



INTERVIEWS

Interview: Mark Tulin from The Electric Prunes

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FILED UNDER [BILLY CORGAN](#), [DAVID AXELROD](#), [ELECTRIC PRUNES](#), [MARK TULIN](#), [SPIRITS IN THE SKY](#)

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Mark Tulin was the bass guitar player for The Electric Prunes, which is best known for 1966's psychedelic garage-rock classic single "I Had Too Much To Dream (Last Night)," the lead track on the highly-regarded Nuggets collection compiled in 1972 by Lenny Kaye. The Prunes' original line-up also released 1968's psych obscurity *Mass in F Minor*, a Catholic mass, sung in Latin, composed by music producer/arranger/composer David Axelrod – the track "Kyrie Eleison" from this album was on the soundtrack for the generation-defining movie *Easy Rider*. Mark passed away on February 26, 2011.

This interview was conducted in person on 8/23/09, and formed the basis of a [preview](#) article of the *Spirits in the Sky* concert at Muddy Waters Cafe on 8/27/09. We started talking about the upcoming show, and then covered The Electric Prunes. Here is the [review](#) of the concert, and a [chat](#) with Billy Corgan after the show.

Jeff Moehlis: I was surprised to hear that The Spirits in the Sky will be playing at such a small coffee house.

Mark Tulin: The big purpose of this is two-fold, as I understand it. What I've been doing with Billy [Corgan] for the last six or eight weeks is he's working up new material. He likes to demo all of his new songs rather than just playing them to himself and then going into the studio. Some of the songs he knows work, and some he wants to try out in person to see how they work. When he works material up with a band, there are these little shifts in how a song is presented. The other reason is to have a good time, have some friends get together and play music. It's easier and less demanding in a small place than in a large venue, because this is definitely not a Smashing Pumpkins show.

JM: Where does the band name The Spirits in the Sky come from?

MT: This came from Sky Saxon's memorial, inadvertently by the way. Billy wanted to do something with a couple guys playing behind him, where he wasn't doing Smashing Pumpkins. He said, we'll do a Sky song, maybe we'll do a cover song. I love "Spirit in the Sky," the record, so I said, let's do that. And that's where the name came from. It didn't start with Sky [Saxon], but it just worked out perfectly. And I guess now that will be the generic name when he goes out by himself, with us or whoever backing.

JM: What are you going to play?

MT: I can't tell you what it is, because it should be a surprise. But I know on his website he said we are not doing any Smashing Pumpkins songs. So as much as I would like to play some of them, just for the adventure of playing them, we're not. There will be some covers of other peoples' stuff.

JM: Anything by The Electric Prunes?

MT: No.

JM: By The Seeds?

MT: Maybe. No Strawberry Alarm Clock stuff, and no Jane's Addiction. This is Billy's, and what I think what it does really well is present him as an artist that maybe people haven't seen him as. Because when you go with power behind you, with multi-amp, multi-layered light show Pumpkins... that drive, you can lose sight of how good an artist and what a good vocalist he is, when it's not power-driven. I think that is what will come out of this, how talented he is outside of that Smashing Pumpkins guitar playing.

JM: Would you describe the new songs as psychedelic, or mind-expanding?

MT: Some of it is definitely psychedelic, and some of it may be psychedelic in that it's spiritually expanding. Maybe not mind-trippy, you may not hear a lot of distortion and feedback and all that, but it's spiritually expanding because there's a lot of heart in what's going on.

JM: Are you also recording?

MT: Right now, they may be recording them, but not for release. I think it's more for a reference. This is all in support of Billy, so he drives the train.

For me, one of the nicest parts of all this is that I had a completely wrong impression of alternative [rock] guitar players. I got them very

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confused with guys that just thrash away on a guitar, and beat the crap out of it.

JM: Well, Billy has never been afraid to do a guitar solo, even when that wasn't trendy.

MT: Right. And he's really good. So is Dave – Navarro's a great guitar player. And together – marvelous! What's nice for me is in this band I don't have to work at making it go someplace. They're taking it. I just have to go for the ride with them. I'm very impressed with their musicality, Billy is like a musicologist – he knows his stuff. Billy and those guys know their history. And that's how I came in contact. He knows our history, and that's why he wanted to

do something with us. He played with us at the Sky Saxon thing – it was really a joy.

JM: How was that evening?

MT: It was really great. Everybody came with the right purpose. We did limited numbers, so nobody played more than like three songs. It gave me a view of what could be. Billy really liked the Seeds. They were a seminal punk, garage band. He likes that sort of music, and here's a guy who organically did it.

JM: What is it like working with Billy?

