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The Electric Prunes are an example of classic Psychedelica. We grabbed an interview with founders Mark Tulin, AND James Lowe.

Altsounds.com: You went through a few band names in the beginning such as The Sanctions and Jim and the Lords. It was David Hassinger, resident engineer at RCA studios, who threatened to lock you in a closet until you came up with a new name.. How long were you in the closet? How did you come up with the Electric Prunes, and do you remember any of the rejects?

Mark Tulin: So history can rest comfortably, the true fact is that we locked ourselves in a garage until we came up with a list of names. We made a long list of names consisting of virtually anything we could think of. If we heard an interesting word we'd write it down. Sorry, don't remember what they were but if you think of something and it sounds kind of odd or stupid, it was probably on the list. Your name may have been on the freakin' list. The truth is no band name sounds that cool until it's a real band. That said, Electric Prunes name came from a type

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The Lowdown: Interview with

of absurdest humor popular for a minute or two back then that was centered around fruit. The joke was what's purple and goes buzz buzz – an Electric Prune. Another version of the same joke gave a San Francisco band its name, what is purple and swims in the ocean – Moby Grape.

**Altsounds.com:** Your hit song "I Had Too Much to Dream Last Night," opens with an unforgettable backwards, fuzztone introduction from guitarist Ken Williams. Was that planned or a happy accident?

**James Lowe:** The opening sound came from a rehearsal recording session at Leon Russel's home studio one Sunday afternoon. We were recording on 4 track tape and to save money we used to flip the tape over at the end of the reel and use it going the other way. The engineer didn't hit record for about a minute when the tape was flipped and when it was played back the sound of Ken Williams testing his fuzz tone and tremolo settings came into the studio at earsplitting level. That is the sound you hear at the beginning of the song. We cut this piece of tape off and took it into the actual recording session a few weeks later not knowing exactly what we would use it for. So it was a happy accident turned into an intro.

**Altsounds.com:** In 1967 you released the album "Underground". It had more of a darker sound than the first album. Was that the direction you wanted to go towards, and were you satisfied with the finished work?

**Mark Tulin:** Underground was most definitely a purposeful departure from our first album. It was truer to our inner core and marked a decided evolutionary step in the band. I think it gives an idea as to where we would have gone had we stuck around to go there. But those darker undertones you hear were always there, they were just masked by some of the fluff pieces on our first album. In fact, some of the songs on "Underground" were recorded along with tracks appearing on the first album, they were just outside the image our producer/label thought we needed to project. (An example is "Hideaway", one of the first tracks we actually recorded for the 1st album). While all in all I am very satisfied with the result, as with any recording, there are some things I would do over and some things, due to outside restrictions and pressures, we were not "allowed" to do. Of the two. I truly regret what we didn't get to do – we just didn't think it would be our last chance for some thirty odd years.

**Altsounds.com:** After your album Underground you released an album titled Mass in F Minor, which was a very innovative album, because of mixing Gregorian music and psychedelic pop. What was your motivation for that type of sound, and do you feel it was a natural progression for your music?

**James Lowe:** The Mass in F minor was a side step for us. We did it at the suggestion of our manager who handled a composer named David Axelrod. David had written the Mass and was looking for someone to perform it. We were sort of an odd band so we thought it would be a challenge. The audience thought we had converted to some kind of religion or something so it confused the few fans we did have. Should we have done it? I think it is good to try different things, in hindsight it may not have been our best career move.

**Altsounds.com:** For a short time Kenny Loggins joined your band. How did he come to be in the group, and how did he fit in ?

**Mark Tulin:** James had just quit the band. With him went Mike Gannon, our oh so excellent rhythm guitar player, and our drummer Joe Dooley. Ken Williams and I were introduced to a very talented piano player/song writer – Jeremy Stuart. Jeremy brought Kenny into the fold. So fitting in wasn't really a big deal as, for all intents and purposes. it was a new group. Kenny Loggins was, from the moment I met him, an obvious star. The difference between that Kenny and the one the world came to know was that he was much more of a wild rock and roller.

**Altsounds.com:** In 1968 the original Electric Prunes broke up. When did you notice the band begin to dissolve, and do think there was anything



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that could of saved the band?

James Lowe: My idea for the band was that we would be in the recording studio all the time and not go on the road. You can't do this when you have a hit record. You have to go out and support it by playing live. When you are touring around living out of a suitcase a lot and don't get much time off you can lose your perspective pretty easily. We were not being paid properly in a lot of cases and this creates pressure as well. The natural thing is to vent this pressure on each other since you are together every day. We went through a time of not speaking to each other for 3 weeks on the road. This silence prompted the end of my interest in the band and maybe it could have been reversed if someone had tried to straighten out the problems. As it was, I left the band in the middle of a tour at the Houston airport with them heading for La Vegas and I went to LA.

