



THE ELECTRIC PRUNES

Back row, left to right, Mark Tulin (bass), Ken Williams (guitar), James Lowe (vocals), and seated in front--Quint the drummer.

The current performing members of the band are James Lowe, Mark Tulin, Steve Kara, Jay Dean, and Walter Garces.

Aloha, fellow Castaways. This week Lucy Hell caught up with Mark Tulin of The Electric Prunes for an exclusive Mystery Island Interview. The Electric Prunes are of course the band that gave us the legendary psychedelic hit "I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night," truly, one of the greatest songs of the 1960's acid rock era. They have kept themselves busy over the years, producing albums when the mood is right, and in fact, have a new CD available called: FEEDBACK. Stay tuned and read my review after the interview.

Bradley Mason Hamlin



LUCY HELL interviews MARK TULIN of the ELECTRIC PRUNES!

LUCY: You guys experienced firsthand the last days of real rock & roll in the 1960s, the explosion of psychedelic music, and the ongoing revolution of punk and garage music from the Los Angeles perspective. What was it like performing "I Had Too Much To Dream" on the Dick Clark Show? Dick referred to the song as a "gassy thing." You gotta love that.

MARK: He was talking about the song? I thought it was a personal comment about Weasel. "Gassy thing" was probably a euphemism for "I don't have the faintest idea what the song is about." But Dick Clark was always supportive and kind to the bands on his shows, so he can call it anything he likes. Hard for people to remember that prior to MTV, VHI, the Internet and cable

shows, Dick Clark's myriad of programs were about the only outlet for seeing what a band looked like. Besides, he looked younger than we did. That period in music, sort of a sonic plate tectonic conduction zone, was a great thing to be part of and a bitch to describe to those who weren't there. Ultimately, you are right, do love it.

LUCY: With having such a definitive hit song hanging over your heads—was there a lot of pressure to come up with similar material?

MARK: There was pressure, but from the outside. Our records happened just before the cross-over point from single sales to album sales. If you didn't have a hit single, as far as the label was concerned, you suddenly ceased to exist. And, since no one on the planet actually knows what a hit record is on a consistent basis, the simplest solution is to replicate what was a hit before. (As if that has changed!) There was no way to really top the unique record TMTD became, so it seemed fruitless to try and reproduce it in another form. We wanted to try something totally different; producer, manager, label wanted more of the same. The result was studio battles and some mongrelized records.

LUCY: What were female groupies like in the late 1960s? Are the girls less or more wild today?

MARK: God bless the 1960's groupies from the 1960s. We used to play forty-five towns in thirty nights. Without a little R&R (and I don't mean rock 'n roll) it would have been unbearable. Keep in mind, back then sex with someone wouldn't end up killing you; at worst, a penicillin shot took care of whatever ailed you. Used to be you had sex with someone to see if you should go out to dinner. These days you review medical records before having coffee. Not being seventeen any more, it is difficult to compare the difference; that, and the fact that a majority of our audience for unknown reasons is male. But if the chance arose for a comparison study I would surely get in line.

LUCY: How did Kenny Loggins become a temporary Prune in 1968? That's sort of like Glen Campbell ending up in The Beach Boys ...

MARK: James (Lowe) quit the band and Ken (Williams) and I decided to continue on. Truth was it was much less a decision than not having anything else to do. Kenny came in as part of the “surge troops”. I know how odd it sounds (keep in mind Glen Campbell actually performed on some of The Beach Boys records); but if you could have seen the Kenny Loggins of the 60s, his being in our band, would have actually made sense. He was out and out rock ‘n roll; pure energy. Of course, even with him that tour rates as one of the worst in history so, upon returning home, Ken and I decided that even if we had nothing else to do it was better than what we were doing with the band.

LUCY: Tell us a scary Electric Prunes road story:

MARK: It was a cold and rainy night. Thunder and lightning stormed over the dark, purple mountains. Just as the last vestige of the moon slipped behind the ominous clouds, out of the deep primeval forest ... Sorry. Let’s see, there was the time one of our tour vehicles didn’t quite make it around a turn in the snow and rolled down an embankment with several band members and precious equipment inside. We had a band member packing up everyone’s bags in the morning because he had just found out he had spent the night with the Sheriff’s daughter. We were heading up to Seattle when the plane turned around because they had to shut one engine down and then went into a steep, steep bank in an effort to get some oil to the running jets. Nude girls in the elevator ... Hmmmmm. Too many chances for a frying-pan reaction here, better stop. Should have stuck with the cold and rainy night, huh?

LUCY: What were the other bands you guys associated with in the San Fernando Valley? Who were the Electric Prunes’s musical buddies?

MARK: We didn’t play much live in LA, preferring to hang out in the garage rehearsing. Since our focus was mostly on recording we never ended up playing in those places where you get to meet the other guys. Every once in a while when we did venture out into the night we would occasionally perform with the other L.A. bands, such as The Doors, Buffalo Springfield, The Leaves. We would go to Hollywood to Bido Lido’s and see Love every once in awhile. But really we have never been “in-crowders.”

LUCY: Did you guys really send Mike Douglas a box of prunes before performing on his show?

MARK: Were we supposed to have done that? I mean, of course we did. I mean, no way in hell. Don’t know where we would have gotten the prunes if we did. The Prune Advisory Board or Prune Council, or whoever represented the Prune Industry, had refused to participate in any sponsorship because they thought we presented the “wrong image.” Wrong image for prunes? Being turned down by everyone’s least favorite fruit was truly a devastating blow. I think it may have just tanked the band?

LUCY: Given the Prune handle, I’m wondering if there are any vegetarians in the band? What does an Electric Prune eat out there on the road? Prunes? Road kill? Road kill with prunes?

