

INXS

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Photography by Sheryl Nields

Ah, the sweet smell of success. Few bands have sniffed that more regularly than that of a little rock band from Australia.

But INXS—which now features JD Fortune (vocals), Tim Farriss (guitar), Kirk Pengilly (guitar, saxophone), Garry Beers (bass), Jon Farriss (drums), and Andrew Farriss (keyboards)—with a new singer, a new album called *Switch*, and a sold-out worldwide tour, is bigger than ever.

In 28 years of existence, INXS put out countless rock hits like "Need You Tonight," "Original Sin," and "Suicide Blonde," survived the rise and fall of the video star, and struggled with the perils that come with the death of the band's late, great frontman Michael Hutchence.

Looking forward, as they were stuck on the bus awaiting traffic en route to a show at the Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, CN, Garry Beers and Kirk Pengilly phoned into SOAK while JD Fortune chimed in later. INXS dished on rock star identity theft, the process of bringing music to television (we've seen this before somewhere, eh?), and what it's like stand as one of the biggest bands in the world.

SOAK: *What have your first shows been like on the new tour?*

Kirk: It's great. I'm really quite surprised about...everything that's happened. All of the shows have sold out and the reactions have been amazing. Everybody's been standing from the moment we walk on until we finish at the end of the night. It's a little strange for me because I wear what they call in-ear monitors; they're a molded kind of earplug where they take like a cast of the inside of your ear and they make this mold with this hi-fidelity driver in it, so it's like headphones. They block out all the outside sound, so for me, I don't get a lot of the noise the audience makes through them, because we don't have mics out in the audience. So it's kind of strange, because I'm not actually hearing the reaction of the crowd like the other guys do that don't use them. Occasionally I'll take them out, but then I'll want to put them right back in again. [laughs]

Garry: I've got some in-ears, but I don't wear them. As a bass player, they do put some bottom in there, but nothing big. We call that "Kirk's World," that's what we call Kirk in his ears. [laughs] It's been incredible. The fan reaction at the concerts has been quite overwhelming in many ways. I guess having a hit TV show has brought a lot of factors back into the popularity of the band and they do reflect at the concerts.

SOAK: *Why were you so surprised at the recent rabid fan reaction?*

Kirk: It's been a while since we've been out touring and we didn't know what quite to expect. Even sort of what the audience was going to consist of and how they're going to react to the old material, the new material, and

even JD, really. The whole thing has been sort of a big unknown to a certain extent, and I'm just really surprised and elated at how great the reaction has been.

SOAK: *It's great to hear fans have greatly accepted JD on vocals.*

Kirk: Yeah. It's all good, you know. Mind you, the audience seems to be about 75 percent women [laughs], but I don't have a problem with that. [laughs]

JD: Yeah, it started off with cheers and now it's cheers and exposed breasts.

SOAK: *I'm sure you guys had lot of females at shows when Michael was on vocals.*

Kirk: We did. To me, it kind of seems like it's kind of heavy on the women side, now. I'm not really sure what it is really. I think with Michael, blokes liked him too. He was a bit like Austin Powers in that blokes liked to be like him. But, it's good. It really is a cross-section of an audience too, because the first half of the audience is a lot younger than what I would have expected, and the older age group of fans, a lot that saw us in the 80s and the 90s—they're all happy and excited that we're touring again.

Garry: I'm sure we have a lot of new fans, fans of JD, and indirectly new fans with the TV

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show. We have a lot of fans that have been around for a long time waiting for us to kind of pick the right singer or make the right move in our career and actually make a new record, and it's all kind of come together because of that.

SOAK: *As far as the band goes, when Michael Hutchence was around, he was a big target of fan admiration, and now with JD at the helm, does all of the attention take some of the pressure off some of the other members of the band?*

Garry: Well, it does. The guy's called a lead singer and lead singer basically is the guy that stands at the front and takes the full force of the press and the public in many ways. That's what singers do, and he's very good at it.

SOAK: *Lots of fans had to phone in to vote for JD, so he must too, have his share of fans across the world.*

Garry: He does; it's quite interesting. Just about everybody tells him every day, 'I always knew it was going to be you, JD.' [laughs] Of course none of them did.

SOAK: *Well, I'll have to admit now that, although I now enjoy the talents of JD, I'm from the Chicago area, so I was initially gunning for Marty Casey.*

Garry: Marty still had the most votes up until the finale. Marty's a great guy and his band [Marty Casey & Lovehammers] is a bunch of

really great guys, too.

