

Outer Shell

The Electric Prunes



1966



2002

Interview with James Lowe

by Roy Harper

Oyster; raw, cooked, or not at all? and why?

The only way - RAW. They are just so visceral that way. I feast on them constantly in the Dominican Republic during windsurfing trips. I bought a second home there 14 years ago.

How did the band originally (60's) come together?

Can't even remember, probably to get some chicks and make records...

Why the name Electric Prunes?

Why not? It was better than most of the stuff out there then...

Did the original band have any set goals?

To be a recording band. I was always fascinated with making records. We never intended to play live; but found you had to do that to stay in the game.

How have the royalties been from the 60's records? Do you also get a "but" when a song is on a compilation album?

No.

Who were some of the artists, or bands, you got to meet or play with in the 60's? and what were your impressions of them?

Played with: WHO, Cream, Steppenwolf, Doors, Jefferson Airplane, Buffalo Springfield, Left Banke, Move, Nice, Lovin' Spoonful, Turtles... can't remember all of them. They were all trying to do the same thing we were... find an audience for their music.

Why did you decide to put the band back together after so many years?

I had read somewhere we didn't play on our records and that made me laugh... "well we'll just have to make one then." Boredom, and it just sort of happened through recording some things together. We found the same passions were aroused.

Who from the original band is still in the band?

James Lowe, Mark Tulin - Bass, Ken Williams - Lead Guitar; Joe Dooley - Drums (Joe was the last drummer with us in '68 as we vaporized). New Member: Mark Moulin - 2nd Lead Guitar (replacing Mike Gannon who unfortunately died of a gunshot wound), Camerson Lowe - Keyboards (James' son).

Do you get a lot of reaction of "They're still around?!"

Mostly incredulous reactions... Fortunately, "I thought you were dead" is all we haven't heard. We have been in the "Whatever Happened To" Category for so long, it is quite normal to get black stares. Certainly this can't be the original band... is the most common.

When it was originally released, did you ever hear about people mistakenly, or even signing instead, "I had too much to drunk last night" instead of "I had too much to dream last night"?

Good question. Yes particularly in the South. I have sort of a southern inflection in my delivery and a lot of people thought it was a subversive message about alcohol to the young under-age drinker... go figure?

What inspired the writing of the song?

Wish I could tell you. Annette Tucker and Nancy Matz wrote it and presented it to us. I would imagine the Billie Holiday "I Had Too Much To Love Last Night" figured into it. We all like the title and most of our songs are about dreams or reactions to dreams, so it seemed to fit.

The 3rd LP, Mass in F Minor, (Nov, 67) was a commercial flop, but considered one of the first examples of "God Rick". Was that the intention, and what direction was the band trying to go at the time?

This project was written by David Axelrod and was brought to us through our management and producer. They wanted to hang a pop group onto the project... we were it. We were a garage band and didn't read music that well. We did the best we could. This was the end of the band in our minds... we had lost all control of the music we were doing and direction we wanted to take. It would be easy to say we had a big hand in the Mass 30 odd years down the road; but this is just not the case.

How does it feel to know that the mention of the name Electric Prunes still conjures up memories of the 60's, and that "I Had Too Much..." is a song that remains "timeless"?

Surprising. WE still can't believe anyone knows us. We never sold a lot of records in the 60's and we were always an "odd" item. No one knew where to put us. So someone has dubbed us a garage band, which we actually were. Songs seem to stick in people's memories for events that take place at the time of their release... I can still smell the clean air in my little roadster with "I Only Have Eyes For You" playing on the radio on a warm summer night.

The 60's generation - What went wrong, and right, as far as influencing generations to follow?

It was basically a very innocent time. Drugs wouldn't hurt us, free love had no consequence. We have up on the ideas, mostly. Manson changed everything. We were apologizing after that and it created a paradigm shift... like Osama's pilots, I guess. Youth is not a time of life - it is a state of mind. Nobody grows old by merely living a number of years. People grow old only by deserting their ideals. I ma please to see people willing to let go of the "ME" concept that was recently very

popular in favor of a look around at what is going on. There is definitely "something's happening here" to quote Stephen Stills. I think young people aren't fooled that easily and will see the value in self examination and intelligent experimentation. Some of the people that were a witness the to 60's ideals are in power now, it will be interesting to see if they remember and actually help in making things better.

Your web site infers to rumors of EP's death in 1967. What's that all about?

We just walked away when it was evident all we had entered for was lost. none of us joined other bands and we never looked back. It was the death of an idea for us.

How would you describe the CD "Artifact"?

It is a chronicle of our meetings 34 years after the other "dream". No thought to making a CD was entertained as we were going along. It was just old friends playing some music in exactly the same way they did before. Peter Lewis of Moby Grape would drop by, we would record the night, an idea for a song would come up and we would just record it... my wife had a birthday party and Mujo 22 appeared. The is why you hear all the talking... just friend making noise.

What has been your relationship with Arthur Lee, and why did you decide to do your own version of '7 & 7 Is' on the CD?

Someone asked us to play a benefit concert to get Arthur's case reopened and all the bands were asked to play a LOVE song. That is one of my favorites. Peter Lewis is responsible for the 12 string approach to it... again, he just happened to bring it along that night. On your mark, get set... play. We played on the bill with Arthur and Love in England recently. I have not talked to him since the Bido Lido days (1965).

What has been the reaction from people at your gigs? Are you headlining? and - do you think people are coming to the gigs out of curiosity more than anything else?

They seem to like us playing old and new stuff. We haven't been booed for the new, which is pretty uncommon for a band from the past. We play better than we ever did so we are giving as much as we can. Headlining... we are an oddity at this point. They are not sure where to put us... nothing has changed. Curious: I would be curious, were I an audience member. The same esthetic is brought to our music as we never played in any other bands. It is just like 1967 for us.

35 years on; - why are the Electric Prunes still vital to the music scene?

I don't know that we ever were. Vital is if you make yourself vital... do they need us... well, we let them fly the plane for 35 years and things don't seem a lot better off then when we left; but no one is indispensable.

What direction do you think the music scene will go after the "boy-band/glamour girl" thing fades away? And what do you think about it?

A phase. My wife is friend with Kevin of the Backstreet Boys and these new groups are good, very good. Going to: Rawer, White Stripes, Hives... you know. I think people are willing to take a more personal message that is a little imperfect... we have had all the perfection we can stand. At least I have.

Who have been your influences, and why?

Dick Dale, Les Paul, Mary Ford, Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis, Stones, Beatles, Ry Cooder... You can't hear something and not be influenced by it... the 60's was about redefining rock and roll. We wanted to be a recording band so people that excelled in those areas always had a

profound position in our minds. From slap back 50's echo to the phasing sound in The Big Hurt no much escaped our perual...

What lies ahead for the Electric Prunes future?

There is no Master Plan: Don't know. We are just taking it as it comes. I think anyone can relate to this being a time in history that you better be doing what you what, and LIKE to do. Dreams don't have to die if you don't let them.

Additional Comments?

Our playing again will hopefully encourage some people that have put that guitar in the closet, left that paint brush to dry, stopped writing that novel... to get off their asses ad JUST DO IT, as Nike says... al that can happen is that you will grow... Don't Give Up!!!

[Electric Prunes](#)