

Q&a

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COMEBACK 'KICK'

They came from the eighties: INXS returns with "Elegantly Wasted"



INXS is back in full swing.

High on the 27th floor of Manhattan's plush Rihga Royal hotel, INXS' Michael Hutchence and Kirk Pengilly look every bit their ages --37 and 38, respectively -- and rightfully so. During their 20-year career, they've gone from playing pubs in Sydney, Australia, to performing at Live Aid and in London's Wembley Stadium, selling over 20 million albums in the process. They've also watched the spotlight fade as the '80s became the '90s and popular tastes turned from soulful pop-rock to grunge and Britpop. Their fairly adventurous 1992 effort, "Welcome to Wherever You Are," was a commercial disappointment by INXS standards, and the following year's "Full Moon, Dirty Hearts" bombed miserably.

But just when INXS seemed destined to become a lead story on MTV's "It Came From the '80s," the band is back with a new album, "Elegantly Wasted." The times may have changed considerably, but charismatic frontman Hutchence hasn't lost his charm, and the band hasn't lost its knack for near-perfect pop. But will anyone listen? As Hutchence runs his hands through his still-perfect locks and Pengilly nervously fidgets with the lighter he's just used to ignite a hand-rolled cigarette, they ponder that very question, the joys of fatherhood and the fine line between pop and not-pop.

Rolling Stone.com: INXS has been gone for a while. What's been going on since we last heard from the band?

Kirk Pengilly: Well, we took a break from working together for two and a half years, and everyone has just been off doing different things and keeping busy.

Michael Hutchence: We were doing all kinds of stuff. I did a song for the

"Batman" soundtrack and a song for "Baywatch." I also did a song for the "No Talking ... Just Head" record and I'm slowly putting together some ideas for a solo record as well. Tim [Farriss] has done a film. [In Sydney](#), we have a film festival called the Tropicana and now everyone has become a filmmaker! And oh yeah, I had a baby!

A girl, right? How has being a father changed your life?

MH: It's fantastic. My life is better, actually. Her name is Tiger. So a lot of stuff has been going on. We have a new record coming out in the States, new management, new agency, new record label -- a lot of dead wood out of the way, I guess.

Looking back, were you prepared for your success and subsequent come down?

KP: There was a lot of innocence about us when we got together. But I don't think you can ever be prepared for anything like this, really. And I don't feel we've come down at all. We just didn't consciously want to make another ["Kick."](#) that's all. We wanted to move on.

MH: We've always known that we walk a very fine line in INXS between pop and not-pop. When we get it right, it's a very unique thing. So as soon as ["Kick" succeeded], we were very suspicious. We were like, 'OK, that is that side, now let's try this side.' We've always been pretty fuzzy about having our feet on the ground, and if our records only sell 4 million instead of 10 million, then so what -- as long as we're making the records we want to make. Now if we kept trying to make hit pop records and it just wasn't happening, that would be a disaster; that would really fuck us up.

Do you guys feel like victims of a fickle audience?

MH: No, I don't think we were victims as much as some other bands. Luckily, we kind of faded away rather than became obsolete. And I remember it being perversely part of my plan. In this strange way, by the time we finished the "Kick" tour, I could see what was happening. I saw all these boys with long curly hair and leather pants on and I just went, 'Ah, fuck! I'm outta here!' I cut off all my hair [and] started wearin' glasses and cotton suits. And the next time anybody saw me, that's how it was.

How do you compare the new record with the last, "Full Moon, Dirty Hearts?"

KP: Well, it's sort of a different animal altogether. "Full Moon, Dirty Hearts" was a very difficult album to make and we put ourselves in the most difficult situation to make it. We were locked up like a bunch of animals and, like Michael said, there were a lot of changes going on musically around the world.

MH: Yeah, and for "Elegantly Wasted," we talked and talked and talked before doing anything. Usually, Andrew [Farriss] brings all these bits and pieces into the studio and I bring all these bits and pieces. But this time, we didn't bring anything into the writing. So when we sat down, we were much more clear in our heads [about what we wanted to do]. For the first song, we started about midday and laid down the lyrics and arrangements, and by 8 o'clock, that was essentially it. And that's how you hear it on the record.

KP: So we were like, 'OK, that's number one, that's the start of the record!'

MH: And it stayed the start of the record. I also like the trippy side to this record. But you know, on the last record, I certainly threw a few bottles here and there -- and had them thrown back -- but now we are all a gang again and we'll see how it goes.

KEVIN RAUB



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