MT: Working with Billy, for me, has been a joy. He knows what he wants, he tells you what he wants. That makes life easier. If you can play, it's always good to know the parameters you're playing in. If you can't play, it makes you angry when somebody asks you to do something you don't know how to do. A lot of musicians have a comfort zone that's only, like, four licks. He is demanding, but in a very positive way. But you realize early on that's he's more demanding of himself than he is of you. So I'll go home, and he'll stay up working on the middle eight of a song, and make it right for the next day. He did something in these demos, that I really appreciate, he said, "I want you to play like you." He knows what he would play, but he said he wants "to know how you would play." It was that freedom of me expressing myself. But if I went strangely away, he would go, "I don't like that, I'd like something more like this." I came into this knowing only a few Smashing Pumpkins songs, because they were so big that I couldn't avoid them. I'm just blown away when he sits down and just plays stuff on the guitar that we were going to work on, how good it is. And how ornate his music is.

I've learned a lot from him. He's taught me how to play grunge, alternative bass, that I never knew how to do. And I'm getting pretty good at looking at my shoes while I play. And he's also introduced me to bands that I wouldn't have listed to [for example, My Bloody Valentine, New Order, Dinosaur Jr.]. I'm going to miss him when he goes back to Chicago. I've just loved every moment of it. And he has pushed me. Some of the stuff he wants is outside my normal playing. I'm playing some parts that never in my life would I come up with. They're more aggressive than my style. I'm having a ball.

I think that who he is outside of all that craziness deserves to be heard. I think the people who are lucky enough to go to this, if they're willing to listen, will see a different side. He hasn't given up Smashing Pumpkins, and he's still that guy. I think it's really a cool thing to hear songs in their simpler manner, before you hear them in their produced Pumpkins style. So this is an opportunity to hear the songs themselves, and that's what stands out, is the individual writer, performer, song, not the production.

I think he's gotten a really, really bad rap as to who he is. People mistake integrity and discipline for arrogance. He has shown me to be nothing but fair, very scrupulous, has strong, strong integrity. I'm a fan of the Smashing Pumpkins, but I'm a huge fan of Billy Corgan. Sometimes it sounds like I'm gushing, but I'm that impressed by him. When you get to see him perform intimately, like you will at the show, you'll see that person. I'm looking forward to seeing the shows. I'll be interested to see what you think of it.

JM: Billy was born in 1967, which is the year that "I Had Too Much To Dream (Last Night)" became a hit. Are there any cross-generational issues?

MT: Good music, done right – close your eyes and you can't tell how old somebody is.

JM: I'd like to ask you some questions about The Electric Prunes. They are often cited as an example of a garage rock band. I understand that you genuinely did rehearse in a garage.

MT: Yes, my parents' garage. Literally, that is where we were discovered, in our garage. So we are a garage band in every sense. A lot of bands in L.A. were, because people would live in these cheap duplexes or multi-units, and they'd use the garage as their rehearsal studio.

JM: Did you get complaints from the neighbors?

MT: Oh, absolutely. Until the record broke. We actually had neighbors take up a petition to stop us from rehearsing. And then the record hit the charts, and they wanted to know when we were rehearsing so they could invite people over. But we did run into that. And the long hair thing. I got kicked out of high school for long hair.

JM: How old were you when you were discovered?

MT: Sixteen. I graduated high school when I was seventeen, and then we went on the road immediately. So I was seventeen when the record started happening and all that.

JM: That must have been pretty wild.

MT: I was naive enough to think that that's what's supposed to happen. I wish I had paid more attention. Because we rehearsed every day, about six or seven hours a day, every day. And I just thought, you know, you work that hard, you're supposed to have success. I never saw it as being mystical. So consequently I was focused on the music, not on the experience. So I missed the excitement of it. It was more like, "You missed a chord last night" was more important than, like, "That's Paul McCartney." I didn't pay much attention.

JM: How were you discovered?

MT: We were practicing in my parents' garage, and this woman's husband was selling a house up the street. She was there, and she was standing outside listening to us practice. My father asked if she wanted to come in. She came in and told us all of these people she knew in Hollywood. We didn't believe a word she said because we had gone through that, you know some guy [says] "I can get you a deal,

don't worry." She asked us if we wanted to play a party for a friend of hers. And we normally didn't play parties. We really just wanted to record. We weren't really a show band in that sense.

But we decided to do this party, for this guy named Dave Hassinger, who at the time was an engineer at RCA and engineered The Rolling Stones. It was one of his major, if not the major thing. And he liked us, for reasons who knows why, and he said I'm interested in producing a band. "Are you guys interested?" We said "yeah," and he sent us home for six months to learn to play The Beatles like The Beatles, to play The Rolling Stones like The Rolling Stones, to play The Byrds like The Byrds, although we could never sing like them. His reasoning was, it gave us a reference point in the studio for sounds. So if he wants a bass like on "Let's Spend the Night Together," I know what that sounds like.

And it paid off, it paid off a lot. He took us into Leon Russell's house, who had a studio in his house, and we cut some demos. Then he took them to Warner Brothers. Sadly he also took them to Elektra, but Elektra wouldn't name him a staff producer. Because Elektra was going to do that billboard thing that they did for The Doors for us, but Warner Brothers named him a staff producer, so we ended up at Warner Brothers, with Reprise.