SOAK: *How have the fans taken to "Switch," the new album?*

Kirk: We're really proud of the album and it's being received really well, so it's all good.

SOAK: *Millions of fans across the world followed CBS's "Rock Star: INXS."*

Kirk: It's wonderful. We really didn't know how it was going to go. We really put our heads on the chopping block with even putting forward the idea of turning it into a TV show. It could have gone horribly wrong, but it went horribly right. [laughs] Just hearing the comments from people after the show finished, and during the show, people have come up to me in the street and told me how addicted they were to the show, and how they had to leave their best friend's dinner party to go home and watch the show. [laughs] Their whole world revolved around it. The biggest compliment is that some have kids, are a bit older, have teenage kids or whatever, and say, 'Thank God for your TV show because you brought rock n' roll back into our house and got hip-hop out.' Not that I have anything against hip-hop. It's just not where I come from.

Garry: It was great. It was nerve-wracking at first, I mean, we wondered what the hell we

were getting ourselves into. It was our idea, so we couldn't blame anybody. It's a weird thing for us, actually being from Australia, which is so many thousands of miles away from the rest of the world, the only way we could get ourselves known was by making videos back in the 80s, and certainly live concerts. And we figured the medium of television was nothing new to us anyway, and our life is kind of a reality, so it worked really well for us.

JD: It was the hardest but yet most rewarding three months of my life.

Garry: With some of the workshops we did, we had hoped the show would kind of reeducate people of what music's really about. The way we did it was, we really wanted people to understand why we're doing it and what we wanted from the singers and to just groove on the music and the great playing from the house band. And that's exactly what happened. And that's what sucked so many people in, was the quality of the singers and the talent, and overall, the show was exceptional. Not to put down any other shows or contests, but we wanted to make ours the best.

SOAK: *With your newfound fame, JD, can you still do normal things like go to the grocery store or are you often approached by a swarm of fans?*

JD: It's hard to do normal things as I do get



stopped by fans. My problem is I love to talk to them so I always stop, and then miss what I have to do.

SOAK: *What's the most embarrassing thing that's happened to you while on tour, JD?*

JD: Coming down with bronchitis/pneumonia during the first week of the tour. That was pretty embarrassing.

SOAK: *JD used to be an Elvis impersonator. Who could you see, at some time, impersonate him?*

Kirk: [laughs] That would be pretty funny. Actually, I think there was apparently a bit of a look-alike that's been going around and getting into some LA clubs and things claiming that he's JD. That will be interesting. I think he wishes he didn't tell people about impersonating Elvis, because people keep asking about it and it keeps coming back to bite him. [laughs]

JD: That impostor is me.

Garry: I have a lot of people run around the world saying they're my cousin, and they probably are. [laughs] We've had people in the past that have run around saying they

were [bandmate] John Farris and actually running up credit card bills, and somebody had a Jon Farris American Express card. It's amazing what people will believe when they want to.

SOAK: *You guys performed "Afterglow," one of your newest songs, on Letterman this year. What was that like?*

JD: A daze.

Garry: We've played it about three or four times. The last time we did it was with Ray Charles singing with us, and Michael. We're not strangers to Letterman. But with JD's first time, we kept warning him about how cold it is in the studio, because Letterman likes it freezing. It was snowing in New York and it was actually colder in the studio than it was outside. But it went really well. TV's always a trip, so it came off pretty well.

SOAK: *What kind of things do you like to do on tour when you have a day off?*

JD: Relax!

Kirk: We don't have a lot of those, but for me, I just kind of like to get out of the hotel, really.

try to eat and stay out of the hotel as much as possible. I love food and wine, so I'll get dinner and try to have somebody accompany me, or I'll just go and find a good restaurant and have a great meal. Or go see a movie. Just pretty standard stuff. Most of the time, if we have a day off, we'll have to drive somewhere or whatever, so that takes up most of the day anyway.

SOAK: *Over the last couple of decades, there can't be many bands with more worldwide fame and success than INXS.*

Kirk: Yeah. It's been an extraordinary career and I guess in some ways, we performed in 1977, I don't know if it's a good thing. [laughs] but we've actually spanned across four different decades, even though we've only been together 28 years, but it makes it sound like it's been forever. We're still loving it.

SOAK: *What's in the future for INXS?*

Kirk: A lot more touring. I'm looking forward to that. We have a lot of stuff in Australia, Asia, New Zealand, and the UK. It takes a long time to cover the world.