MARK: No vegetarians back then. I think being a vegetarian takes some sense of awareness; a commodity we were severely lacking. Most of the time Electric Prunes ate whatever Holiday Inn was serving. By today’s standard our usual road diet would have come in somewhere below fatal. But that was only because we were usually in too much of a hurry as we hurtled across the country to stop and pick up any road kill. Morte de Route avec Pruneaux – hmmmm. LUCY: Besides “I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night”—what is one of the other Prunes tunes that you guys are especially proud of?

MARK: I always liked "The Great Banana Hoax." Still do. And, when we perform it live these days, it still gets a good reaction. Mostly, however, when I listen to our old stuff I hear what could have been except for the usual rock tragedies of manager/producer/band relationships. It's strange to listen to something with a combination of joy and pain. But, as easy as it is to dwell in the past, of everything we've done I am most proud, I think of our latest CDs ("Artifact," "California," "Feedback"). It's still us with the same aesthetic (or lack of same), angst, tremolo and feedback but with better material and freer hearts.

LUCY: Tell us how your song "Kyrie Eleison" became the soundtrack for the drug trip scene in Easy Rider?

MARK: Great question and you have as good an idea as we do. We were as surprised as you were and had no idea until the film came out that it was included in the film. Think it was just our record label's (Reprise) way of promoting their own product. But hey, if you're gonna be used, being included in a film like "Easy Rider" is not exactly scuffing your boots!

LUCY: What do you think of "popular music" today? Ray Charles said, "Radio is dead" long before he himself passed away. Is that true?

MARK: Ray Charles always knew the truth when he saw it. I'm not sure what the term "popular music" means these days. What I do know is that in the 1960's radio was alive with different colors and sounds. Everything wasn't so controlled and compartmentalized; there weren't major radio stations just playing this or that kind of music. This meant that within a few minutes you could hear a rock song, something by Miles Davis, a folk song, and then "The Ballad of The Green Berets". It was a little schizophrenic at times, but like it or not, you were exposed to different styles of music just by listening to the radio. This meant a more literate and discerning radio audience. And people weren't all walking around with their personal music list playing through some headphones so only they could hear it. If someone had a radio on everyone got to hear it so just walking down the street could turn you on to some new song or performer. It was a way to communicate with the "latest and greatest" ideas. Of course now every radio station in the known universe is controlled by one or two companies who believe having over three songs in rotation is overkill.

LUCY: Tell us about FEEDBACK and the future of the Electric Prunes Underground:

MARK: "Feedback" is our newest CD. It is the last of a trilogy, which includes "Artifact" and "California," that we've recorded since getting back together in the studio after a multi-decade break. It's pure PruneAudioFreakinPhonics with all the requisite squeaks, honks, noise and squawks. In the 1960s many people did not know what to make of our music. In the 2000s, seems things haven't changed all that much. We're pretty tame by today's standards, I guess, but we are still running against the grain if you listen hard.

As far as the EP future, that's in the hands of those out there in cyberspace. If we can make a go of this through a combination of live performances and CD sales, we will be the happiest Prunes on the planet. So far, not so good. This time around it was not about money/fame but about to correct a dream gone bad. Most people don't get second chances and too many people aren't doing something they love, so the last few years have been a real boon. However, what we've found is that people who say how much they love our style of music and can't wait to see us in performance must be under house arrest – they don't seem to get out much. Either that or too much Celine Dion has dulled their hearing. And, for the most part, the younger audience we

would most enjoy introducing to real roots psychedelic/garage rock, don't know we exist. So, as always, we will see what shall be.

But thanks to people like you and those who read what you put out there, there is always possibility and hope ... and for now, that's enough. Thanks for the most interesting and slightly disturbed questions – What do Electric Prunes eat? “Gassy thing?” Gotta love it.

Mark Tulin

April 19, 2007



ELECTRIC PRUNES: FEEDBACK REVIEW

The Electric Prunes don't take themselves too seriously. There is no pretension here, and that's one thing I appreciated right away when listening to their new disc called FEEDBACK. The Prunes know who they are and what kind of music they want to make.

Good ol' garage rock that your grandma will still hate after all these years.

Fuzzy, trippy, and goes good with beer (or several) on a Saturday afternoon.

The immediate standout tune on this album is “Circus Freak,” a song that will undoubtedly take its position in the permanent play list for this band. “Circus Freak” stands up to any other song written by the Prunes. It's just good fun with a very cool beat and interesting lyrics. What more do you need?

Maybe not much, but you get 9 more Prunes tunes that will please older fans of this band, as the songs are true to the Prunes's core sound, but should also appeal to younger listeners as well—if they want something unique, something different from all the guys mumbling into their mics these days.

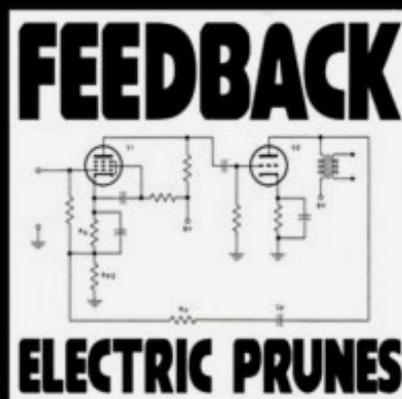
The other real stand out song is “Morphine Drip.” It has all the earmarks of a Prunes classic as well. The humor and metaphors come across without being too obscure or too heavy.

I also liked “Flying Bird,” the vocals remind me of The Butthole Surfers on this track, very interesting.

The bottom line is, it's the Prunes. They're good for you. It's groovy. Go buy it.

Bradley Mason Hamlin, April 22, 2007.

"Electric Prunes Interview" by Lucy Hell and "Electric Prunes: Feedback Review" by Bradley Mason Hamlin
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