But it was playing in a garage, it was a real Fabian sort of knock, "do you want to be in a band?"

JM: You're biggest and first hit was "I Had Too Much To Dream (Last Night)." What is the story of that song from hearing the demo to cutting it?

MT: Two women wrote the song, Annette Tucker and Nancie Mantz, and they wrote it to be a country and western – back then it was country and western, it wasn't country, it was country and western – they wrote it to be a country and western ballad. That's why the title's clever, because it's supposed to be a country song, not a rock song. Country always had more clever titles. It was really slow and ponderous, and had a backbeat going "boom, boom-boom, boom, boom-boom". Our producer loved the title, so he gave us the sheet music and said, "Do something with this."

"Too Much To Dream" was one of those records that happened beyond what we were doing. Things fell into place. Like we had that "clclclcl No!" at the end. We played up to a point a stopped, and said we'll do something here, we don't know what it is yet. The backwards guitar on it, I had written the chart out backwards, and Ken [Williams, lead guitarist for The Electric Prunes] played some stuff that just worked. It all fell into place.

Then the biggest thing was with the record company. They didn't know what to do with that record. It was unlike anything they'd ever heard. And now it sounds pretty tame. They called it the weird one at Warner Brothers. "What do we do with this?" The name of the band, the weird song, they're just going, "What?" So they put it out in November. I get the feeling – I've never spoken to anybody – that was their contractual obligation. Because if you put it out in November, it's going to die over Christmas. That's a horrible time. But it somehow just meandered its way through and really broke open in the first of the year. It held on.

"Too Much To Dream" was just one of those things where we never could have sat down and planned out everything that happened. Couldn't have done it. But it turned out great. And it turned out to be something that was greater than the sum of its parts. Because certain things just worked. Even the opening was an accident. We were recording on both sides of the tape to save money, and our guitar player had a Les Paul with a Bigsby [vibrato unit] on it, and he just banged the crap out of it. James [Lowe], our lead singer was walking through the studio, and we'd just flipped the tape over – that was the end of the tape – and he said, "That's great," so we used it. But we didn't say, "Let's do this." It just was what it was.

JM: But you were at least able to recognize that, hey, this could work, right?

MT: We were always good at recognizing the benefits of accidents. We were not necessarily good at creating the accident in advance, we were sort of more like, "What just happened? That's really good!" Our band, in particular, if there's a squeak or a squawk, or if you trip over your amplifier, we'll use it more than most bands will. So we're big on that sort of thing. We've tried to maintain that experience. When we play live we try to do that also.

JM: When that song broke, suddenly you were put on a tour. Could you describe that?

MT: The first tour we went on, we'd never heard ["Too Much To Dream (Last Night)"] on the radio, because L.A. was always the last city to play anything. Like in years that were to come later, the Pacific Northwest broke a lot of songs. We went on a tour with Tommy Roe, who was headlining this tour. As it turned out, one of opening acts was Don & the Good Times, with Don Gallucci, and another was Merrilee Rush. We had never played before more than a couple hundred people, max.

We were driving on our way to the arena, first show in Spokane, and the record came on the radio. We'd never heard ourselves on the radio. That was just one of those moments. I think we pulled over and started hitting each other, because being guys we couldn't kiss, so we smacked the crap out of each other.

And then that night I just remember playing and [the audience] started screaming, and I actually turned around to see who had come onstage behind us. So that first tour was the first experience with really being accepted before you played, which is a unique experience, as opposed to going to a small club and trying to win them over. We had to lose them. And I think back then fans were more supportive. Now a lot of people seem come to see how bad you'll be, but back then they came to have a really good time. So then we did a bunch of tours, we toured constantly after that.

JM: You toured Europe, and England...

MT: The only thing we didn't do was Monterey. Why? They didn't like us or something. We would've been a really good fit. One of our problems was that our producer went out of his way to make it sound like we didn't play. Like we were his studio creation.

A lot of stuff on our first album I actually detest. There is material on there that we never would have done. We liked to do extended stuff. It started with "Comin' Home" by The Rolling Stones, listening to them do that, and some jazz stuff, where these guys just took off. I'm a huge, huge Miles Davis fan, it just stuns me every time I listen to it. And Mingus and Coltrane, and those guys. When you hear them play, where they go is what it's about. And if you can go with them, it's a mystical experience.

But he wanted us to be The Beatles, and The Beatles had just done Sgt. Pepper, so we had to do a little vaudevillian thing, and we detested those. They were embarrassing to us. But we were signed to him, so he was like our lord and master, basically. So we fell

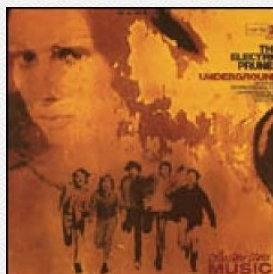
through the cracks as far as who we really were. It sort of pays off now, because nobody's sure what our band is, and where we fit into anything. Because we're sort of psychedelic, but we're actually much more punk and garage than we were psychedelic. We just used sounds with anger as opposed to anger with anger, you know.

