

The darker side of Xavier Rudd

Aussie exorcises some demons on latest album

BY ROGER LEVESQUE, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE JULY 4, 2009 8:37 AM



Australian artist Xavier Rudd takes his music and emotions to extremes with his latest, *Dark shade of Blue*.

Photograph by: Fran Flynn, Getty Images, Canwest News Service

For Xavier Rudd, creating music means tapping into something subconscious.

"It feels as if my music just comes through me," says the Australian singer and multi-instrumentalist, known as a one-man band. "I don't think about it or plan it, or say I'm going to make a record like this or that. It comes strongly, and it's been the same way ever since I was a little boy."

Rudd's last album, the moody *Dark Shade of Blue* (2008), took his music to greater extremes, into great noisy walls of sound at one extreme, with a few spare acoustic tracks in between.

"Over the last 10 years, I've really built up my sound with what I can produce from one guitar, really thickening my sound. That fed into the other instruments to an extent and there were a couple of overdubs, but for the most part, it's just one guitar making all that sound."

He admits the music came from a dark place emotionally.

"It's a reflection of an interesting time, almost like a documentation of that and a chance for me to look back at what was happening. It was a bit more of an intimate, closed journey, going within myself and into some locked rooms and dusting off the shelves. Stuff was coming out of me and I just needed some time to stop and think about who I was."

It was also the first album in a while that he had recorded at home in Australia after making several in North America. The songwriter's own barely legible handwritten lyrics added an even more cryptic note to the whole affair. But if Rudd had to exorcise some personal demons on *Dark Shade of Blue*, he has moved on now.

"It's interesting because the music that I'm writing and performing now for the next album is completely the opposite--really bright, funny and bubbly."

For a window into Rudd's psyche, you have to consider his upbringing. Born in Torquay, in the southeastern Australian state of Victoria, he enjoys a mixed British-Dutch-Aborigine ancestry. He grew up very close to nature, spending much of his early life in the bush and along the ocean. He taught himself to play guitar, percussion and the ancient traditional instrument of the Aborigines, the didgeridoo, as he was drawing musical influences from records by Neil Young, Leonard Cohen, Bob Marley and Jimi Hendrix. But the most enduring theme in Rudd's music is his attachment to the land and water.

"Our future is unknown, but I feel confident that Earth will look after itself, and if it needs to, it will flush us away, just as our bodies are able to flush out bacteria. There is time to still celebrate the beauty of this planet. That's kind of where my music comes from."

Not surprisingly, issues of environmental concern and related social commentary often come out in his

songs and he's found an audience to empathize. While Rudd's musical style is a synthesis of folk, rock, reggae and other world beats, he has managed to reach the kind of sales numbers in Australia usually reserved for pop music.

Following his 2002 debut *To Let*, the album *Solace* a year later went platinum in Australia. He was starting to tour North America, opening for artists like Ani DiFranco and Jack Johnson by the time his third disc, *Food in the Belly*, got released to great acclaim. *White Moth* and *Dark Shade of Blue* have only continued to build his profile at home and around the world.

He's a big fan of Canadians and loves touring here. His wife is Canadian.

He usually tours with minimal support. On his current travels around North America, he is pleased to have two South African musicians, the former rhythm section from reggae star's Lucky Dube's band.

"Everything has a little bit of a different feel based on their style. It's really cool, actually. I'm really excited to get out there."

Xavier Rudd

Performs Sunday At The Jubilee.

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