

An interview with
DAVE DAVIES
of the

KINKS

Kinks guitarist Dave Davies had the coolest and the longest hair of any mid-60s pop hero - and that includes your Mick Jagger and your John Lennons. But even more importantly, his guitar playing on the band's 1964 number one 'You Really Got Me' remains among the most distinctive and influential in all of rock history.

With the Kinks now inactive Davies lives and works in Los Angeles, but the 1998 double CD 'Unfinished Business' (Castle ESSCD 584), which comprises a mixture of Kinks and solo material, some previously unissued, is a useful reminder of the scale and quality of his work, over four decades.

PT: In the CD booklet you call the Kinks the greatest rock'n'roll band in the world. How would you justify that claim?

Apart from all the obvious hits we've had over many years, I think the Kinks were a very diverse band. And I think also because of the endurance value of the band, because in rock'n'roll you've got to have a lot of bravado and a lot of energy. Those are some of the elements that make the Kinks, I feel, the greatest rock'n'roll band in the world and I think the Kinks' music has helped stimulate and inspire a lot of musicians over various decades, even up to modern bands now like Kula Shaker and Radiohead.

The Kinks started as a blues band...

My main influences as a kid learning to play guitar were Eddie Cochran, who was a big idol of mine. I think he was the first real white rock blues musician that I knew of - and Big Bill Broonzy and later John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters. It was because the music had such grit and Ray and I

wanted to break away from the light pop music that was on the radio at the time and I searched to try and get a unique sound, which luckily I found when I cut up the speakers of my amplifier!

When we first started we would do the odd Sonny Boy Williamson song and Bo Diddley, like 'Who Do You Love', and then we might throw in a couple of Buddy Holly songs - it was just a very experimental mix. And we used to do 'Smokestack Lightnin''. It just had more soul, more grit, more expression.

The persistent rumour that Jimmy Page played lead guitar on 'You Really Got Me' must really annoy you.

I think it's very unfortunate that he should make that claim. Because it's so obvious - I had that guitar sound. I think it cost £200 to record 'You Really Got Me', which seemed like a lot of money then, and we recorded it pretty much how we wanted to, which was a very dry kind of sound, very different to what the engineers and producers of the time were doing. We were the only ones who knew how we wanted it to sound. I think that record influenced a lot of guitar players and the music that came after it.

What does it do to someone's mental health to become as incredibly famous at the age of 16 as you did?

It doesn't do it a lot of good! But I didn't realise that for about five years. I had an absolute ball, enjoyed myself to the full and it took about five years for me to realise it was messing around with my brain a bit. But, you know, we got through it.

'All Day And All Of The Night' was later copied by the Doors, as 'Hello I Love You'. Why didn't you sue?

It was so outrageously obvious and our music publishers wanted to sue them and we saw lawyers, but Ray and I decided it was a silly idea. Funny, I met someone in L.A. who has access to some early Doors tapes and he says they did a version of 'Hello I Love You' with heavy guitar in it and they must have realised it was too blatant a

rip-off so they did it again with a more keyboard-oriented feel. I'd love to be able to get a hold of that recording!

After the Kinks' early heavy records the band completely changed personality with singles like 'Sunny Afternoon' and albums like 'Village Green Preservation Society'. Since you were identified with the heavy guitar sound of those earlier singles were you happy about the new direction and all the concept albums that continued through the 70s?

Obviously I wasn't happy with all of them but as a musician I found that playing with a band you can contribute other things than heavy guitar parts. The whole recording process is give and take and exchanging of ideas. There's an awful lot of collaboration that goes on that isn't immediately noticeable so I was getting into arrangements and working out guitar lines, rather than dominating the records. I think in a band there has to be give and take and not everybody can be a front man. And I felt my collaboration was very important through all that period. I think the only album I didn't like making that much was 'Soap Opera' and some of 'Preservation' - although I enjoyed helping to engineer that. Because we had a new studio and I was the only one knew how to use the equipment!

Was your 1967 solo hit 'Death Of A Clown' autobiographical?

Yeah. It was after those early years of raving, with all the entourage and constant partying and realising that I was getting to be a bit of a tired party animal and it was reflective, feeling that I was like in a circus and there was something quite sad about the whole thing. It was a song that expressed how I felt about what was happening to me.

Ray Davies gets a co-writing credit for 'Death Of A Clown'. What was his contribution?"

