



Aaron Lingenfelter

Cold Shot: Former Mofro guitarist Daryl Hance injects some dank rock into the local music scene.

Primordial Stomp

The debut release by former Mofro guitarist Daryl Hance is an impressive collection of roots rock alchemy

DARYL HANCE

Friday, March 11 at 10 p.m.

Mojo Kitchen, 1500 Beach Blvd., Jax Beach

Tickets are \$8

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If there is a genre of music more maligned and mislabeled than punk, it's swamp rock. In the able hands of a Tony Joe White, we get the superlative, guitar and grunt-driven menace of 1969's "Poke Salad Annie." Yet when molded in the cornpone clutches of a Jerry Reed, we get 1970's syrupy "Amos Moses." Though the genre is rooted in gnarly '50s blues and R&B bogs of Louisiana and southeast Texas with artists like Bobby Charles and Slim Harpo, the real alpha point of the scene is best exemplified by Creedence Clearwater Revival's swamp-a-delicious opus "Born on the Bayou." And though CCR was actually bred in the down-home delta of San Francisco's Bay Area, "Bayou" (1969) is the archetypal marshland jam, containing elements utilized by everyone from contemporaries Dr. John and ZZ Top to '80s L.A. cowpunks The Gun Club: dominant seven chords, a muted but swinging rhythm and an acknowledgment of a darker, voodoo-vibed realm.

Locally born rockers JJ Grey & Mofro have to contend with the moniker whether they like it or not, but the debut release from ex-Mofro guitarist Daryl Hance is a surprising departure. "Hallowed Ground" (darylhance.com) is a remarkably well-made album of agile, bulletproof rockers and contemplative ballads that contains neither Fender Strat masturbation nor any mention of bullfrogs a-matin' in the mean moonlight. Speaking to Folio Weekly from his home "between Maxville and Macclenny," the 42-year-old Hance says he's on indefinite hiatus from playing with Grey & Mofro, acknowledging that some of that decision was suggested by the frontman.

"JJ just encouraged me to do this. I was trying to do both bands, but now I see that would have been next to impossible."

Hance and Grey have been playing together for decades, first with Faith Nation (1990-'93) and then in the mid-'90s with Alma Zuma, which eventually morphed into JJ Grey & Mofro. Like Grey, Hance admits to influences ranging from old-school metal to the blues, which he first heard while in his early 20s. That discovery in turn hipped Hance to an equally powerful awakening. "I heard Curtis Mayfield, Stevie Wonder and Sly & the Family Stone and just thought [laughs], 'holy shit!'"

Mixed in Nashville, "Hallowed Ground" is deftly engineered by Matt Grondin at Jim DeVito's Retrophonics Studios, the mix translates Anthony Cole's drums into a John Bonham wallop while Shane Platten's bass anchors the songs into a near prog-rock measure. Keyboardist Adam Scone adds tasteful Hammond B3 filigrees throughout. On the harder cuts, Hance's guitar is all crackling fury, his solos sounding like they were peeled off as he sat on his amp, another half-joint burning in the ashtray. But Hance shows restraint when unfurling his formidable expertise, realizing there's more power in one vital note than in a flurry of acrobatic, arpeggiated guitar runs.

The 13 tracks run the gamut from rockers to tasteful balladry, Hance's chilled-out vocal delivery finding company with JJ Cale or fellow Okie, the sorely underrated Jesse Ed Davis. The acoustic cuts "In the Dark" and "A Breath Away" find a weird nexus between Jerry Jeff Walker and the narcotic cadence of David Gilmour from 1970s-era Pink Floyd. Superficial comparisons could be drawn to Hance's disc and acts like The Black Keys or even Beck, but this debut from the Macclenny homeboy is more uncut psychedelic blues than indie rock pastiche. If at times "Hallowed Ground" can come across a shade monochromatic, who really cares, if it's a groovy-ass color?

"There is a whole stigma attached to it for what people call 'noodle bands' — like when you're basically the backdrop to somebody's acid trip," he says. Yet even the mighty Mofro couldn't dodge radiation from tie-dyed trustafarians, or their apparent need for a spellchecker. "We showed up at one gig in Memphis and they had spelled the name on the marquee 'Mo' Phro'" Hance explains with a chuckle. "As in *Phish*."

For his upcoming gig at Jax Beach's Mojo Kitchen, Hance's band will consist of a trio, joined by bassist Platten and drummer Mike Romine. Shows are already booked for the Southeast, and then the band trips west to Texas and the Plains States. Hance admits he's still getting used to the adjustment of leading his own band. The segue from sideman to the spotlight has been awkward at times. "I initially tried to keep it incognito, but then the club owners would put 'Mofro' on the poster. So people would videotape me suckin' up the joint — and now there's evidence on YouTube! But some of it's not too bad. Most of it's like, 'This shit sucks!' [Laughs] But maybe I just shouldn't watch 'em." □

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