

**thepsychedelicguitar.com**  
is honored to present a few words with  
**Ken Williams** *of the*



**The Electric Prunes circa 1967. Ken is at left.**

**Here is a guy laid up recovering from *back surgery* and he E-answers some questions. Is that dedication to his fans and the music or what? Thepsychedelicguitar.com thanks Ken for his words, his years of music, and wishes him a speedy recovery and best of luck with all his endeavors!**

**Was there a particular moment that guitar music or music in general grabbed you, shook you to the core, and said "This is your life's path"?**

There was no particular moment where I (knew) music was what I wanted to do with my life. While I have always been interested in lots of things, playing music was at the very top. When I first started playing it was the power of the music that attracted me. Turning up the amps and playing good old rock and roll was the high I like the best. It was the best way I knew for me to express myself.

**Would you talk a little about the scene that birthed the Prunes, and bands you shared stages with.**

The band started out with Mark Tulin, myself and another guitar player. We were all guitar players, with no bass or drums. Our first gig was junior high graduation dance. We only knew three surf songs – “Miserlou”, “Pipeline” and “Surf Beat”. I have no idea how we ever got talked into doing something like that, but I loved it. And much to our surprise, it really went over well.

Most of what was going on in California in music in ‘64 was soul band oriented. This meant a band that wanted to work the club scene had to play the standards of the day – “Money”, “Louie Louie”, “Whad’ I Say” and so on. If you look at the early Rolling Stones stuff they were really doing a British version of Motown. We did some of that for a short while but it wasn’t our style and we weren’t really interested in playing clubs. We wanted to record and so concentrated on working on becoming a proficient recording unit. The surf music that came along was a refreshing relief from having to play “Midnight Hour” over and over. The Beatles showed us you could write your own stuff and still get the chance to be heard. I think they really opened the door for a lot of bands that were trying to figure out what to do.

One of our first gigs was opening every night for Bo Diddley at the Troubador in LA. We were backing a folk singer named Dick Glass for a live album in the club; but I remember we were all really more interested in what Bo was doing. We got to play some of our own things each night and he was very kind and supportive. The obvious extension of this meeting became the ending to “Get Me To The World On Time” as we broke into that great “Diddy beat”. Music is like that, the sum total of what you are going through as you try to make it.

Most people think that if you play with a band that you get to enjoy their set before or after your own. This usually did not happen on one-nighters. Some of the bands we did get to hear were pretty cool: Lovin’ Spoonful, Cream, Who, Jefferson Airplane, Buffalo Springfield, Nice. You would think since you’re all playing the same game, trying for the same brass ring, that there would be a sense of camaraderie; but since you represented the competition, it was pretty rare that you got to hang out. Sometimes you were not even introduced to each other. The good times with bands were away from the concerts. We spent a day with Jefferson Airplane out on a yacht on the lakes outside Minneapolis. In addition, there were many parties after the shows. Nevertheless, most of the time I was so burnt from traveling, I died at the end of the day.

**What gear (guitar, pedals, and amps) were you using back in the late '60s, and what is your setup currently?**

The setup I had in the 60’s is basically what I use today – guitar through a fuzz tone device and tremolo. My first guitar was a Gibson 1960 bottom of the line acoustic. I took guitar lessons from Ernie Ball, the same person who created the line of super slinky strings. After some lessons I went

electric and got the top of the line Sears Silvertone with a Sears Amp. Sure wish I still had that one around. From there I bought myself a Gretsch Country Gentleman with the vibrato bar. The big guitar sounds then were coming from Dick Dale, the Ventures and Duane Eddie. I learned and copied every note they played. I bought a '58 Les Paul Sunburst in 1967 for \$285 and have played that ever since. It came with a vibrato bar (wiggle stick) installed like the Gretsch and the Silvertone and was instrumental in creating the sound at the beginning of "Too Much To Dream".

**Additional info on Ken's amps from fellow Prune Mark Tulin @ [electricprunes.net](http://electricprunes.net):**

*"In the very early stages of the band Ken used a Fender Twin Reverb - he later switched to the Fender Super Reverb (the amp he prefers to use today). Along the way he utilized the Vox Super Beatle (they were, after all, equipment sponsors of the band), then, later on Acoustic amps."*

**What are five albums that move you, that you would consider essential to the personal soundtrack of your life?**

For me it wasn't a particular album, but more of the feel that the artist created. I was and still am into the sound and style of the guitar. I very rarely listen to the words or what was trying to be said by the artist. Before Dick Dale, the Ventures and Duane Eddie along, Chet Atkins influenced my playing. I would pick out guitar licks I liked and learn them, never bothering with the whole song. After that phase I started listening to the blues. People like John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters along with groups like the Rolling Stones. By listening to riffs here and there, cranking up the guitar with a fuzz sound and speeding it up a bit, the blues fit very nicely into the music we were playing. Our first albums covered all kinds of guitar style; some of that was from our producer trying to cover it all. The challenges were fantastic and each song left us with a good felling. As an example, "Quarter to Nine" was a song that I never would have listened to, but playing the guitar on it was a real high for me.

**What did you do during the post-Prunes years and tell us what you're up to now?**

I have always taken my guitar with me wherever I went. After the Prunes broke up I traveled quite a bit. I lived in Oregon, Nevada, Puerto Rico, and all over Californian before settling down in Northern California. I always managed to find somewhere to play and usually had a casual group thing going, nothing serious. My other love is computers. What is so fantastic about computers is they are constantly changing.



