

# nixons

## We Are Pretentious!

Four years is an insignificant amount of time in the long and tortured history of rock 'n' roll, yet a lot can happen in a short period. Auckland, New Zealand 1990: The Gluepot was the cornerstone of a fresh and flourishing music scene, every Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights the upstairs bar was at least half full playing host to three or four groups each evening. At the forefront of the new breed were a handful of great bands — Second Child, Salad Daze, SPUD and a hardcore three-piece called the Nixons. They weren't crooks, just a damn fine kick-ass punk rock band — Mike plucking the bass strings, Sean strumming while singing and Mark thumpin' the tubs. Things change though, for better or worse. Many up-and-comings from that era are long gone, old age has virtually strangled the Gluepot and even the Nixons have undergone a major change in point of view . . .

**Mark:** "I think it was just a progression that most bands seem to go through, when you first start a band you go really really fast cause it covers up a multitude of sins."

**Sean:** "We have also learnt how to play together instead of against each other. Being extremely noisy and anarchic touches this node with the audience. They don't really consider it as music anymore, it's just an incentive to violence. People either stage-dive or jump around madly and basically don't think anymore. If you're trying to make people think, playing fast and noisy doesn't tend to work."

**Mark:** "You seem to turn on that front row mentality and that's as far as you get. If you play a slow song they all look perplexed and you can see just how pissed they really are!"

I'm not sure whether to be offended or not as the front row was always my choice of position when watching the Nixons. Anyway, making people think is all well and good but should it be a major objective? Surely there's a fine line between writing thoughtful, complex arrangements and killing

any spirit or spontaneity that makes for memorable rock 'n' roll?

**Mike:** "We're still awesomely spontaneous cause we always fuck up!"

**Mark:** "That's the fun thing for us about tightly structuring our songs, because then we can't play them. Even with something as moronic as rock 'n' roll you still have to conceptualise the whole thing, although people do refuse to believe that. They don't want to think about their rock 'n' roll cause that's why they're in it. They say if they wanted to think they'd be a sculptor or something. Making people think is not our main objective but I think it's necessary to provoke people, not into just anger or indignation, but into all sorts of emotional states so that when they come see us or hear our new record they can go through a whole bunch of emotions."

Yes indeed, the new record. *Eye TV* is the Nixons debut long-player released this month on Pagan Records. And no non-thinkers, they didn't plagiarize the letter U and the numeral 2 for the title.

**Mark:** "We came up with the name of the song, we came up with the idea and the concept, we had it all finished and then U2 put their album out. We can't help that as it takes a year to get an album out in this country, for U2 it takes two minutes. Obviously by listening to the record it took them that long to write it as well."

**Sean:** "The song 'Eye TV' is one of the songs that we thought happened to sum up what the record was about. You can look at the rest of the song titles and get an idea where the name comes from. The fact is that so much of what we do is about conceptualisation whether it's lyrical or the moods of the songs. Basically all of the songs are defined by the mood that originated the song, anything else that is added only embellishes that one basic concept. If you don't start writing a song with some objective in mind you're not going to get anywhere. The way that I write the lyrics is with a very visual analogy in mind. Basically the songs on the album are this flow of images past your eye and the only constant is the fact that they're heard by you."

One constant in the life of

the Nixons has been the remarkable lack of support they have received from within the upper echelons of the Auckland music industry. They have travelled the hard way down a long road to witness the birth of their new album. Does that absence of assistance cause a band to feel hard done by?

**Mark:** "It has been frustrating for sure, but the reason we haven't had a hell of a lot of favours done for us is because we don't do a particularly large amount of ass-licking."

**Mike:** "People have helped but not the same people who have helped a lot of other bands. We have had to find a new set of networks to go through, which is harder but just takes patience and determination."

**Sean:** "Also, it has given us time and enabled us to develop a style before we put a record out. We weren't ready after one, even two years to release a record that would have been of any consequence."

As happens with any band, a major change in style and direction can precede a major shift in fan base. Many early Nixons followers have moved on also.

**Mark:** "We have held the interest of some people from that time, not very many, but we have had a steady growth. A lot of people who like us now come in to town to see us. They are not the sort of people who are part of 'the scene.' There is a whole different group of people into New Zealand music now and a lot of the people making music haven't realised that it's gone out to the suburbs, nobody is taking it to them anymore."

**Sean:** "A lot of people still have misconceptions about what we do, they think we're art-wankers or that we don't rock hard enough and I've got nothing against people being extremely vehement about what they like and don't like and what they believe in. I've got nothing against people who come up to us and tell us we suck as long as it's for a particular reason they can justify."

**Mike:** "But we are pretentious, we're hideously pretentious."

**Sean:** "How can you not be pretentious if you want to say something in rock music? You can't be anything else because you're assuming that people who listen really want to hear you. People have either got to love you or hate you. I don't want people to be indifferent about what we do."

