

The Register-Guard: *Ticket: Ticket*

Rudd crafts music with unusual tools

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Xavier Rudd's music — he's a one-man band who plays a variety of odd instruments on stage — might give the impression his genre is New Age. But it's not; it's totally rock 'n' roll.

For its Web site, Rolling Stone magazine gathered some behind-the-scenes how-to footage of Xavier Rudd's unusual live setup.

Rudd is the ultimate musical multitasker. Blowing into three didgeridoos, playing drums and other percussion, working various guitars and singing, the performer's whole body is engaged during a show.

On the video segment, the Australian explains how he uses his "bits" to create his original and compelling sound.

"Probably the uniqueness to my sound comes from all these," he says, showing a journalist his "guitar world."

The new album from the rocker, "Dark Shades of Blue," employs Weissenborn lap slide, resonator slide, hollow-body electric, six- and

12-string acoustic guitars and a Chaturangui slide guitar.

The generous use of didgeridoos, or yirdaki as the Aborigines and Rudd often call them, combined with the diverse guitars might make you imagine some sort of New Age or world music. But let's be clear: Xavier Rudd is a rock star.

In the United States, he's almost achieved that status. Certainly, he's a star on the festival circuit. In his home country and Canada, his star shines as bright as the ones he slept under during the making of this album.

Within minutes, Rudd can bring the intensity of metal, then draw back and deliver emotional, almost spiritual songs.

"This World As We Know It" comes out of the gates like Led Zeppelin's "Immigrant Song." With pounding, percussive didge, it offers up a short, repeated message — this time about a shifting world amid slow-moving governments.

It's also one of the tracks where Rudd, who produced the album released in America on Aug. 19, features vocals from Banula Marika of the Rirratjingu clan of Northeast Arnhem Land.

In the biography for the album, he says it is a contrast of dark and light.

"Even though it's a darker album, I think there is a lot of sunshine in the record," he says. "There's brightness in the instruments, tonally, and I can hear the humidity in the didgeridoos, and in the guitar.

"I can hear that humidity, the warmth of the climate in Byron Bay."

Byron Bay, a town in New South Wales on the east coast of Australia, is where the 30-year-old Rudd recorded his sixth studio album, sleeping under the stars with his dog each night.

"There are a few different moods that come through it," Rudd notes. "There were a few different personal bridges I crossed last year, in terms of my family history. There's a well-rounded emotional landscape to the songwriting, and down to the production of the album.

"I think we pulled it off."

Music with a conscience

They pulled off something. The All Music Guide gave the project, released by Anti-, four of five stars. And the Jam Base reviewer practically had a fit over the CD.

"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," he writes. "This album is one such work."

Grouped musically with the Jack Johnsons and Ben Harpers of the world, Xavier Rudd toured with the Dave Matthews Band last year. But

he pulls away from those other mellow rockers by being a one-man show, something more on the energy-output level of Keller Williams or That 1 Guy.

Unlike Williams, Rudd uses no looping. Also unlike Williams, Rudd is pretty serious. He sings about environmental and social issues, relationships (but he's never trite) and about struggling people.

Married with children (his wife, Marci Lutken-Rudd, did the album artwork and sang some backup vocals), Rudd's bittersweet relationship with the road dominates "Blue." He is grateful to be able to tour and put on what he calls "amazing" shows, but he longs to be home.

Rudd calls the last track "Home." It features both lonely cello and samples of a little kid saying "daddy" in the deep background.

As Danielle Beittey draws the last note from her cello's bow and Rudd sings "home" for the last time, I'm left with the thought, "I'm glad he doesn't stay home."

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