

Xavier Rudd: *Dark Shades of Blue*

By: **Trevor Pour**

Occasionally I encounter a work that so eloquently describes the human condition that my futile attempts to capture its essence in a review seem almost absurd. This album is one such work.

Xavier Rudd's *Dark Shades of Blue* (released August 19 on Anti) is an absolute tour de force and unequivocally his most powerful work to date. Listeners will immediately sense a change in tone; There's a heavy, brooding element to most tracks, something not heard so overtly in earlier releases. The use of strong, raw, primarily electric riffs are foreign to the perceived carefree nature which made Rudd a hit many years ago. But beneath, or perhaps within, this rough stratum lays a deeper and significantly more intimate artist. Never before has Rudd produced an album that so fluently translates his ideals and perspective through pure sound.



From the opening bars of the first track, "Black Water," the album immediately delves into the powerful, heavy instrumentals that define it. "Black Water," also the title of his wife's painting which adorns the album cover, is both a moving and fitting visual representation of Rudd's creation. While essentially a slow metal ballad, the track retains enough of Rudd's signature sound to make it uniquely his- a trait revisited throughout the disc. After a few minutes, it seamlessly transitions into the title track, an equally weighty but vocally strewn onslaught. One standout amongst the general excellence is the beautiful and emotional "Guku," which doesn't exactly provide a contrast to the rest of the album, but instead complements the power and sincerity of the previous, more heavy-handed pieces. "Edge of the Moon" and "The World As We Know It" are more akin to traditional Rudd: upbeat with higher tones and toe-tapping rhythms. Still, both contain elements of the heavier distortion which gives *Dark Shades of Blue* such great consistency.

"Shiver" is arguably the best track on the album, a long delicate piece with choir vocals designed to give you the sensation it implies. Despite the gentle nature of "Shiver," it retains the power and intensity present on the remainder of the album. The following track, "Uncle," manages to gradually transform this fragile-natured piece into a full-blown blitz of charging guitar and pounding percussion over the course of eight exquisite minutes. Again, this track highlights how well Rudd has written his music to suit both his lyrics and his intentional album flow. This vigor continues on "Up in Flames," which rocks without a break from start to finish, replete with the kind of excess energy that brought Rudd into many lives. This track will get a lot of playtime in your car, guaranteed.

Dark Shades ends with a pair of slower, slightly more personal pieces, "Hope You'll Stay" and "Home!" The latter is a touching look at the world as a strange, sometimes sad yet beautiful place to live. He soberly sings, "I recognize my health/ things that I have been dealt/ places that I have roamed/ and feelings I've had, and things that I've known." This is Xavier Rudd captured in a single song, reflecting on those perspectives that make him such a strong artist and global citizen.

Dark Shades of Blue establishes the closest connection between Rudd's spirit and his sound of any release to date. There is an element of truth evident in *Dark Shades of Blue* which serves to confront the bleak realities of the human condition while elucidating the sparks of love, hope and unity that remain constant even in dark times. This voyage to the edge of darkness adds legitimacy - both artistic and philosophical - to Rudd's message of positivity and kindness. I simply cannot speak highly enough of this album.

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