So our second album was closer to what we did. Then there's Stockholm '67 that shows us live, and people are really surprised when they hear it. Aguy offered to mix a show for us, and he came back and goes, "You guys are loud!" We go, "What did you think we were going to do?" We're loud. We're a rock and roll band that does these little musical things and sounds. We have never been a happy band. You know, Strawberry Alarm Clock, bless their hearts, were happy. Their music is like caramel skies and flutter, we're going "Life sucks, maybe you should evaluate what you're doing and change your life." Much more L.A. sounding than San Francisco.

We never quite were understood. And then, people like Bill Graham thought that because we had a Top 40 record that we had sold out and were commercial, and wouldn't even book us at Winterland. So we never played any of those places. And again our producer made it sound like we were just the band that couldn't play. We were actually better live than we were in the studio. Still are.

JM: You mentioned your second album [Underground], which it sounds like you did have a lot more input on, more of the songs were written by the band and so on.

MT: What happened is... one of these days I will see David Hassinger again and get to ask him... He discouraged us from writing songs. He told us we stunk. As a matter of fact, for some of the songs that are on the album, we had to go in and cut demos, bring them in and tell him somebody else wrote them. Then when he liked it, we told him we wrote it. So we spent our own money, to sneaked into our own studio, to get our own songs on our own album.



What happened with Underground is that he had about had it with us. Part of it, I was seventeen. I had never stood up to an adult in my entire life, I just did what they told me to do. Well you get beat up enough, and survival kicks in. He was tired of us arguing with him, so he sort of dropped out for a lot of Underground. He caught up on his sleep. He would sleep under the console a lot. Or reading. He increased his newspaper reading dramatically. We'd look through the window and he'd be reading a newspaper. So he didn't participate a lot in it. So that's why it's more us.

But even then, we were still pretty much staying within the under-three-minute or three-minute-and-thirty-second format. We hadn't done what, like, the Blues Magoos did and stretch out. Like a lot of bands if you ever hear the tapes and you get to the end of the song, that's where all the playing starts. You go, "We got our three minutes and fifteen, let's play now," and you do five minutes. But we didn't put out a lot of stuff like that. Keep in mind back then there was no internet. It was all your label, so if your label wouldn't put out a record you cease to exist. So you had to stay within their confines, also.

JM: Your third album was a massive change in direction.

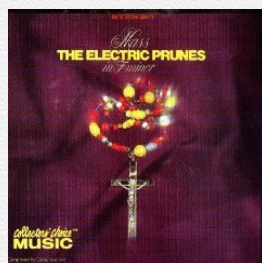
MT: Mass in F Minor.

JM: Which I love.

MT: Really? Bless your heart.

JM: What happened with that?

MT: What happened was this. David Axelrod wrote it. It's Dave Axelrod's album. We've said this, and he is still pissed off at us, but it's his album. Dave wrote and composed and arranged it. He was managed by our manager. We were a name entity. So we were a vehicle to get the Mass in F Minor to, supposedly, a larger audience. I don't think it was ever intended to destroy our base of audience, but it was meant to get it out there.



Dave was probably the first hip jazz musician I ever knew. He worked with Cannonball Adderley, and he knew Miles Davis, he produced Lou Rawls. He was a musician, you know? So I was in awe of him. I was just in awe of his abilities. He'd sit a piano, he'd just sit there and say with joy, just joy, "The celli are going to play this." I don't even know what what he meant, maybe, but he had such joy with it. So I would've done anything. In a weird way – I didn't think of it until just now – in a weird way the experience I had with him was a lot like what I had with Billy [Corgan], where it was a musical growth experience.

So we go into the studio, and I'm the only one who can read music, which is a drawback when everything's charted. The band cut "Kyrie Eleison" and "Gloria." And I'd never seen lyrics like that by the way – I'm Jewish. I went "Kyree" and they go, "not Kyree, you idiot," you know? And Dave's Jewish too, so it made it even weirder. We were doing it in Latin, because we didn't know they were going to change the mass to English before the album was released, because [smiles] the Vatican didn't check with us while we were doing it.

So we went and we cut the songs, and we were taking too long. Because this was really a Warner/Reprise budgeted thing, it wasn't an Electric Prunes album. It was a concept. So they kept Quint who played drums, and me, and then brought in some studio guys. Don Randi played. Richie Podler – it was his studio, American Sound, he'd played on "La Bamba" and "Alley Oop" – he played guitar. So it was a good group of musicians, it just wasn't our band. And James [Lowe] sang. Aband helped out called The Collectors from Canada.

