

## Crimson & Clover

Written by bluesever  
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### Crimson & Clover

It's pretty much a three-chord pop song with inarticulate lyrics, but **Tommy James and the Shondells'** classic is up there with the best. The weird logic of dreams. Images, colours, nonsense word combinations. They seem to make sense. Tommy James woke up one day with the phrase 'Crimson & Clover' in his head. Crimson, his favourite colour, clover, his favourite flower. (There is also a species of clover native to Europe called the crimson clover.)

### Crimson & Clover

A song to fit the phrase was written by Tommy James and bassist Mike Vale, but was scrapped. His following collaboration with drummer Peter Lucia, Jr. was more successful. In interview with Tommy James, he told: *"They were just two of my favorite words that came together. Actually, it was one morning as I was getting up out of bed, and it just came to me, those two words. And it sounded so poetic. I had no idea what it meant, or if it meant anything. They were just two of my favorite words. And Mike Vale and I – bass player – actually wrote another song called 'Crimson and Clover.' And it just wasn't quite there. And I ended up writing 'Crimson and Clover' with my drummer, Pete Lucia, who has since passed away."*



### Crimson clover

Tommy James scored two chart toppers and five other top 10 hits in the US between 1966 and 1969 with his group the Shondells. After all, this was achieved while not only making the difficult, rarely successful transition from garage rock and bubblegum pop to full-fledged psychedelia, but for a label, Roulette Records, that didn't exactly believe in paying its artists their rightful dues.



### Tommy James

The group had worked with producers Bo Gentry and Ritchie Cordell since early 1967, beginning with the classic "I Think We're Alone Now." The Gentry-Cordell formula continued to bear fruit with "Mony Mony" in the early summer of 1968, but Tommy felt it was time for a change, as he wanted to take control of his own records.



### Tommy James and the Shondells

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In late 1968 during in the midst of psychedelia, "**Crimson & Clover**" was recorded in about 5 hours, with Tommy playing most of the instruments, Mike and Peter on bass and drums. It's a very simple chord progression, just C, F and G with a key jump midway through. The tremolo effect on the guitar vibrates along with the song's rhythm and it gets me every time. The band had the idea to stick the same effect on the vocals, with the microphone plugged into an Ampeg guitar amp with the tremolo effect, and Tommy singing "*Crimson & Clover, over and over.*"



## Tommy James and the Shondells

Tommy made a rough mix to play to record exec Morris Levy, for his feedback. The band had intended to improve on the mix with ambient sound and echo. A few days later James stopped by WLS radio station in Chicago, a station he'd already had a good relationship with, to get their view on it. After an interview talking about the forthcoming single, he agreed to play a rough mix for WLS off-air. Without his knowledge, they recorded the song, and played it on air in November 68 as a world exclusive.



### Tommy James and Morris Levy

Morris Levy initially pleaded with WLS not to play the record before the release, but changed his mind after the enthusiastic reaction it generated. Roulette Records produced a specially pressed single and posted it to listeners who had called up about the song. WLS was also sent 800 copies for promotional purposes. James wasn't allowed to produce the initial mix, and the rough mix was released as a single, with "Some Kind of Love" as the B-Side.



### Crimson & Clover, single, 1968

Tommy says he is thankful for the complete artistic control that Roulette gave him at this critical point in his career *"Probably no artist was given more creative freedom that I was, and I must say that I'm very grateful to Roulette for giving it to me,"* he notes. *"I literally did everything from the artwork to the producing and recording -- everything but setting up record racks on the street corner. Roulette trusted me with huge budgets and allowed me to trust my own instincts. If I had been with a bigger label, I don't think I would have been given that kind of freedom."*

