



MANTIS NEW STUDIO ALBUM FROM UMPHREY'S MCGEE

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Global Beat: Xavier Rudd Crashes the Shore with the Oceanic 'Dark Shades of Blue'

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Written by Bill Murphy

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THERE'S A PURIST SCHOOL OF THOUGHT that says you have to be born into a musical tradition, be it Spanish flamenco, West African highlife or American blues, to truly feel it. Barring that, your only hope for true enlightenment is to mark your 40 days in the wilderness—or to be more precise, make your way to hell and back—before you can know anything about what it means to have "soul." That's what the purists say, anyway.

So when you lead what appears from all angles to be the charmed life of Xavier Rudd—globetrotting troubadour, devoted surfer, yoga practitioner and all-around laid-back bohemian family man—it's hard to imagine being able to dig deep enough to come up with the dark, penetrating and powerful sentiments that drive his latest album, *Dark Shades of Blue* (Anti-). Consider the largely upbeat, summery mood of his last outing, 2007's *White Moth*, which probably did more to raise the profile of guitar-strumming beach bums than an entire year of Reggae Sunsplashes. We couldn't possibly be talking about the same

guy, right?

Guess again. "I think there's been an element of lightness and darkness in all my music," the 30-year-old Aussie asserts, "and that goes for everything that I've ever made since I was a child. I use these beautiful, sweet, bright acoustic hollow-bodied instruments, but all the heaviness you hear is coming from those same instruments, too. Maybe over the years I've tried to capture that and bring it in and out. But this time, I think we've really captured the darkness better."

One important back story to the making of *Dark Shades* helps explain some of the album's mournful, at times even elegiac tone. About five years ago, Rudd was adopted into the Rirratjingu clan of Australia's northeast Arnhem Land region. As an accomplished *yirdaki* (didgeridoo) player and an outspoken advocate of preserving Aboriginal tradition, Rudd is a living, breathing amalgam of all that's modern and impossibly ancient in Australia, and it comes through in his music. When the man who was his mentor passed away last year, it was inevitable that Rudd would pay him tribute the only way he knew how.

"The song 'Guku' is a dedication to my Wawa, which means brother," Rudd says. "I can't say his name for eight years until after he's passed. I have to call him Wawa. He was a *yirdaki* player on a lot of Yothu Yindi's music, and his tribe is where the actual instrument comes from. I remember I was in the States when I heard the news, and it was such an amazing experience because I was playing my song 'Messages,' and he came through me so strong it was unbelievable. So I started singing what eventually became 'Guku.' It was surreal. This all happened live on the spot—that piece of music just came through me, and I didn't change it at all for the album."

Dark Shades of Blue opens, auspiciously enough, with "Black Water," which fades in on a note of sustained feedback from Rudd's signature Weissenborn slide guitar. Amplified and overdriven to Hendrixian levels, the instrument sings with a plaintive wail that recalls "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)" but also sounds as contemporary as any tube-screaming axe would in the hands of an alt-rock guitarist with proven chops.

There are gifts aplenty on *Dark Shades*, from the low-end thickness and constantly evolving tone of Rudd's guitar tone to the startling vocal performances of guests like Banula Marika (blood brother to Rudd's fallen Wawa) and Marci Lutken-Rudd (on the near-psychedelic ballad "Shiver"). Whether he's channeling his own surroundings or forces from the spirit world, Rudd doesn't ask any questions.

"I have a lot of strong spirits that come through me and guide me on my journey," he says. "I'm very lucky and also very respectful of that, and I try not to alter it. In my mind, whenever the music comes through me, I let it come through."

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