The thing, though, was that we kept saying, "When do we get to do our stuff," and they'd say "Later." "When do we get tremelo guitars, when do we get to do feedback, when do we get to do this," and they'd say "Later." Dave charted a lot of it, a lot of it was like "bass solo for 38 measures" with chord changes. And then we said, "When do we get to do our stuff." We went in and put in the celli and French horns on, and we go, "When do we get to do our stuff," and they go, "It's mixed." Well, we don't get to do our stuff.

That we allowed our band to be broken apart, and that they used us... we had no credibility with the label. If I can happily let our guitar player go and he didn't fight, we don't even have a band.

Then it was that process of, you know, you don't know what the hell else you're going to do, so you just let it deteriorate until you can't take it anymore. It forces you out, as opposed to having the balls to go, "I quit today." You go, "I'm going to wait until it's so miserable that I have no option." It's like some relationships. You know, I'm going to wait until she leaves before I leave.

JM: I understand there was one live performance of *Mass in F Minor*. Any comments?

MT: If the album hadn't destroyed the band, that would have. What happened was we got a call while we were on the road saying we were going to do *Mass in F Minor*. We didn't know it. Keep in mind that this was before FedEx and the internet, so we didn't even see the charts until we got home. The day of the show we had a rehearsal in the Musician Union's Hall, and they had French horns, and the singers from the Smothers Brothers show, all the guys were there to do the background vocals.

I walk in, and Dave Hassinger says, "You're going to conduct it, you're going to play the keyboards and the bass." So I have a bass around my neck, I'm standing at a Vox double keyboard thing, and I'm going to conduct all this. My conducting experience was watching Leonard Bernstein's concert for young people, or whatever the hell it is. I just saw him point. So I just stood there and pointed at people, and they had no idea what was going on. So they called Don Randi in, a guitar player named Don Peake came to play. We did it at some high school I think, I don't remember. So we had no rehearsals, really.

The whole album starts with this little bass line, so it's "one, two, three, four – chord hit", right? We have the charts, it goes "one," I start my slide, Don comes in on four... from that point we never recovered the entire night. So we didn't play the charts, we just sort of jammed. After the concert, the celli said, "This was the first time anybody ever told us to jam in E," because that's what I said to them, "Just jam in E." The people hated it. And we had these vocals, just to do over silence, like "Kyrie." I just signaled a stop at random, and looked at them. We blew speakers out in the first... it was just horrid.

After the show, we thought they were going to kill us, so we stayed much longer in the dressing room than we normally would. Some guy came up and said "I didn't know you guys were into modern jazz." So it was horrid.

You know something, we'd love to do it now. If we could get the resources to do it, because it takes resources, to actually work it out and go do it at The Royal Festival Hall, down here at Disney. Do the whole thing, but do it maybe even with an orchestra, and have it charted. I've spoken to Don Randi about doing it, and he said he'd conduct and orchestrate it. It's just finding somebody interested – it's just the money. But it'd be an interesting experience. And maybe do "Too Much To Dream" and a couple songs with a string section, and horns all playing at the end, and do our own Sgt. Pepper's ending.

JM: Do you have a tape of this concert, or is it lost to time?

MT: No. To record live back then you needed a portable truck studio. So nothing was recorded. And I have a feeling that it is actually one of those instances of it being even worse than I remember it, not better.

JM: You know, sometimes I read reviews of albums and they say how horrible they are, and I listen to them to see. And sometimes I think they're much better than the review.

MT: I don't get the feeling that's the instance. I cannot tell you how undisciplined... We were talking about *YaHoWha 13*. They listen to each other. The concert was people not listening to each other, just going, "Whatever, I get to do it." And for a couple of guys, who never got to do feedback, they were having the best time of their lives. So all they did was get feedback. They just stood there getting feedback, going "I'm having a ball, man." It was awful. We did a couple of tours after that, and then James split, and then everybody quit. And I'm sure you want to know about Kenny Loggins.

JM: If you'd like to share...

MT: All I'll say is that Kenny did our last tour. This was pre-middle-of-the-road Kenny. Ken was a rock and roll star. When I played with him, he wasn't a star yet, but he was a rock and roll star. I used to watch him play. He was that good. He glowed. He shined when he played. He had such energy and was so good at it. And he could write brilliantly. But when he played, it was just an act of sheer joy. It infused us. At that time I was a tainted eighteen year old, burnt out and just angry at the world.

JM: Now, you had nothing to do with the next *Electric Prunes* album. Did you ever listen to it?

MT: No, you know what it is. First of all, I got to do the Catholic and they did the Jewish thing, and that really pissed me off.

The reason I didn't listen to it was two-fold. It took me a long time to listen to our stuff again anyway, because, again, I was young. This wasn't a business to me, it was my heart and soul and my life. So at eighteen or nineteen, all of your friends are in college, and your life's over. And it didn't happen happily. So I for many, many, many years focused on what a dismal experience the whole thing was. I couldn't listen to anything without it bringing back... I can listen to recording sessions to remember how hard they were, not the pleasure.

