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May 13th, 2010

Xavier Rudd

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Cormac Rea

*Australian reggae, folk, roots star Xavier Rudd's deeply held spiritual beliefs help guide him through a rough patch on the road to new release*

Perhaps it's that he wears his heart so clearly on his sleeve with music; it could be that it's 9:20 a.m. in Australia when I ring; it may just be that the musician's heavy emphasis on spirituality is exemplary of a certain internal placidity, but it's utterly apparent that Australia's Xavier Rudd will be a hard man to stir today.

In contrast, Rudd's music is of the "get up, stand up" variety, chalked lightly into the same genre as Ben Harper, Michael Franti & Spearhead and Jack Johnson - the sort of unquantifiable sounds that prompt subconscious head-rocking or undulations even in the semi-dead. His latest album, *Koonyum Sun*, is just such a deeply engrossing, rollicking affair, traipsing through reggae, folk and roots music influences that display a broad mastery by Rudd and his new band, Izintaba.

Surprisingly (not least as his new band members are South Africans: bassist Uncle Tio Moloantsoa and drummer Andile Nqubezelo played in legendary reggae artist Lucky Dube's band until his 2007 murder), *Koonyum Sun* even bristles with blues, bluegrass elements and Dylan-esque folk phrasing. How did Rudd, I wonder, get to these places?

"I don't know how I get to any places really," drawls Rudd laconically. "Yeah, my music just sort of does its thing and it's, um, I can't even really explain it a lot of the time myself - it just sort of what comes through me. It's just a reflection of what comes through me at the time, and comes up and out of me and it is what it is. I can't really draw on any other influences in this record other than life itself, its journey, and my connection to the African fellas, which is all pretty strong."

**ROCKY ROADS LEAD TO SEXY VEGGIES**

In fairness, Rudd's life journey of recent years has been as rocky as the Koonyum mountain region of Australia for which the album is named. His last outing, the significantly darker and harder edged *Dark Shades of Blue*, startled many fans, and in retrospect seemed a sign of what was to come: Rudd's Canadian wife left him while he was on tour and reflections on the loss are evident throughout *Koonyum Sun*, especially on the painfully directed song, *Woman Dreaming*.

"Yeah, my marriage of 10 years is finished, and that was all part of [*Koonyum Sun*]," says Rudd. "It's interesting you know, I didn't expect the whole thing, but I think now that I look at it, quite often my music is ahead of me, my spirits are ahead of me and they're reflected a lot in my music. Yeah, I think that *Dark Shades of Blue* was probably a bit of sign of what was to come while, uh, this album reflects a new beginning, new decade, greener pastures, all that."

Hopefully, as the winner of PETA's 2007 Award for the Sexiest Vegetarian alive - "I really don't know what to make of that," he says wryly - Rudd will not have to wait long to meet someone again. Blonde, perpetually whiskered, tanned and spiritual to the extreme, Rudd's stereotypic Aussie mien could have just as easily have been the makings of a proper surfer pinup. But that would be underselling the man: Rudd's interests go far beyond the material.

"I follow my aboriginal roots and understanding of life, which is basically just how spirits and ancestors move with us and help shape our journey - a lot of the time we don't even know what it is, or what is around the corner," adds Rudd. "My journey is reflected ahead of me a little in my music and I find my music kind of interesting, kind of a mystery to figure out sometimes. But I wouldn't say I'm spiritual - just live by what I know, what my culture is, and follow my heart."

Rudd is deeply involved in campaigning for Aboriginal rights in Australia, a country renowned for its callous and divisive approach to such matters in the past, and it's on this subject that Rudd is quick to engage.

"Oh yeah, it's still pretty much the same," says Rudd angrily. "Racist country, third-world conditions in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. A lot of Aboriginal communities suffer complete depression and lack of respect, and it's still happening today."

"I'm working with protesters at trying to prevent industry from going up in the Kimberley - 10,000 hectares of industry proposed, on the Kimberley Coast. It's pretty devastating, it's one of the world's last great wildernesses and they're trying to put a gas plant there now on Aboriginal land. It's pretty intricate politics too, between Aboriginal land council and government, and a pretty daunting issue.

"The government is trying to fast-track the land title, and it's all in the courts now. The traditional holders have taken the corrupt local council to court and it's one of the most interesting Aboriginal political situations the country has ever seen. From an environmental point of view, though, it's just toxic; it's a very rare piece of country left worldwide. Basically, if they put this through it'll just fuck it up."

**Xavier Rudd**

w/ Justin Nozuka

At Métropolis (59 Ste-Catherine E.), May 15



Rudd forges strong friendship with Dube's former band members  
photo: Kane Hibberd

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