public interest these days seems to be with the disco bands.

A - That's just great. From what I've been reading, it seems that rock 'n roll has been put on the back burner. If there's anything I don't think we need a return to,

it's the Disco era, but hey, it's not my decision.

Q - Where did this name The Electric Prunes come from?

A - We had already recorded our first single, "Ain't It Hard", which didn't do anything. We needed a name for the band. We'd been playing around a little bit. Even when we got together, we were never one of those bands that played a lot of clubs and parties. We set out to record, as opposed to just playing gigs. We were playing under the name of *Jim and The Lords*, I think, which is from Lord Jim, from Thomas Hardy. Anyway, we needed a name that was a little better than that. And so our producer told us to come up with some names. So, we came up with this entire list of names. There were about 50 names on it. And the last one was based on a joke, which is "what's purple and goes buzz, buzz, buzz?" The answer was "an electric prune." Grape jokes were big. That's where Moby Grape got their name from by the way. Same period. Same bit of jokes running around. We put this at the bottom of the list 'cause we thought it was probably the dumbest name we could come up with. And, we turned 'em in. James had always liked the name. I always thought it was off-base. And so our producer, Dave Hassinger was an engineer for The Rolling Stones also. And so, he was in a session and basically, as I understand it, turned to Mick Jagger and goes "Look what these idiots came up as far as a name." Jagger said something to the effect of "That's really cool." That's how we got the name.

Q - The names of groups back then were really strange: Strawberry Alarm Clock, Jefferson Airplane, The Grateful Dead, Country Joe and the Fish, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Big Brother and the Holding Company. I always wondered where did these names come from.

A - You know, I think it was just an extension of the music. When I heard the name The Beatles, I thought that was strange, when you found out how they spelled it. I think what was happening with music is, it was expanding and with it, everybody, at least we, were willing to settle for the band names like The Cars. That's a bad example 'cause they turned out to be a big band. You were just trying to extend possibilities. That's all it was. I've always maintained that any band name sounds really stupid until you get a hit. Then it sounds great.

Q - Before The Prunes, had you been in a group that recorded an album?

A - No. I was just out of high school when we cut our first album. So, my experience had been either high school bands that didn't record anything. Once James came in, we tried to do some demo stuff, but most of the stuff we did was direct to acetate. All my experience recording prior to that, was with this band.

Q - Let me see if I have you story right. Barbara Harris, a real estate agent turned the group onto a friend of hers, Dave Hassinger.

A - Correct.

Q - Dave was a resident engineer at R.C.A.

A - Correct. Except Barbara, I don't think, was a real estate agent, her husband was. There was an open house two doors up from my parents house. We used to rehearse in my garage. She was standing outside, listening to the music. My father was watering the lawn and asked her if she wanted to come in and hear it. That's how it really transpired. Then the rest of it is true. She knew Dave Hassinger and that's how we were introduced.

Q - Why did she do what she did? Was she looking to become your manager or get a finders fee maybe?

A - No. She was really cool about it. Not a thing. We got invited to play a party. Somebody's birthday party. Actually it was the husband of the woman who wrote "Too Much To Dream". And Dave was at that party. That's how we met him. She was just doing it because she thought it would be cool.

Q - You guys got lucky with that one.

A - You know something? Luck is half being ready for it and the other half is just luck.

Q - Is it true, as *Rolling Stone's Encyclopedia Of Rock* tells it, that "The Electric Prunes were one of the first psychedelic bands from Los Angeles?"

A - Yeah. We probably had the first psychedelic record, or one of the first for sure. Keep in mind, the term psychedelic came later. We were just playing what felt right to us. We didn't say "we're gonna be psychedelic." That wasn't one of our options. (laughs)

Q - What does the term psychedelic mean to you?

A - We've never been able to define it. I don't think anybody has. I think Steve Van Zant comes closest to calling everything garage rock. We were just, and James in particular, were just trying to do something different. Rather than playing a 3 chord blues song you put a backbeat to, we were just trying to see what we could do. We're always tryin' to add different sounds. If that's what somebody calls psychedelic, that's cool.

Q - Who wrote "I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night?"

A - Two women. Annette Tucker and Nancie Mantz. That was brought to us by our producer, Dave Hassinger. It was a ballad when we got it. A very slow ballad.

Q - Did they ever tell you why they titled the song what they did?

A - Nancie and Annette always went for clever titles. That's what really got 'em into it. How they chose it, gee, I don't know. But, he (Dave) brought it to us. Dave said "I

think this is a clever title. Do something with this song." And that's what we did.

Q - After the song became a hit, you went on tour?

A - Yes.

Q - Where did you go?

A - Well, that's when we toured the States a lot. We went everywhere. I think the only place we didn't hit was Alaska or Hawaii.

Q - Who did you tour with?

A - Everybody. It wasn't like the *Caravan Of Stars* they used to have. We'd do shows with ten, twelve other bands. Everybody played like 20 minutes. So, whoever had a hit record was on the show. Then we'd do tours with The Lovin' Spoonful, The Beach Boys. We did some stuff with The Who, Cream. Almost everybody. Buffalo Springfield, Turtles. We didn't play a lot with the English bands.