The other thing was, I never wanted to be in a position of judging anybody else's work. So I still haven't heard any of it. I don't want to bad-mouth anybody. I understand why they took the gig. I have nothing against them. We just walked in and go, "We're done," they said, "Can we use the name," and I go, "We don't give a damn what you do with it." I know why they did it, so there's nothing against them. I just didn't want to ever have somebody say, "Do you think they were as good as you?" and go, "No," or God forbid, they're even better. So I don't know anything, I know nothing about it, only what people have told me.

Even now we'll show up at shows, and people will bring those other albums for us to sign, and we'll say, "You know, I'll sign it, but I'm not on it." I have a hard time signing something I didn't do. I don't even know the guys that were in it.

JM: I understand that you became a psychologist.

MT: Yes, I got a PhD in psychology.

JM: Did anything from your experience in the music industry prepare you for a career in psychology?

MT: No, after I quit the band I played recording sessions for a bunch of years, and I wrote screenplays. One actually got made. It's called "Defiance" with Jan-Michael Vincent. It's not that good of a movie. We wrote it for Robert De Niro and Jan-Michael Vincent did it, so we took out a lot of dialog. Nice man, by the way, I really like Jan, but [he's] not Robert De Niro as an actor. I usually only quit things when I'm successful at them. So I was doing really well writing screenplays and all that, and I just wasn't happy.

I always loved school. Had I thought about it, I'd have been happiest doing that. I always took classes at a junior college or at UC. I'd just

go take classes. So I went and got my degree – I received my undergrad from UCLA. And this was sort of just going to school, it wasn't my goal. I was the oldest guy in the classes. I looked at what I had credits in. Psychology wasn't my end-love.

I've always been fascinated about how the human mind works, and if I'd even thought about it for a second I would have done physiological psych rather than clinical psych. I just kept going to school, and then, at the end of it, if I'd been smart I would have specialized in dealing with musicians. I didn't. I went into geriatric psych. My musical thing, except for occasionally playing piano for people who had no idea what the hell I was doing, didn't pay off at all.

I didn't play for a long time. I just didn't. I didn't enjoy the studio thing. It was not collaborative. It was about booking dates, not about how well the music was going. It was only after I burned out on doing geriatric psych that we started playing again. So it was my salvation, but it didn't pay off at all. I should've gone into the artist thing. It occurred to me about five months ago.

JM: How did The Electric Prunes get back together?

Briefly, I hadn't seen our lead singer in thirty years. We didn't talk. We didn't part as friends. Like most bands, it was, "I don't ever care if I see you. Don't come to my house." We got a call that David Katz-Nelson from Warner Brothers was looking at doing this compilation thing, and did we want to go into the studio and help remix our records. He contacted James [Lowe], and James called me.

We hadn't seen each other, literally, in thirty years. And we went in. Because we did everything on four-track, remixing is a euphemism. We had to keep mixing as we went along. So we'll have a two-track stereo mix and maybe a tambourine hit on one and a voice going "hey." So we didn't get to do a lot of remixing, to our disappointment. Give me our second record, I'd love to take some that echo off – it's awash in echo. It's like so much that you can't even make any sense out of it. But we couldn't do it, because it's all in the track.

So then, for the first time when we did that, and that maybe was about nine years ago now, we remembered how much fun it was. And I remembered the enjoyability of playing, as opposed to the pain. So then we just decided – you know with the internet we can track down people – let's get whoever we can find from the band together and apologize to each other. No intent other than going, "Man, whatever you perceive that I did to you, whatever I did to you, whatever I thought about, I'm sorry. I was young and stupid."

JM: Well, yeah, you were like eighteen years old.

MT: Max. And then we started playing and had such a good time that we decided to keep playing. We never got back together with the intention of playing, we got back together with the intention of healing old wounds, so you can move your life forward without that baggage.

Some guys are still angry over things that happened in the Sixties, they won't let go of it. So we can't play with them, because it needs to be about joy, you know? The difference this time around is, I appreciate every person that comes out to hear us. And I appreciate that I get to play. It's no longer my God-given right to do it. So now when we play, I adore doing it. It's just the most enjoyable thing I know how to do. And we are better than we were. We actually are. We're better musicians. So we can do extended things that have a little more substance to them. That just comes from experience, and living. But we're still as angry as ever. For reasons I'm not clear on, we're still pissed off. I don't know what that's about.

JM: You're a psychologist...

MT: Yeah, yeah, but I didn't heal me! That's the goal. Hopefully by healing other people I heal me. But that's not happening yet.

The only thing I really learned is – and I explained this to the band members – if I'm angry at you, number one, I really am good at expressing it, and number two, I've already done my own inventory about my share of this. So you don't have to tell me that I messed up, too. I know that. I'm clear on that.

JM: We touched on this a bit before... There are a lot of interesting sonic exploration on your first two albums. What are you most proud of, and what are your reflections of that aspect of the band?

