

— Turtles singer sheds his shell

Howard Kaylan assembles obscurities for solo debut

Howard Kaylan's first solo album took 44 years, but that's somewhat understandable considering the reliable repertoire he has accumulated from his tenure with The Turtles. Thanks to the chart-toppers they stockpiled in the '60s, he's been able to bank on the band's material most of his career.

Nevertheless, Kaylan said he is no longer content to merely rehash the hits. He recently released *Dust Bunnies*, an album that finds him tackling a set of songs that spans the past 40 years. Although the writing credits boast names such as Tim Buckley, John Miles, Charles Avonour, The Left Banke's Michael Brown, and Jerry Yester and Judy Henske, most are obscure outcasts and unlikely B-sides far removed from most people's musical memories.

"They're songs I discovered as album tracks, songs I used to love, songs the Turtles could never do," Kaylan explained. "I heard them and thought, 'I could cover that.' These great songs became the concept. My only criteria was that the songs had to have some sort of historic or nostalgic element."

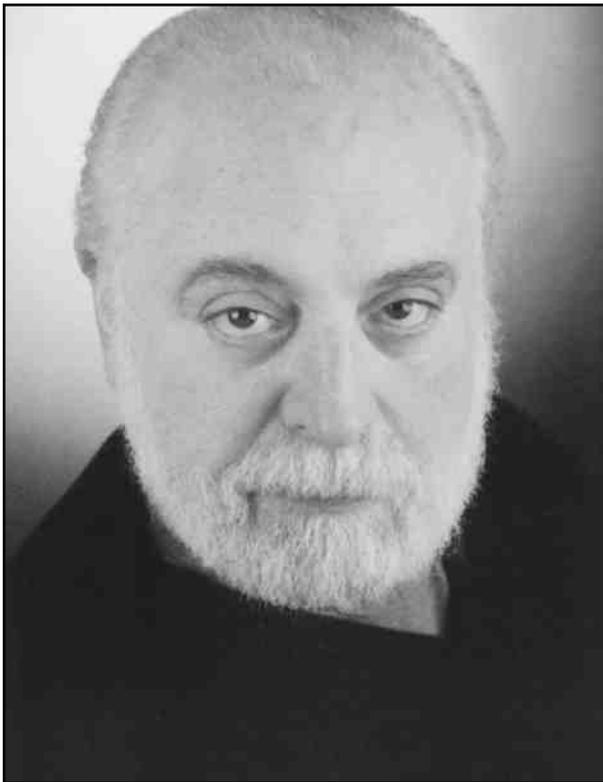
He was mostly driven by the desire to resume recording. "It certainly wasn't financial," he said. "I really missed going into the studio. We hadn't recorded a Flo & Eddie album since the early '80s. Mark [Volman] and I live so far apart, and we don't get together that often. I live in Seattle, and he lives in Nashville. It's been a long time since those days when we'd regularly get together and do background vocals for other people. When we lived in L.A., David Cassidy would call, and we'd be at the studio in 10 minutes. When we were in New York, Duran Duran or The Ramones would call, and we'd be there right away. But for the last 10 years we've been on the road and we've literally stopped recording. I'm 59 years old now, and this might be my last chance to make a great statement."

After such a long absence, Kaylan admitted he wasn't sure exactly how to proceed. "I was going to go in and use a group name so I could disguise my real identity," he recalled. "Then I decided I'd do a demo presentation and take it around, play it for my friends and people I knew and see what kind of reaction I'd get."

Recording took the circuitous route. Kaylan gave his keyboardist, Andy Cahan, the original records so that he could reproduce the arrangements on synthesizer in his basement studio. The tracks were sent to Rick Howard, a guitarist Cahan knew in New York, and Howard then hired a band to overdub Cahan's synthesizer parts. Kaylan took those tapes to Billy Bob Thornton's home recording studio, where he synchronized the band's performances with the vocals he had originally recorded with Cahan.

"It was a painstaking process," Kaylan recalled. "I had to get every beat in just the right place. We then had to extract Andy's synthesizer so it would sound like a real band. It took two weeks to get everything in sync, and we'd work until 4 a.m. some nights. But if you have to pass that time with anybody, who better than Billy Bob Thornton? By the way, I've yet to meet the guitar player, the bass player or the drummer, but thank you everybody, you did a great job. It's a virtual band for my virtual label. It became a product totally of my imagination. It was therapeutic in a way. I had to totally trust my vocals and my instincts."

