

STEVE GRIEVE AND THE MOURNERS – PRESS RELEASE



It's a measure of just how jaw-droppingly good they were that their biggest fans were other musicians, even internationally successful headline acts who were often in genuine danger of being blown off the stage by the unknown local support band who played their own songs.

Steve Grieve and The Mourners inhabit an enigmatic virtual Neverland of hazy musical dreams, outback chicanery, and lumpy, hybrid rock, roots and urbane blues edifices. Since its inception some decades ago the band has been an on-again off-again vehicle for the songwriting of Steve Grieve and Dan Myles. Performing alongside such iconic acts as Dr Feelgood, Johnny Winter, and Lonnie Mack, and despite their best intentions, the band has acquired an improbable yet vaguely mythical cult status on an increasingly vast yet desultory Australian musical landscape.

Since Dan's recent return from a 14 year hiatus in the US many demons have been lain to rest and the band's most recent confrontations with crass commercialism, lazy stereotypes and alliteration have been ceremoniously captured on the new album *Caterpillar Maze*. Notwithstanding a busy career as chief mischief maker at home and sideman to prestigious artists including Jimmy Witherspoon, Margaret Urlich, Christine Anu and Wendy Matthews, Steve remains unperturbed by the enduring gravity of the task before the band. Dan's lengthy sojourn and travels across the US have delivered deep and rich musical insights, revealing new, worthy and compelling artistic battlegrounds. Miraculously, and against all the odds, Steve Grieve and The Mourners live to ride again another day. That day is today, for the most part. Sometimes yesterday, and just occasionally tomorrow instead.

Album review: *Caterpillar Maze* – Steve Grieve and The Mourners

It takes your average caterpillar about a week or so to emerge from its cocoon as a magnificent brand spanking new butterfly. The process is not pretty – the caterpillar must first destroy and consume itself before recycling its bits to emerge completely transformed. In adverse conditions the cocooning process has been known to take a year. In the case of legendary cult blues-rock band, Steve Grieve and The Mourners, it has taken considerably longer to find their way out of their own 'Caterpillar Maze' but the wait – even one as long as this – has been worth it.

From the moment the band first emerged out of Canberra's north in the eighties, they were earmarked for big things. They were simply dynamite on stage and quickly

built a large and loyal local following. It's a measure of just how jaw-droppingly good they were that their biggest fans were other musicians, even internationally successful headline acts who were often in genuine danger of being blown off the stage by the unknown local support band who played their own songs. When I heard whispers that a Mourners album was finally on the way, I was expecting a kind of retrospective of older recordings and live tracks from back in the day, and I would have loved that! But *Caterpillar Maze* is a very different beast indeed.

The Mourners tip their cap to the past with “Neighbours”, a funk-laden number about the evils of the ‘Neighbourhood Watch’ program, which dates back to the eighties but has been given a makeover here. It has always been the policy of the blues and roots-bred Mourners, which is now pretty much the writing team of guitarist Steve Grieve and singer Dan Myles, to respect and pay homage to the past while looking to the future. To be true to the principles of the blues but also be committed to taking that tradition forward and not get bogged down playing the same twelve bars Muddy Waters was playing 70 years ago. And they have certainly done that.

Sometimes the music gods, fate, kismet, geography or even immigration hostels throw people together who just perfectly complement each other to make a writing partnership that creates real magic. So it is with Grieve and Myles, who have created some magic here. Perhaps a little jazzier, slicker and poppier than I expected, it took me by surprise a little bit at first but it has grown on me more and more with each subsequent listen – quality songwriting will do that.

Caterpillar Maze kicks off with the breezy “Honeysuckle Hill”, a country and funk-tinged gem of a pop song (could we call it funk try, perhaps?) before “Neighbours” kicks in the door to discover Myles doing “housework in the nude”. The disappointment of the Mourners’ inability to break through back in the day – as well as gratitude to still be around, given the high attrition rate amongst their friends and contemporaries from that era – seems to be referenced in the hard-rocking “Kiss Those Days Goodbye”, in which Myles laments “I believe the only crime, are the years we leave behind, too afraid to speak our minds, thrown against the waves of time, we got lucky and survived”. And there are great songs and moments all over *Caterpillar Maze*. “Kiss Those Days Goodbye” is brilliant, and its unexpected extended outro is icing on the cake.

“Emale” is just a superb slab of sleazy blues rock rifferama and an amusing indictment of internet porn, the title track is masterful and “Single Man Town” just sounds like a ready-made hit to me, and features some tasty slide playing from Grieve, who provides plenty for guitar nerds to marvel and puzzle over. Grieve is regarded as one of the very finest guitar players in the country, having toured with the likes of Wendy Matthews, Christine Anu and Margaret Urlich as well as stints with US blues legends Elvin Bishop, and Jimmy Witherspoon, and has also taught out of Southern Cross University, so be prepared for some serious six-string wizardry.

It's never intrusive though, Grieve is way too smart for that and always serves the song, and there are some very tasty touches. On both “Lost In A Caterpillar Maze” and “Jubilation” Grieve seems to have basically written string arrangements or horn parts for both songs but has used layered harmonised guitars instead, which sounds incredible. And Myles, who has always possessed one of the finest voices in rock, is sounding as good as ever. If anything his voice has gained a little character and experience as has his writing, slightly coloured by the wisdom and amused cynicism that comes with having been around the block a few times. *Caterpillar Maze* is an old-fashioned album in a way, in that you get a little bit more out of it every time you listen to it. Steve Grieve and The Mourners don't sound like anyone else, really, but if you're someone who doesn't mind a bit of Allman Brothers, Gov't Mule, Stevie Ray Vaughan and maybe the Badloves, you may well go nuts over this. — Ben Vernon

Ben Vernon is an award-winning journalist and erstwhile musician based in North Queensland. He has covered music and entertainment, news and sport in the mainstream print media with Melbourne's Herald Sun, the Townsville Bulletin and Brisbane's Sunday Mail. Ben currently works freelance from his home on Magnetic Island.

Sometimes the music gods, fate, kismet, geography or even immigration hostels throw people together who just perfectly complement each other to make a writing partnership that creates real magic. So it is with Grieve and Myles, who have created some magic here.