MT: What I'm proud about, I have nothing to do with. And that is that other bands cite us as influences. And some of them are really good bands, and I don't happen to hear the influence. But it's always an honor when somebody does that. Because we expected when we got back together again that nobody would care. The first interview we did, somebody said, "Do you have any questions for me?" and I go, "Yeah, why are you talking to us?"

It was Little Steven who had a lot to do with us getting back and playing together. He's a rock and roll fanatic, and he backs it up. In other words, he's not just a commercial venture – he really loves the music.

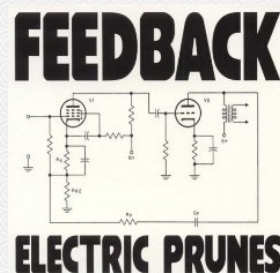
But I think that we just, without trying to sound pompous about it – because one thing I've learned is that any success should bring humility with it, not arrogance, because it's a gift, not a right – I think that the thing we did best was to try things. We were always saying, "Is that steel rod of any purpose to us? Can we hit something, what if you drop it, what does it sound like?"

And that we were willing to forgo a commercial concept. I say that realizing that our first album sounds like an entirely commercial frickin' venture, but that we internally were willing to forgo commercialism in the sense of doing things. Billy said normally what happens – and he's right – is there are the people that create it, and there are the people that take what you create and now do it a little better than you, because they now know what to do to get hits. If we just opened up things, that sonically you can do things a little different, or that a record can sound a little strange and people can still listen to it, then that's really cool to me.

It took me a long time to not be more embarrassed about what we did then. And the band name is still hard to say to people if they don't know who you are. It's just like, "What?" But I think that's it. I think that we did things with a mixture of youth and wonder – because we just wanted to know. Plus Richie Podler at American, he'd would do things like take a pencil and use it to get wobble on the tape, just to see what happened if we played.

We never would say no to an idea without trying it. We may not like it, but we'd do anything. We would just literally try anything. I think that's what I'm proudest about. That it didn't get manifested in a lot of our songs, it's a shame. But that's really where we were at.

JM: What advice would you give an aspiring musician?



MT: I think there's two things. One is, you'd better love the process. Because no success makes up for not loving what you're doing. Especially in art of any form. Because at the end you're left with your process. You find that as nice it is that people like what you, if you're not enjoying what you're doing there's an empty space somewhere.

And the other thing is, don't give up. At any age. I think the shame is that my generation took their guitars and put them in the garage, and never picked them up again. I'm a firm believer in dreams, and that dreams come true. What I think we said on one of our newer albums is that dreams never quit. You quit on them. They never give up. So love what you're doing, and do it.

Also keep in mind that someone not liking you is an opinion, not a statement of fact. It's just somebody's opinion. And it can be a very high-ranking opinion. If I play a track and Bono goes, "I hate what you just did," that's his opinion. So that's it. I just think it's internal faith, that is what it basically comes down to.

[Chat about Cris Kirkwood's answer to this question. Kirkwood fell into serious drug abuse, and basically said, "don't do what I did."]

MT: Drugs didn't play as large a part in our music as people assume it did. We weren't stoned most of the time we were playing. The drugs were there, but they also were a lot, a lot milder. And we didn't have all the massive hydroponically grown, imported from India through Pakistan with a stop in Siberia... Cocaine wasn't a big drug. Nobody outside jazz guys was using heroin. We'd smoke some, and do LSD, but it wasn't a big influence for us.

I found, fairly early on, that really stoned I played really like crap. Because I wasn't listening. That's my other hint to aspiring musicians, by the way. Listen. Listen to other music, all sorts of it. And listen to who you're playing with when you're playing with them.

That's what stunned me the first time I played with Billy. More than anything else, aside from the fact that he could play, what stunned me was how well he listened. Because he could have come in and said, "I'm frickin' Billy Corgan, I get to play whatever I want and you guys follow me." He didn't, he played within what we were doing. And I heard him listen as a musician, as opposed to just a guy who struck it big in a band. Listening's everything.

I think that one of the dangers today is how compartmentalized music's gotten. Younger musicians aren't exposed, they lock into a genre, and just listen to that station. So all they hear are variations of that station. When I was growing up AM radio played everything. So you'd hear a folk song with a rock song with jazz. And people also listened on radios. So you might be walking down the street and I'd say, "What is that?" Nowadays everyone's internally listening, so I never know what you're hearing.

I had a kid one time explain the divisions of metal music to me. And I got a headache. Industrial metal, specializing in power tools. "That's, like, a division?" He goes, "Yeah."

So I think that you listen to everything, and if you're creative, it's what you do with what you've heard that makes the creation, not that you invented it. I just don't think that people hear enough music. Mike [Byrne], the new [Smashing Pumpkins] drummer, brought me like a thousand songs that he's listening to. Because I have no way of knowing his bands, like Grizzly Bear and The Mars Volta and all that. But I'm listening to them. Because, you know something, there may be something that I'll steal from that that's really good.

[For fun, like some of my other interviews, I asked Mark the questions from MOJO's monthly feature "All Back To My Place." I don't have any connection to MOJO magazine - they're just good questions.]

