

Xavier Rudd

Brett Winterford
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Singer, instrumentalist, greenie . . . Xavier Rudd can do so many things at once.



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WATCHING the surfer-styled Xavier Rudd simultaneously shred on a slide guitar, growl through a didgeridoo and throw his limbs at various percussive instruments in front of a huge throng of ravers, the casual observer is struck with two thoughts.

One is admiration for his ambidexterity. You simply must envy Rudd for being able to do so much, so well, at once.

"Six instruments," he reckons, is the most he has ever played on stage at one time - six out of the 30-odd different instrument lines snaking away from his chair on stage to the sound desk.

The other thought is his timing. Rudd's couldn't be better. And it's not just his feet or his fingers, or the addition of kit drummer Dave Tolley on his latest album.

Rudd's best timing is his message. Consciousness about global warming, once the realm of hippies and doomsayers, is now a fixture in the suburbs. Rudd - the barefoot, vegetarian one - dropped in on that whole eco-rootsy-worldy-music thing just as its momentum swelled to enormous proportions. It's a bigger wave than he ever could have imagined riding at home in Torquay, Victoria.

But riding big swells does have its dangers. First, there are comparisons to whoever rode that break first (Jack Johnson? Pete Murray? Ben Harper? John Butler?), several of whom are sounding flat of late.

Rudd is determined to be less predictable. His latest album, *Dark Shades Of Blue* - his fifth in six years - is as amped up and psychedelic as its predecessor, *White Moth*, was subtle and understated. (And where there was Harper or Butler yesterday, Rudd notes, "there was

Muddy Waters before". This roots stuff isn't entirely new, he says. It only ever felt new in Australia.)

The other danger is when Rudd's publicist describes him as an "activist". Rudd isn't too keen on the label.

"I have friends who are real activists," he says. "But I wouldn't call myself an activist. Not while I'm touring on jet planes. The music industry is a toxic environment and I live a toxic existence.

"What I am is somebody inspired by the real activists; I write music for them and about them. I am inspired by our earth, by culture, by the aesthetic things that make me tick."

Among Rudd's favourite causes are Sea Shepherd, the ship-butting nemesis of the Japanese whaling fleet, the "Friends of Australian Rock Art", who protect ancient relics from new mining developments in north-western Australia, and various groups aimed at saving the Tasmanian forests.

"There are so many good groups doing good things," he says. "It's been inspirational to connect with these people and watch them grow over the past eight to 10 years. The awareness is getting stronger. More people are getting involved with groups they might not have known about in the past."

Rudd concedes that while there are plenty of protests and movements, there aren't a lot of solutions or change. "A lot of change needs to come from people on a smaller scale first," he says.

Rudd does his level best. His family lives in a sustainable house on the Victorian coast. They try to get the simple things right. And that's all he expects from anybody else.

"People talk about living sustainably but they are still lazy when it comes down to it," he says. "Even the people talking about change won't recycle unless they can find a bin handy to them. What I've seen in my career so far is networking and building. Hopefully solutions will follow."

For now, Rudd is happy to be the conduit that brings like-minded activists together.

"I guess I see myself as channelling the crowd's energy," he says.

"Everyone is spinning out good stuff. I'm receiving it and giving it back. Doesn't matter if it's 500 or 10,000 people, I'm lucky that way, that at the kind of places and festivals I play, people are there to celebrate peace and love and good connections between people. I'm pretty lucky to be making a living in that kind of space."