

Elegantly



INXS story by J.

Holy shit! I didn't really, you know.... Not until I did some solid research. I mean, INXS are champions. No bullshit. No hype. No running up the flag to make them sound good. They're the genuine article! Let me just remind you of some, and I stress only some, of the things they've accomplished. They've sold out Wembley Stadium in London four nights running. They've had Grammy nominations. They've won Brit awards for Best International band. They've sold out Madison Square Garden in New York. They've played to a record 100,000 people in Brazil. They sell records from Helsinki to Rio, from Venezuela to Indonesia, from London to Paris and beyond. You see INXS are still one of the few truly global acts. They've just finished a nine week tour of South Africa, England, Europe and the United States where the reaction has been as you'd expect. Concert reviews and critical reaction in the U.S. alone have been phenomenal. Just check the postings on the Internet. Now they're back home and touring again. They're sleek and modern and they're as big as it gets.

INXS have also worked with some of the best people in the business. These include Nick Launay, who produced Midnight Oil's early albums and silverchair's latest effort, Bob Clearmountain, whose name on an album is almost a guarantee of a superb mix, and producer Chris Thomas, who has among his many credits the *Never Mind The Bollocks* album by the Sex Pistols. They've even had the legendary Ahmet Ertegun from the equally legendary Atlantic Records label 'borrow' their stash. On top of all that, at the Edgfest in Texas just a couple of months ago where Beck and Cake were supposed to be headlining those guys refused to go on after INXS. The Americans weren't fools. They knew a good live act when they saw one and they weren't going to mess about with that. To top it all off Everclear covered one of their early hits, *Don't Change!*

But do you know what's worth more than all of that? They came to my hometown out the back of beyond many years ago and played their socks off because they knew it was important. Important for us and important for them. They had the guts to tour their arses off in this country before they headed out to become lords of the rock and roll jungle. That desire to conquer the world has often been cited by many younger bands, and their managers, as a justification for heading directly overseas to crack the international market before building a large and loyal following in Australia.

"I think they're making a mistake. I do," offers Andrew Farriss from down the phoneline connected to INXS's publicist's office in Sydney. "If only because - how can I put this -

there's a sentimental roughness to Australians and a grittiness. Not so much in the cities although it exists to a lesser degree, but out in the regional and country areas there exists a people and a culture that you don't find anywhere else in the world. As most young people do, you tend to absorb those influences more easily. I think that is what they're missing because that is what will make them different. In the international circuit and in the United States they don't really need or want another American country act, or an American rock band. They want someone with a little twist that makes them a little different and in absorbing that Australian culture through touring right around the country I know that makes us look different. I know it does. You do need to do that and that's exactly what it takes. You don't achieve anything without the hard yards."

"Sometimes I feel like I need to see an analyst about it," laughs Farriss realising the turn the conversation has taken. "It's been incredibly over the top what we have actually achieved in touring terms," he continues. "It's really mind boggling. Just in the United States alone, and not including Canada, we've probably done thirteen or maybe fourteen three month tours by road, which means that's a different town every night. And that's just in one territory."

That, as anyone who has been out on the road will tell you, is an incredible amount of hard work. But without the songs to keep their motors running INXS would have failed many years ago. Along with Michael Hutchence, Farriss is one of the key songwriters and the major musical force behind INXS. He has been likened to Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys by people like the Edge. They first met when U2 were recording their new album just down the road from the hotel room in Dublin, Ireland, where Farriss and Hutchence were writing songs for INXS's new record *Elegantly Wasted*. But that didn't stop Farriss from concentrating on the job at hand.

"We'd been working on the music and talking about what we were trying to do with the actual song," he says candidly. "Michael went out that night and I stayed back to keep working on some parts for the song. He came back later on and I played him what I'd been doing. He said 'that's great but I'm a little tired right now. I'm feeling a little bit wasted and in fact he said 'I feel elegantly wasted.' And he wrote the phrase down and I said 'that's about right!' We didn't think about it much and the next morning he came in and we said 'that's an interesting phrase,' and we fooled around with it for a chorus. It was only after we'd done the song that many people commented that the phrase had been associated

INXS

by Johnnie Clott

with Keith Richards, who incidentally I admire greatly. I think he's fantastic. It was a bit more naive than that. We didn't set out to consciously make a connection with the Rolling Stones or Keith Richards."