Although the autobiographical "Easy Street," the set's sole original (co-composed by Kaylan and Volman), bears obvious references to The Turtles, Kaylan admit-



Courtesy of Howard Kaylan

ted he never felt that strongly about the abilities of his former colleagues. "The original Turtles, the band that existed between 1965 and 1970, was not that great a band," he conceded. "We had the good fortune to be able to pick out records that fit our vocal style and fit the community, but we weren't that strong musically. But the songs worked great because we had horns, strings and vocals washing over those chords. When we had a chance to be in Frank Zappa's band and actually hear a great guitarist, we were mesmerized."

These days Kaylan and Volman still tour regularly, billing themselves as The Turtles Featuring Flo & Eddie. Kaylan said he sees his former bandmates on occasion but confessed, "It's sad in a couple of cases." The current incarnation of The Turtles is actually two different groups — a New York-based band for East

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Coast gigs and a L.A. outfit for western dates. "We learned long ago how to do this in an economical kind of way," Kaylan conceded.

Surprisingly, The Turtles have not been inducted into The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, a fact Kaylan doesn't find surprising. "It's very political. It has very little to do with success and a lot to do with what label you were on. If we had recorded for one of the WEA labels, we would have been in years ago. The people who aren't connected with the old guard — people like Ahmet Ertegun or Clive Davis — they're not going to get in. We recorded for White Whale, which was owned by two guys who were sort of shady. There were rumors the company was started with funny money.... Unfortunately, the music isn't treated separately.... It's mixed in with the politics."

Looking ahead, Kaylan is touting several other projects in addition to the album, including a film he's produced based on an actual evening spent with Jimi Hendrix at London's Speakeasy Club in April 1967, a docudrama of sorts titled, appropriately, *My Dimer With Jimi*. He and Volman are also preparing a new multimedia show that documents the history of The Turtles and Flo & Eddie. Then too, there's the book he began writing two years ago, which he said he finally feels inspired to finish.

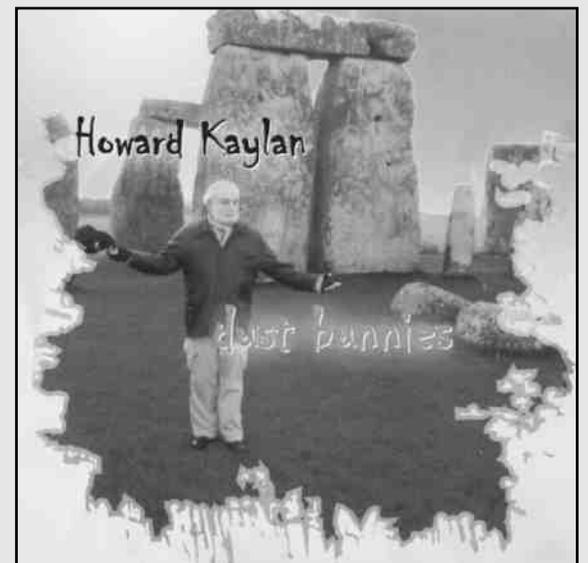
Still, Kaylan insisted he's not interested in dwelling on his former glories. "The past used to scare me, but now it doesn't," he said. "I used to lament it.... It used to depress me, but now I celebrate it and move on. I want to leave a legacy beyond 'Happy Together.' I don't want to spend my life re-creating. I'd rather spend it creating. I've been good at re-creating since 1962."

— Lee Zimmerman

HOWARD KAYLAN Dust Bunnies Intentional Records (none)

Despite his seasoned status, on his debut solo album, *Dust Bunnies*, The Turtles' Howard Kaylan displays the veracity and tenacity of a younger, hungrier upstart, an impassioned performer whose voice conveys unbridled emotion. That's evident at the outset with "Pleasant Street," an anguished outburst that belies any "happy together" sentiments, its title notwithstanding. "Snowblind" and "Love Songs In The Night" make for a pair of tough, tenacious rockers, each capped with riveting refrains. The elaborately orchestrated ballads "What's That Got To Do With Me," "Two By Two" and "A Young Girl" find Kaylan's voice soaring with grandeur. "Easy Street," the album's one original, boasts an exhilarating chorus that rivals any of those found in his classic Turtles tunes.

"Music" is the only misstep, with guest Billy Bob Thornton intruding on the lavish production with a rambling dissertation about the meaning of music. But



who needs Billy Bob's babbling? Kaylan's performances express all one needs to know.

— Lee Zimmerman