**JOHN RUSSELL**



**Motley Crue's Nikki Sixx** is reciting sweet poetry in my ear:

*"Tabloid sleaze, you're just maggots on your knees, digging in our dirt for slag. If it's not moonshine, strychnine, it's speedballs or shootin' lines, anything to push your rags."*

That's his response to my question about the Tommy Lee/ Heather Locklear bust-up ("Yeah, good sweet Heather and poor mean Tommy, don't you think that's a little one-sided?") and another example of this rock poet's way with words. Last time I spoke to Nikki in Sydney on the Dr Feelgood world tour, he was about to publish his first book of verse. Now he's taken up painting ("Man, I'm just gonna get a bunch of canvasses and just like throw shit at 'em - I need a release!"). But more crucially, Motley Crue have just released their zillionth record, titled simply *Motley Crue*, and in the lingo of the band they're like, totally jazzed about it. OUT is pouting, peroxided Vince Neill. In his place, John Corabi of the *Scream*, and a brand new tough n'dirty sound. Well, maybe not exactly new. It sounds suspiciously like Motley Crue have been soaking up the grunge vibe — Alice In Chains with squealy mid-80s guitar solos, songs about hooligans and child abuse. What happened to the party n' pussy songs of old? The Crue raised that stuff to an art form.

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**John Russell:** "Yeah, but you know what? It wasn't where my head was at. I have other things I want to do," replies Nikki over the line from his home in LA, "I remember reading John Lennon, who meant a lot to me as an artist, he had a lot of the same torture things that I go through, always being compared to something he did the year before."

Yes, well, it's funny you

should mention John Lennon. You look a bit like him in the 'Hooligan's Holiday' video - little glasses, shorter hair. I'm sorry to bring up fashion this early in the interview, but while we're on the subject, are you still getting around in spray-on rubber, or have you guys devised a new look for the new sound?

**Nikki:** "Everyone's got their own itinerary as far as whatever they feel like lookin' like. I'm just kinda a jeans and boots guy and I live on motorcycles and my hands are always dirty and that's just kinda me. Sometimes I'll like leather-up a little for being on stage, but there's other times when I don't do much more than a pair of black jeans and no shirt. The image of Motley Crue was tarnished by Vince because Vince was always so glummy."

Do you feel that *Dr. Feelgood* marked the end of an era in rock?

**Nikki:** "The end of our era. It's like right of passage, kill your idols. I've always been more into suicide. I prefer to kill myself rather than let somebody else have the right to do so. That's why, when everybody copied what we did in 85 I put a knife to its throat and killed it."

Nikki goes on to say he did the same in 82, 87 and 94, he's always movin' on, ain't nobody gonna dictate to him except himself.

**John Russell:** "Otherwise we're corporate, we're everything we hate about the industry."

But a lot of bands you admire like Soundgarden would regard you as the ultimate corporate rock band.

Nikki sounds hurt. "Well, they don't know shit, because they don't know us. I happen to be fans of theirs because they're doing what I grew up on — MC5, Black Sabbath, the Stooges."

But if that's so, why didn't

you go in that direction yourselves years ago?

**Nikki:** "I think we did. On *Too Fast For Love* were a punk band. On *Shout At the Devil* we were more in line with Sabbath meets MC5. You know what fucked everything up was the image, we got too image orientated."

Whose fault was that, I ask, thinking not unfondly of men in big hair, shredded leather and designer tatts.

**John Russell:** "Probably mine. I thought it went well with quaaludes, heroin and lots of girls."

Do you look back and cringe at your old sexist lyrics?

**Nikki:** "No, I think they're cool. There's some great lines, like in 'Dancing On Glass' when it goes 'Silver spoon and needle, witchy tombstone smile, I'm no puppet strung out, 'cos I engrave my veins with style.'"

Phew! But Nikki, doesn't it bug you that you don't get taken seriously as an artist by the critics? They think you're nothing but a dumb-ass glam-rock churning out pap for adolescent mall rats.

**John Russell:** "I don't tend to strike out at the press for being nasty to the band. I almost think they're doing us a service. It's like cooler for us to be underground critically. We're no different to the Rolling Stones. The Rolling Stones have never won an award in their life, they're still loathed."

I let that one pass. The one aspect of Nikki Sixx's personality that comes winging most powerfully over the line from LA is his implacable belief in himself. AS AN ARTIST. Which might strike some readers as amusing but I think it's kind of admirable. Nikki told me he's been reading *Primal Scream Theory* again, but I think somewhere in his formative years he stumbled across *I'm OK, You're OK* and never forgot it.

**DONNA YUZWALK**

# MOTLEY CRUE