Q - How about Hendrix or Morrison or Joplin?

A - We toured with The Doors for a little bit. We played several of these teenage fairs they used to have. Like mini-conventions for teenagers. We did a couple of weeks with The Doors doing that.

Q - How were they traveling?

A - It depended on how far we had to do jumps. Most of the time, it was either in station wagons... We had a deal with the promoters. If it was over...I forgot how many hundreds of miles, we would fly. Most of the time, the initial thing would be, fly into a town, have a car, some U-Haul stuff and drive.

Q - Did you ever have time to talk to Jim Morrison?

A - He was hard to talk to. Most of the time, we'd only see each other waiting to go on backstage. And he was not the most communicative person I've ever met in my life. He sort of sat in a chair and didn't say anything, is my memory of it. We have better Hendrix stories than we do Jim Morrison stories.

Q - I'm all ears.

A - Well, what happened there is, we went and toured England in '67. We had a flat in London. We were centered out of London and one night we got a call. It was Jimi Hendrix asking if we wanted to come over to his apartment. He's an American, so he wanted to catch up on what's going on in America. So, we went over to his flat. All we knew about Hendrix was the "Are You Experienced? " cover and his music, but we didn't know anything about him. Nicest man. Anyway, we got there and he had his first test pressing of "Axis Bold As Love". So, what we did is sit in his living

room and he walked us through the album, pointing out all the guitar stuff he'd done. Back then, because there was so much money going from the United States to England, all the big bands were English. You had to sort of like switch. So, if two bands came from England to the United States, they had to take two American bands. (laughs) So, whenever the Americans would come, they'd throw a party for 'em. So, we had a party at this club and it was the high point because Hendrix played and Keith Richards played. Anybody from the English thing was there. It was more of just a blues, rock 'n roll jam session.

Q - How about The Beatles...were they there?

A - Met 'em. We got another one of those calls, "would you like to come and meet the Beatles?" They were, if I remember correctly, doing their "Magical Mystery Tour" stuff. We went in and met them at a studio somewhere. Just three of 'em. I don't think John was there. We met him later at a club.

Q - That's incredible.

A - You know something? It was kind of miraculous really. And we'd be at another club and Brian Jones said to say hello to Dave (Hassinger) when we went back to the Station. That sort of stuff. London had a club scene where any band member could be there any given night. So, you'd run into a lot of people just that way. You got to meet everybody and hang with 'em that way.

Q - What was that like for you? I know you had a hit record, but...

A - I was all of 18 years old. Somebody says you're gonna go meet The Beatles The album they just had out was "Sgt. Pepper", right?. Most of the time when you'd meet another band, you say "I really liked your album." Well, you don't like "Sgt. Pepper". (laughs) My analogy is, it's like saying to God; "The Bible, good book! Nice job." So there's certain band who had been, when I was even younger, heroes, and meeting them was very strange. They were treating us as fellow musicians. These were guys who I had liked, learned all their songs and sort of idolized 'em a little bit. So, it was really exciting. We loved it over there. We had a great time. The audiences were great. They were really honest. If they didn't like you, they didn't like you. If they like you, they like you.

Q - I'd like to go back to something you touched on earlier. If The Electric Prunes were not necessarily a club band, how did you pull it off when the record hit and you had to go out on the road?

A - Oh, we practiced out butts off. In high school, we practiced seven days a week. I'd go right from high school to a rehearsal. We'd practice every weekend. We were ready to play. That wasn't a problem. Still isn't. Playing isn't our problem. We basically went from playing a couple little local clubs, one date here, one date there, to auditoriums. We always could play. We just missed that step I guess. We were busier rehearsing than we were playing. To play most of the places, we would have had to play cover tunes and we weren't into that.

Q - Did you guys have a stage show to go along with your music?

A - No. Nobody had a stage show. Keep in mind, when we were doing this, there were no monitor systems. Lighting, until later on when lighting systems started popping up, consisted of maybe a blue spotlight and white lights. The front and house system was whatever you got when you played. That's why there were so many amplifiers. You had to project the sound to the back of the house with whatever you played through. So there wasn't a lot of staging going on or a lot of the drama that came later with the full act. It was really get up and play your music.

Q - At one point, was Kenny Loggins a member of The Electric Prunes?

A - Yeah, towards the end. We did a tour. We never recorded anything with him. The last tour I did, Kenny was a member of the band.

Q - That's kind of strange too, isn't it?

A - The thing is, you have to forget the Kenny Loggins that everybody came to know. That sort of middle of the road Pop guy. Kenny was an out and out rock 'n roller when I knew him. And he could sing and play his butt off. Once he got with Jimmy Messina, things sort of changed and he got a little Popier. Prior to that, he was really dead straight on. He could play anybody's material and sing like anybody. Probably the one person I played with before he became a star, that I knew he would be a star. I used to watch him. He had such energy. He did some benefit in Santa Barbara and Ken Williams, our guitarist, went to see him. And so, we're all gonna get together fairly soon. I haven't seen him in a long time.

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* The Electric Prunes placed two songs in the Billboard Top 40

"I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night" (#11 - January 1967) and "Get Me To The World On Time" (#27 - April 1967)

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