JM: What music are you currently grooving to?

MT: Grooving? I'm not grooving to anything. I am listening to a combination of the newer music that Mike has given me, so The Mars Volta, Grizzly Bear, I forget all the names of the bands. And listening to the stuff that Billy recommends. So I'm sort of doing a multi-generational thing.

At the same time, I'm back listening to Pink Floyd, because of their sense of space. I still trying to figure it out. I can listen to it a million times, and still not understand quite how they got what they got with what they had.

And then, I'm now heavily into Beethoven again, because he's like my source-flow of everything, it's that power. I don't know if you groove to Beethoven.

And, of course, Smashing Pumpkins because I listen to them a lot. Billy gave me every one of their albums. You know something - I'm blown away by how good they were. I was really surprised. Also how many of their songs that I knew. Like I didn't know "1979" was them. I just knew the song. So I constantly listen to them.

JM: What, if push comes to shove, is your all time favorite album?

MT: If I had one I had to listen to forever, Kind of Blue by Miles Davis. There are some that stick out for other reasons. Sgt. Pepper's just because it is what it is. But if I had one album I had to listen to forever, it would be Kind of Blue. Because I think he plays perfectly. I've never heard a man choose better notes in my entire life.

JM: What was the first record you ever bought, and where did you buy it?

MT: I bought it at Music City, Wallich's Music City, which was this place in Hollywood where they still had record booths where you'd go in and listen, where you'd play an album before you bought it. I bought "The Happy Organ" by Dave "Baby" Cortez, and "The Battle of New Orleans" by Johnny Horton. I bought them the same day. A dollar each, I think. Those were the first two that I bought. I wish it were something really hip, but those were the first two records I bought.

JM: Say something like Kind of Blue?

MT: You know something, I didn't discover Kind of Blue until much later. I called everybody in the band one day, and said "I've just heard the best album I've ever heard." [They said,] "Do you know when that came out, you idiot?" I thought it was a new release. I came late to that.

JM: What musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

MT: There are several. For the musical part of it – we're not taking lifestyle into account – it's James Jamerson. He was just stunning, brilliant, and played parts that were simple but eloquent. So he'd probably be my first choice. Then I'd either like to have been either Mozart or Beethoven. But Jamerson for the bass. And Entwistle. Not for lifestyle, again. But for just being able to play with those fingers.

JM: Who is your favorite bass player?

MT: Charlie Mingus, I just adore, but that's the jazz thing. I truly, truly appreciate Carole Kaye. Brilliant bass player, just brilliant. And Jamerson's a good one. And McCartney just because of how lyrical he was. And Entwistle just because he played ungodly things with seeming ease. He'd play with three or four fingers – that comes from playing the French horn and stuff. But he's playing these lines, it'd take me a year and a half... I mean, he played lead bass, and foundationally, at the same time.

JM: What do you sing in the shower?

MT: Nowadays? Billy's demo frickin' songs. I can't get them out of my head. I swear to God. Some of them I can't get out of my head. I went in the other day, and said, "I woke up in the morning, hearing that song." I literally am singing his songs. I can't tell you what they are because that's up to him. He writes some brilliant stuff. That's what I'm singing in my head. Unfortunately nobody knows what the hell I'm hearing because nobody's heard them yet. But that's what I'm singing.

JM: What's your favorite Saturday night record?

MT: It might be – I know it's weird, I always go to jazz – but it might be A Love Supreme by John Coltrane. That might be my favorite Saturday night record. Or, if I'm in a really good mood, Animals by Pink Floyd. I'm a huge Syd Barrett fan, too. So it depends on what mood is. One of those.

JM: And your Sunday morning record?

MT: You know, Sunday morning would probably be rock and roll, because it's time to wake up and go do something. I love Spirit. I really love some of their stuff. [Randy California's] guitar sound was just stunning. So it might be that.

JM: Which album?

MT: Probably The Twelve Dreams of Dr. Sardonicus. It might be Fleetwood Mac. And secretly, if I know no one's watching, ABBA. Their songwriting – they carried forth what Goffin and King, and Barry and Greenwich did, that ability to write songs concisely and have really cool tracks. I might throw them on and just dance around the house, you never know?

[Discussion of Syd Barrett.]

MT: The story I tell about Pink Floyd, by the way, is our manager called us into the office in 1966 or so. He said "I've been asked if I want to handle this band in the United States. I have a demo record of theirs, do you want to hear it?" And the demo was "See Emily Play." Nobody had heard of Pink Floyd over here. He played it, and we just said, "We'll manage them! If you don't manage them, we will." I was just astounded. And to this day I'm in awe of that band. If you ever analyze what they did, they're not playing that much. They're not a busy band. But they create this massive wall of space. I don't know quite how to describe it. Sound and space simultaneously. It's funny how Billy and Dave [Navarro] – we can do Pink Floyd references all day.



D I S C U S S I O N

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