**Two part "Inspiration" question: What has inspired your music & playing over the years (other players or events, etc.), and what have been sources of personal inspiration for you? (books, people, things of spiritual nature, whatever you'd like to offer for information or as seeds to others).**

Something that has helped me through the years, is the ability to see things from more than one angle. I think all the traveling I did and all the people I met helped me see life as a much bigger picture than most realize. A good example is when the group broke up. I couldn't understand then why we didn't just stop, stand back and reorganize. But too many things had been said without thinking and the communications were gone. It really is a shame because I have always thought the group could have gone on to greater things.

**Mass In F-minor is one of my all-time favorite albums. I know it was made under less than ideal circumstances, but would you talk a bit about the times and recording this album?**

The Mass album was sort of a mystery to us from the start. We knew there would be charts but we did not think it would be so "ordered" in the recording phase. We all got on it from the start and since we were not used to recording with a conductor (David Axelrod), we moved slower than a bunch of studio guys might have. When I got the charts, he had written out my solos. I do not play that way; I make up my own solos (with a little help from my friends) along with the effects. When it came to playing my biggest influence was James who kept encouraging me to get crazy and play the shit out of that thing.



I was shocked when we started and Hassinger wanted me to actually play those solos, I tried but could not get any power out of the riffs. I am not sure how many cuts we had completed when the producer (Dave Hassinger) came into the control room and said, "This isn't working, you, you and you are going to be replaced for the remainder of the sessions". I happened to be one of the "you's" in there; but I was not having a good time recording the thing anyway so it just rolled off my back. In hindsight this is where we should have said, "Wait a minute, you are going to put OUR name on this aren't you?" But we were very young and too trusting of the people that pulled the strings. Since we felt we were just being used as pawns, none of us really got into that album. James kept asking when we got to put our effects in there. We never did. The idea was potentially awesome, and could have been really something with our effects and the different way we looked at music. So everyone lost.

**As for what of Ken's playing wound up on the album, again here's Mark Tulin:**

*"As far as "Mass in F Minor" goes, Ken's playing on the "Kyrie Eleison/Christe" cut (Number 1 on the album and the cut that appears in "Easy Rider"). Other than that it's someone else."*

**What do you feel are some "Defining moments" of Ken Williams on record?**

Well of course there is the wobbling fuzz tone/tremolo opening to "Too Much To Dream", which is a pretty strong single note statement. That would be my 15 minutes of fame. Those are the hardest to make, as most players are so ready to show you they can "shred". I stayed up all night listening to a Wes Montgomery album so when we recorded "Train For Tomorrow" it just came out like I was him. The feel was there for me, even when I did not normally play that way. That was pretty weird. "The Great Banana Hoax", "Long Day's Flight", and "You Never Had It Better" were my chances to let it out a bit. If you really look at our albums we did not put guitar solos *per se* on the records. Everyone else was doing that and we wanted the arrangements to be a little different. Live was a different story, you could get a bit carried away and everyone loved it. When we practiced, we could go four hours on one song and not repeat ourselves. We could just take a feel anywhere we wanted without looking at each other. That was the greatest high and when we did it live the

audience was just as jazzed as we were. When it came to recording, the guitar part has to be part of the song, not how fast you can play. The Beatles are a great example of this. George Harrison's tasty licks just blew me away.

**What are some causes that you feel strongly about?**

I have never been someone that gets involved behind a cause. I look at life from more than one perspective; it becomes difficult to support something when 9 times out of 10 both sides have a good point, a bad point and no point. There are always three sides to an argument, the third being the truth.

I am presently against the kind of war that we have gotten into with Iraq. Everyday I hear that one or more soldiers have been killed. It reminds me of Vietnam. With war when necessary, we need to get in and get out as fast as we can. Human life is not something that is expendable. Our military feels that everything is fine, as long as death is at an acceptable limit. What in the hell is acceptable?

**Any life wisdom you would like to pass along?**

One of the biggest challenges is balancing a family life along with a music life. The key is in the balance, and to make sure who you are living with loves creativity as much as you do.

In addition, when I heard from older people that, "Life goes a lot faster than you think," I did not believe it for an instant. Now with some years behind me, they were right, it does. So do what turns on your creative mind and whatever makes you happy. Life still goes by way too fast, but when you think about where you have been and what you have done, you will feel more complete. 40 years with a company and then retirement is not for everyone. 40 years in the company of creative and loving people is worth it.

**Thank you, this is an honor Ken! Is there anything you'd like me to plug for you?**

The Electric Prunes have a new CD, "CALIFORNIA" coming out soon. It is new music within which we remember our past and where it all came from. It supports our claim that you can reclaim that which is important to you at any time in your life. You are always allowed to dream and can never get "too much", in spite of what we told you back in '67.

Thank you for you interest in me and the band.

Ken



Thank YOU, Ken!

UPDATE: The NEW Electric Prunes CD is out May 25, 2004: [DETAILS](#)

Big thanks go out to James Lowe Productions for sending over the awesome pictures and band logo!

**Photo credits:**

**'67 Group Psychedelic: Gered Mankowitz**

**Ken while recording the "Artifact" CD: Pamela Lowe**

**Photo above: Anne Heck**

**The Mass in F minor cover was pilfered by the webmaster from a huge corporate webseller, without much remorse.**

Check out the official Electric Prunes website by clicking [HERE](#). (Special thanks to Pamela for her help!)

Another great Prunes resource is [HERE](#).

I've been writing a review of the Mass In F-Minor album, I promise I'll finish it as soon as I get more info on the sessions. It is one of my [Top 10 Favorite](#) Albums.

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