"We used Bruce Fairbairn on the new album," Farriss continues, "and I co-produced it with him. But even when we were working with Chris Thomas back in that middle period with *Kick* and *X* we weren't looking for someone to make us mega-platinum sales, although we'd always dreamed about that. What we were really looking for was someone who could get into experimentation on a musical level with us and really mess around with what we were doing. We wanted to come up with a sound that was exciting and I definitely think we did that. You see in most recording studios these days, and I think this is unfortunate, most of the people are employed on their technical ability, and that includes their understanding of things like electronics as opposed to music. Now it's been transferred into computer programming, except we're not building plastic buttons, we're making music."

Now that the new album has been released for some months the distance has given Farriss the chance to reflect not only on its progress but also on how it fits into their twenty-year career. The album, like most of INXS's ten studio albums, one live record and over forty-two videos, has been doing variable business around the globe.

"It depends where you're talking about in the world," Farriss muses. "The records have done very well in the United States and Canada. We've done very well in South America and in certain places in Europe but this one hasn't done well here in Australia. But to put it all in perspective we've had great exposure on this current album. It's been very well received critically, the critics have actually liked this record, but it hasn't done well sales wise here, whereas going back ten years our biggest most successful commercial record, *Kick*, wasn't well received by the record company or the critics. In fact the record company said 'there's no hit single on it. Can you re-do it please?' It's funny isn't it. Which goes to show the fickleness and complete unreliability of opinions or critiques. To be quite honest with you most people don't really know what they want. All they know is what they like to hear. There are very few people who can actually predict anything with any reliability."

"We've had many roller coaster rides in our career," he continues, "even going back many years from when we first decided to take our career from being an Australian national band to an international band. That was in 1979 in a meeting that we had in the Carotel

Hotel in St.Kilda in Melbourne. We were playing down in Macy's, which no longer exists. In fact a lot of the pubs we used to play in that were such a great testing ground for material no longer exist. Anyway we made a decision to go international and that was fairly momentous for us because we were fairly young. We soon began to realise what we'd taken on. As young fellas leaving Australia to go to America back in 1983, everyone in the Australian music industry said 'you're absolutely crazy! You won't succeed! You're mad! Forget it! You're kidding yourselves! Many have tried before you' and so on. We went there and we had two hit singles! Our first album in the United States, *Shabooh Shaboh* did really well on the charts. So we thought the first thing we're not going to do is listen to what people think we should do any more. From that moment on our career started to change dramatically. But, just to give you some idea of what's been going on in our career, the album following that, *The Swing*, didn't do very well in America at all, and yet that same album did really well in places like South America and in parts of Europe and in Asia it did really really well, all of which surprised us. Most of our career has been like that. We have not always had great record sales in one territory and then that means we've sold records well everywhere. That hasn't been the case. Exactly the same thing with the current album *Elegantly Wasted*. It's frustrating to us in that we kind of hoped that Australia would've embraced it a little bit more. We kind of like to think of ourselves as being Australian and we've always promoted ourselves internationally as being Australians. Even AC/DC don't call themselves Australian. We've spent the last fifteen years running around the world telling people we're Australians and in our own country we get the feeling that...I mean it doesn't show in our record sales...I mean we're a funny lot."

It would be an all too easy generalisation to invoke the tall poppy syndrome right here. Nonetheless INXS are very tall poppies. Farriss is reasonably philosophical about their reception from some quarters though. "I just wanted to say that on a personal level I lived in England for almost five years and I've just moved back and I'm really glad I'm back in Australia. As a band we've had our heads chopped off a couple of times. But I think we're all more relaxed about it now. We're a little older and we've realised that we're very lucky, unlike a lot of musicians and writers and some very talented people in Australia, we've been able to play our music, we've been able to write songs and have people internationally buy them. That's been a fantastic experience for us!"

INXS play the Newcastle Workers Club on December 11. Tickets are on sale now from the club. *Elegantly Wasted* is out now thru Mercury Records.

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