



RAY MANN THREE

BY JESSE SHROCK

Despite a long track record in Sydney's underground bars and clubs, soul outfit the Ray Mann Three - the hobbyhorse of former Kid Confucius guitarist Ray Wassef - have only just ventured down to Melbourne... where they have quickly found the musical climate to be a lot more soul-friendly.

"For so long, I was still into Confucius," Wassef says. "That was my touring band - the band I would jump in the car with every weekend to go interstate, play shows, get no sleep, and go back to my day job during the week. Ray Mann Three was like my outlet for my own amusement. But when it became more of a serious thing, (coming to Melbourne) seemed a logical next step. Our first visit to Melbourne was just after we released the album, and considering that no-one had heard of us, it was a pretty extraordinary response."

While Wassef's background in the frenetic hip-hop/funk posse initially helped to give The Ray Mann Three a jumpstart, what it eventually came to represent was a point of contrast for his new outfit.

"The way that we go about our music and our shows, it's almost like Ray Mann Three is the Yang to the Kid Confucius Yin," Wassef observes. "Whereas Kid is big, and highly rehearsed and orchestrated, a kind of 'knock you off your feet' sort of show, Ray Mann Three is almost the opposite of that. It's very small, it's very intimate, and one of the driving aesthetics of the band is that it's so improvisational. I think in the initial stages, yes, using the Kid Confucius name definitely helped people at least have a reference. But later on, I found that the audiences at the gigs for the two bands were becoming increasingly disparate, for whatever reason."

The Ray Mann Three have a laid back aesthetic, for sure... but in the hands of such tight-knit, soulful players, that's no bad thing. Indeed, minimalism can sometimes be a key to uninhibited feel.

"In terms of expression, I feel, ironically enough, that less players give you a broader range," Wassef explains.

"Or at least, I feel like we have a broader range, playing as a three piece, than I've felt in larger bands before, where there tends to be more overplaying. When I set up this band, I gave my guys a real strict brief of: 'Play less.' And what I've found is that people lower their defences quite a bit, which gives us a lot more room to move, and we suddenly start to sound fuller. We can do something that, maybe volume-wise, isn't half as loud as a band twice the size, but intensity-wise, easily eclipses it."

When Wassef, along with bassist Byron Luiters and drummer Bart Denaro (recently replaced with long-

"AND WHAT I'VE FOUND IS THAT PEOPLE LOWER THEIR DEFENCES QUITE A BIT, WHICH GIVES US A LOT MORE ROOM TO MOVE, AND WE SUDDENLY START TO SOUND FULLER. WE CAN DO SOMETHING THAT, MAYBE VOLUME-WISE, ISN'T HALF AS LOUD AS A BAND TWICE THE SIZE, BUT INTENSITY-WISE, EASILY ECLIPSES IT."

time touring drummer Grant Gerathy) stepped into the studio with noted Sydney funk and r'n'b producer Buckman (aka Tony Buchen), their goal of "live and organic" helped them turn the album around in three days.

"We wanted to do it in as few takes as possible, both for the aesthetics and also for the money," Wassef laughs. "Once we got in the studio, it was like, only one or two takes per song. And if somebody did something that wasn't quite right or whatever... too bad, that's the way it stays. For the kind of band that we are - we don't rehearse, and we try to never play something the same way twice live - it wouldn't have made sense to do things any other way."

The trio did splash out, though, for a little extra production on some of the album's highlight songs, with the added string and horn parts adding a motown-like flair.

"Those extra elements - the horns and the strings - were pure Buchman suggestions," Wassef says. "That was his idea for how to take these two songs to a slightly more emotional level, without compromising the basic concept of the record. To his credit, he pulled it out in a way that, as you said, recalled more motown than anything else - which is just as true to the style brief as any of the other things that we've tried to do."

Wassef and company are now gearing up for a series of regular residencies in Melbourne, hoping that the positive reaction will continue.

"I've heard from a lot of the local musicians who have been turning up to our shows that there's a real pride and ownership over soul, groove, or whatever you want to call it, in Melbourne," Wassef says. "It's taken very seriously. In Sydney, it's quite a different story. This kind of music is not very popular. And most people who are playing music that might be called 'funk' or 'soul' or whatever don't take it so seriously... it's more a means of making money. We're in a strange position of trying to do something artistically, in a town that doesn't really respond to it. And slowly I'm discovering that, in Melbourne, it's very much appreciated."

The Ray Mann Three play the Retreat Hotel, Brunswick, this Saturday February 14, at Veludo's, St Kilda, on Sunday 15 and 22, then a cruise boat on the Yarra River with Simon Wright & Eclective, Direct Influence, Simon Philips, Coby Grant and Emily Grayson on Saturday 21. The self-titled album is out now through MGM.

Dallas Frasca
LADY LUCK
NATIONAL TOUR 09

Fri 20th February
The Espy – Gershwin Room

Fri 27th February
Ruby's Lounge – Belgrave

Sat 28th February
Peninsula Lounge – Moorooduc

w/ special guests:
THE BLACKWATER FEVER

www.dallasfrasca.com

Brand new single "STRONG MAN" featuring Xavier Rudd.