

Dave Graney is a man of many talents and almost as many disguises! For two decades he and his co-conspirators have done their best to remain undercover, subverting rock'n'roll into something luscious, heartfelt and totally absorbing.

HIDING IN ROCK 'N' ROLL

Jeremy Dean blows their cover...

Dave Graney's mind sounds like an interesting place to live, rich with epic landscapes that stretch away into cinematic backdrops of wild west sunsets or smoky noir nightclubs. Landscapes only partially mapped, where one road can take you from the spectral sunlit savannahs through pioneering frontier towns, while another will wind its way through the back streets of memories and nostalgia, and where most routes cut through the territory of the heart. Listening to a Dave Graney album is like hitch-hiking across a new country with a wisecracking, and extremely well-read companion. Dave Graney is a world unto himself, and he's generous enough to let us in to share it. Here he reminisces about his long and varied career, from the early days with the seminal combo, *The Moodists* – who often shared the bill with other Aussie influentials such as *The Birthday Party* – through his period of hunting the great and elusive *White Buffaloes*, playing with *The Coral Snakes*, forming his own tribute band, *The Dave Graney Show*, and onto the Dave Graney who turned blues into something heroic...

The Moodists were a throbbing drums and bass-driven combo with evocative lyrics that prowled through the growl – how does Dave view that period from where he stands now?

He smiles and then frowns, "I was looking for a vinyl release while I was over [in the UK], because we didn't have any of the records, and we found one and listened to it in the studio. I couldn't be in the same room... It was an early one though, called *Engine Shudder* ... at that time recording studios were still very 1970s – carpeted and muffled. At the same time there were these cheapo echo and reverb things that can make people who couldn't play very well sound bigger. I think a lot of music from that time sounds pretty thin."

So how does it feel, more than fifteen years on, to still get billed as 'Ex-Moodist'?

"It only happens here, back in Australia no-one really knows *The Moodists*... It's OK with me. We spent most of our life as *The Moodists* here. *The Birthday Party* kinda opened up a doorway into this other dimension and we slipped through with a couple of others, like the *Go-Betweens*. There were other groups that just stayed in Australia, like *The Beasts Of Bourbon*, Tex Perkins... They weren't too enamored with British music.

So how did *The Moodists* evolve into the *Coral Snakes*?

"Well, it petered out a bit and I didn't want to do much right away. Claire [Moore – Dave's partner and constant collaborator since *The Moodists*] kept playing with different people and made contact with other musicians. We didn't really have enough money to go back to Australia and we had in the back of our minds that we wanted to finish something. My attitude to music changed to where I became more focused on trying to write complete songs and wasn't interested in being just a singer any more, I wanted to become a *song*-writer. It started out from that kind of thing."

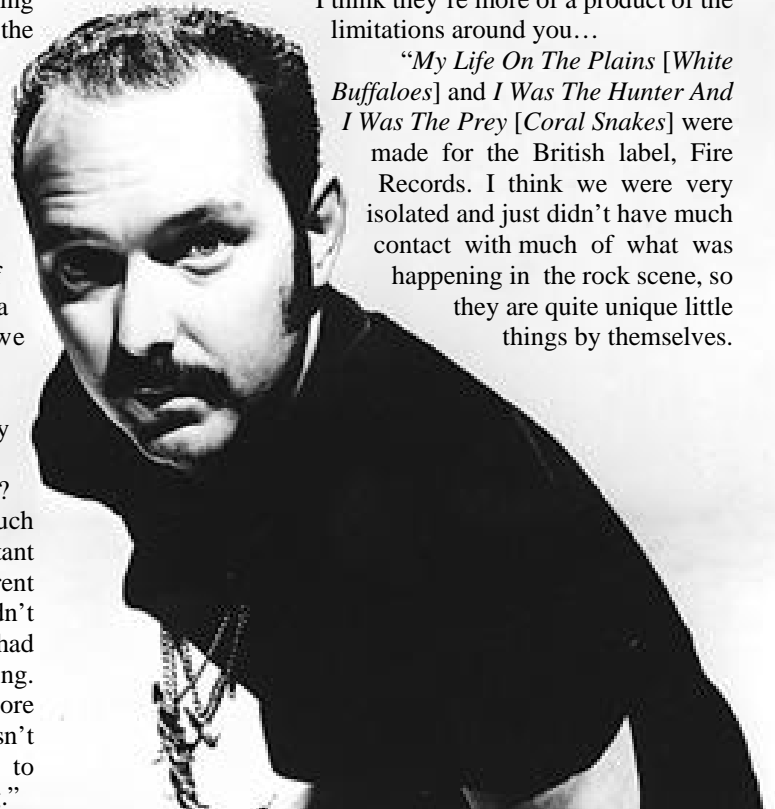
Around the same time as the *Coral Snakes* were coming into being, Dave and Claire were also centre stage in the *White Buffaloes*, what was going on there?

"We had just started working with Fire records. Claire and I had to go back to Australia for visa reasons. It felt like we had just started to get things happening with Malcolm [Ross] and Louis [Vause] and Gordy [Blair] - *Coral Snakes*. So, the whole thing sort of stayed in Australia for a little while, and we got some sort of plan together, to come back here and finish doing something with the *Coral Snakes*. In the meantime we started playing in Australia as *The White Buffaloes* – a different name to differentiate. It just grew from there because there is a lot more opportunity to play in Melbourne than here in London. Australia is not a media place at all, it is very removed from the rest of the English speaking world. So we just enjoyed the sheer thrill of playing live. I had all this imagery of wild frontiersmen, dressed in buckskin, with a curled mustache, and the album had that flavour – not strictly country-rock – we liked Gene Clark, Tim Buckley, that sort of thing."