Altsounds.com: In 1969 your record company took the Electric Prunes name and gave it to a completely different group, who recorded one album. Were you involved in the recordings at all, and did you even want to be a part of it?

Mark Tulin: No one from the original band played any part in any of those recordings nor, as far as I know, did anyone have any desire to do so. As far as I was concerned my prune days were over – little did I know.

Altsounds.com: After almost 30 years the original line up got back together, and recorded the 2002 album Artifact. What was it like to get back in the studio as a group after all those years, and did you feel it was overdue?

James Lowe: In 1999 Mark and I had remixed the original material for a compilation at the behest of David Katznelson from Warner Bros. We had not heard the old recordings since we had played together. It sounded pretty good and we decided it would be fun to play some music together again. I had a small guesthouse we converted into a little recording studio on my property, so why not? Mark and I started recording some songs together and were joined by Ken Williams and Quint. The album just sort of "appeared" after a number of these weekend sessions. The thing you find out is that people don't change much, even after all that time. If a guy won't tune up in '67, he probably won't tune up in 2002. Making a record is fun; but a lot of hard work too.

One of the real motivations for us was that we had read in some articles on the Internet that we did not actually play our instruments in '67 and that we were a "manufactured" group. We felt we had to do our own album just to scotch these silly rumors. Artifact is still one of my favorite albums. We did not make too many copies so it is a hard one to find today.

Altsounds.com: Your latest work was in 2006, an album called "Feedback". It seems like on that album you returned to your original Electric Prunes sound. Do you feel the same way, and if so did it come naturally?

Mark Tulin: Without attempting to create the past (we prefer to create a future) "Feedback" did end up not falling far from the original sonic Prune tree. For better or worse, it seems to be that no matter who or what we set out to sound like we end up sounding like us.

Altsounds.com: What are currently working on, or is there anything planned for the future?

James Lowe: We have been concentrating on live shows lately but will probably do one more album. Since reforming we have recorded Artifact, California and Feedback. This represents a good number of songs and some insights for people that are interested into the band. One more won't hurt, I think.

Altsounds.com: Can you explain a little bit about your songwriting

process, and how do you come up with new ideas?

Mark Tulin: James and I are the sole songwriters in the band. And while his overall process may be somewhat different, I think that with some slight curves and bends it is similar to mine. As the creative process is virtually impossible to explain, please stick with me, as I give it a shot anyway. It's going to be long in the hopes that if I write enough you won't discover I'm really not saying anything. So, hold on, here it comes --More often than not, I start with the music and most of the time it is kicked off by hearing something, a bit of dialog, a chord change or a part of a melody (in my head, at a club, on the radio or on a CD...); something that makes me pick up the guitar or sit down at the piano. Some ideas spring from personal life events and some just rise up if you're paying attention to what is swirling, as George Harrison wrote, "in and around you." I also get some decent ideas from mis-hearing what people say. People can be really clever when filtered through your own humor screen. Anyway, after I have something that sounds vaguely interesting I start by singing whatever the music brings into my mind; making sense is not required. Sometimes, in this way, I come up with something that serves as a key for the song. The again, sometimes it doesn't. In either case, I have to come up with what the song is about in order to write the lyrics. I need to be writing about something— a concept, a thought, a relationship, a hope – anything that provides the fodder for a full lyric. I'm not real big on totally abstract lyrics or writing to see where it ends up. Works for some, not me. When I have it organized enough so that I don't have to explain what is going on, I show it to James. He then processes and offers up his suggestions/changes. It is then a matter of massaging and kneading to form the final entity.

#### Quick One Word Answers

James Lowe:

1. CDs or MP3s? - MP3's
2. Coffee or Tea? - coffeeyyyy
3. Barack Obama or Hilary Clinton? - Obama
4. Acoustic Neil Young or Electric Neil Young? - 'Lectric, of course
5. Favorite curse word? - Greek word: skata

Mark Tulin:

1. CDs or MP3s? - CDs (actually vinyl)
2. Coffee or Tea? - Coffee
3. Barack Obama or Hilary Clinton? - Obama
4. Acoustic Neil Young or Electric Neil Young? - Electric!
5. Favorite curse word? - Karl Rove

FOR MORE INFO GO TO: [Electric Prunes Official Web Site](#)

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