Well, you know that lyric that goes "La la la la la la la la la la ..." He wrote that lyric. He's shrewd, my brother. Very shrewd guy. And I'm a very giving person. Giving to a fault!

You released another couple of great singles but you never seemed to push

your solo career. Do you ever feel you've underachieved a bit?

Yeah, I think so. But I was very happy doing what I was doing. I thought the band was the important thing. The record company wanted me to go into the studio to make a solo album in the late 60s and we messed around with a few songs but I decided I didn't really want to do it. I liked the role of being in a band - it suited me.

Is it true you wrote the music for 'Lola' but weren't given the credit?

The main instrumental part of the song was my idea. A lot of songs grow out of situations where you get together and you rehearse and someone will come up with a riff, like the 'Lola' riff. Obviously Ray had a lyrical idea in his mind and he'd play about with it for a few days then we'd get together again and take the song a little bit further. I would say 75% of the songs grow out of situations like that. But in the end it's like if you're walking down the road and you're trying to write a poem and you see a beautiful woman cross the street and you write, "I saw a beautiful woman cross the street", do you give the woman a songwriting credit? But also I was a bit naive about the thing. The whole excitement and joy of playing was enough for me. I didn't contemplate the thought of worrying about things like that.

Is it fair to say that you feel you've been exploited and manipulated by Ray all through your career with the Kinks?

I think so. Growing up in a family you're used to helping people to do things. And taking it into the outside world and being in a band you find you're still doing it. Ray's always had a great ability to extract things from people and his environment and that's what makes him a writer. But obviously there were moments when I felt that some of the credits could have been a little bit... particularly towards the end of the 80s, when it was really starting to get to me and I was finding I wasn't being given any kind of arrangement credit. But at the end of the day the music speaks for itself. I think you've got to put aside all these personal things and look at the overall picture. The Kinks catalogue is such a

great body of work it would be negative to paint it with any kind of personal



resentment. That's life.

Do you have a favourite Kinks track?

Obviously 'You Really Got Me' is a very special record although I thought 'All Day And All Of The Night' was better. It was so much more aggressive. Listening to it on the radio for the first time it was actually scary. It's a very, very powerful record. Then there are songs like 'Dead End Street' which reminds me of my family and growing up in a working class family in North London. Oh, there's too many to name!

You resurrected your solo career with three albums in the 80s ('Dave Davies'; 'Glamour'; 'Chosen People'). How satisfied were you with them?

The first album was like I thought I had wings! It was wonderful! it was a great experience for me to get all this stuff out and I was playing drums and producing and singing. It was a really wonderful experience. On the second album I wanted to do something a little more conceptual about what was happening in the 80s, about the Reagan/Thatcher era and corporations starting to take over the world. I don't think people liked it very much but I have a lot of fond feelings for it. The third album I felt very focussed about where I wanted to go musically and what I wanted to focus my energies on spiritually and I've always been interested in metaphysics and astrology. It's another side to me that's kept me going since the early 70s when I felt things were caving in on me a bit, emotionally and stuff.

In 1996 you published your autobiography, 'Kink' (Boxtree

Limited), in which you were very open about your bisexual experiences and your abuse of women and so on. Why did you want all that sort of stuff out?

I didn't at first. But when I started writing it, actually it was quite a therapeutic exercise to get rid of all these feelings and get them all out. It was really helpful. I tried to keep it amusing and easy to read. I wanted it to be like a conversation with the reader.

Are the Kinks now totally defunct?

Not really. It would be nice for us to get back in the studio and make another album. I'd like that, but I don't know what Ray's got in his mind. I'm planning on doing some solo touring and I've got web sites that I'm running (www.davedavies.com). And I've recorded a music CD only available through the site, called 'Perusha and the Spiritual Planet', that I've done with my son Russell, who's in music college. It's a mixture of rock'n'roll and a bit of new age and ambient and dance. I really enjoyed making it.

What did you think of Ray's fictionalised autobiography, 'X-Ray'?

I thought it was really good. I really enjoyed it - until I fell asleep half way through it! I don't know why he called it 'X-Ray' and during dinner one night I clumsily said to him that maybe he should have called it 'Why Ray?' but he didn't think it was very amusing!

Dave Davies was interviewed for the Terrascope by Trevor Hodgett © Ptolemaic Terrascope 1999