Is there a concept behind each album, or is it just going with the flow of what your interests are at the time and the kind of thing you find yourself writing? I ask because each album seems very cohesive, yet very different from each other... I'm thinking particularly of the live album, *Lure Of The Tropics* and the classic *Night Of The Wolverine* – both very cohesive and very different in feel.

"I think they're more of a product of the limitations around you..."

"*My Life On The Plains* [*White Buffaloes*] and *I Was The Hunter And I Was The Prey* [*Coral Snakes*] were made for the British label, Fire Records. I think we were very isolated and just didn't have much contact with much of what was happening in the rock scene, so they are quite unique little things by themselves."



“Then we sat around for eighteen months, waiting for *It Was The Hunter* to come out, and during that time we were in Australia and we didn’t have anything to do – we had no songs on the radio, nothing for people to talk about, so we played live for about 12 months and developed a pretty wild rock show. We did whatever the hell we wanted, and I was this kinda juiced-up, raving fool, telling lots of gags and stories – and the record that resulted from that [*The Lure Of The Tropics*] was very different, the most different, from anything we’ve done. It was recorded at one gig on a 24 track.

“We used to do these gigs on the anniversary of the battle of Little Big Horn – just a stupid idea of mine. We used to play in a horrible pub in Melbourne and all the drinkers would be there, and on June 25th we played. That gig is from that period... when I was just this grand drunken joker. There’s a ten-minute improvised song, *The Lure Of The Tropics*, which is a little known Nineteenth Century ballad. It’s a really fierce story about a guy who was travelling around that part of America before there was a United States. Shooting Indians or dealing liquor, getting shipwrecked, hooked on morphine, and stuff... The band just improvised the music and I improvised the song. It’s quite an amazing performance, luckily.

“Then our bassist, Gordy [Blair] went back to the UK and we started playing around Melbourne. Claire started to play more percussive stuff with brushes and singing, and I was on acoustic guitar, and Robin [Casinader] was playing violin and piano and Rod [Hayward] on acoustic... and we brought the music way down in contrast to *Lure Of The Tropics*, which was a rock’n’roll animal.

“We were quite courageous then, and the first gig we did playing the songs that would become *Night Of The Wolverine* was supporting Bob Dylan in this beautiful theatre in Melbourne. We had been playing a long time and still had the sense that we were way out, running about by ourselves and nobody knew much about us, so, consequently we felt relatively free to experiment. So we played the whole set of *Night Of The Wolverine* and the people responded to it quite well!

“We made the record within limitations of studio time, and the instrumentation was semi-acoustic. We recorded all of the rhythm tracks in one day, and spent no more than one week on the whole thing! It was very spontaneous. Claire and I were walking home with the tapes at about 2 a.m. at the end of it - a delirious rush to do it all and we were quite elated to be walking home with the tapes, having achieved something. We got to experiment with textures and the long version of *Night Of the Wolverine* was supposed to be reminiscent of *Street Hassle* and we even got Tex Perkins to come in and do a cameo like Bruce Springsteen did on *Street Hassle*. We followed our ideas through to their ultimate conclusion, just for the hell of it.

Night Of The Wolverine sounds strongly biographical...

“Not strongly. Some of it is, in many ways. I’ve lived my life around bohemian musicians who all loved the lifestyle

more than anything. It is a funny scene and I don’t live in that world anymore. I like to meet musicians and I like them as people, most of my friends are musicians. There was a time where I lived in this bohemian lifestyle where everyone I knew was farting around in some band, but just doing it for the lifestyle – which I probably was too! So the line in the song, ‘I saw an old friend who was lying in the gutter with his ear full of rain, and I remember him saying I was gonna prevail...’ I knew lots of bums like that – from very comfortable families, most of them. And there are bits of Bukowski in there, where people would be looking for him in the gutter, but he’s up in the penthouse with babes in bikinis and champagne, smoking cigars. And Lenny Bruce used to say that if a comedian makes the band laugh in Las Vegas, then get rid of him straight away, because he’s obviously so hip to life that the stoned-out jazz musicians behind him are digging him, but the audience won’t know what he’s talking about. I felt I was venturing down that road a little bit at

times, hence the line, ‘You could always make the band laugh,’ so it is quite autobiographical in a sense.

Your lyrics are often full of literary references or are literary themselves in feel and flow, telling quite epic stories – would you ever consider writing a novel?

“I like the idea of working by oneself and concentrating greatly on something for a long period of time, but to think of an idea good enough! I have a book of lyrics and stories out in Australia [*It Is Written Baby*]. I have had a complex presence in the music scene that some people may be interested in...”

You tend to get the credit, musically – how does the song-writing process work? Is it a big

jamming session or do you go in with it all written?

“No jamming sessions... well there have been some... It’s been different with each album. I generally write and arrange songs around strong ideas.”

So what’s the idea behind your dandy stage image – is there a concept or do you just enjoy dressing up? To me, it seems that your music – although it does contain a lot of humour – it is also a very sensitive, poetic and heartfelt thing. Yet between the songs you often take on a sort of macho parody persona – is that so you don’t alienate the ‘lads’?

“It could have started like that. I love the self-indulgent sensuality of playing music. I’m getting more interesting bringing it back to playing. You’re not allowed that latitude much in rock. I’ve always enjoyed being large when I’m playing, and keeping a freaky kind of off-kilter atmosphere going. I don’t know why it is.

“My songs are serious, but you can’t go on and perform like the person you are when you’re writing a song, because you’re never in that same sort of solitary place, in your interior space. When you’re performing you’re trying to manifest something out in the physical world, and that’s a different scene, really. And yes, I do like all the big performance too.”

For more info on Dave Graney, Claire Moore and their many and varied projects check out their lively website:

thedavegraneyshow.com

- where you can also get hold of back catalog and current releases.

