

# 311

## --A Decent Band With An Indecent Arrest

BY GABRIELLA

**The frontman and rhythm** guitarist of 311, Nick Hexum, is relaxed and doesn't appear tired, despite a yearlong-plus stretch around the globe. The band toured with Cypress Hill and No Doubt, among others, and supported acts like seminal punkers Fugazi and KISS in Madison Square Garden in New York City. Playing the Garden is a dream for most bands, but picturing the funk-pop influenced 311 and the older, more heavy-metal oriented KISS on one bill is somewhat jarring.

"I have to confess that it was a strange feeling," says the 26-year-old Hexum. "Supporting Fugazi [their first gig back in 1990] was simply great. After all Fugazi is something close to a living legend, but KISS was definitely a very strange experience. The audience was waiting for KISS, and they made sure that we understood they didn't come to see us. It was pretty stupid that we accepted the gig, but we got talked into accepting it."

With thousands of KISS fans costumed and made-up like their idols,

the band had trouble figuring out if it was Halloween or a midnight screening of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

"I thought it was pretty spooky – all that make-up on and off stage. It felt like being caught in a horror show. At least we didn't have to wear make-up. Not that I mind KISS, but I remember they were all the rage when I used to be a 12 year-old – and now they are back, just like the Sex Pistols. Well that comparison isn't really fair. At least KISS knows how to play their instruments."

Based on the double-platinum status of their 1995 self-titled album, 311 (consisting of Hexum, guitarist Timothy J. Mahoney, bassist P-Nut, turntable player SA Martinez and drummer Chad Sexton) are not strangers to critical acclaim and popularity. Pushed to the forefront of alternative rock with their oft-played singles "Down" and "All Mixed Up," the Los Angeles-based quintet are part of a growing movement of up-and-coming alternative bands that combine



Nicholas Hexum

several genres. No Doubt and Sublime incorporate the lilting rhythms of ska and reggae into their rock formulas. In 311's sound, there are traces of Bob Marley, Red Hot Chili Peppers' fat bass tones, and Beastie Boys' rap. Hexum says their versatility would not have been as far-reaching had it been developed in their present home, Los Angeles.

"It gave us a chance to develop our own style. Most bands from L.A. just sound pretty much the same – too smooth. The city and growing up here did that to them. Well, that is my opinion, and maybe I'm wrong. I honestly believe that we wouldn't have gotten that far growing up in L.A."

Their native Omaha city is a "perfect" place to raise children and provides a very healthy atmosphere for aspiring musicians, Hexum says. "Omaha was certainly good for our music. I still think of Omaha as home; musicians are supported by the community. In the Heartland there's nothing there except cornfields, and not too many bands come and tour – so





*Drummer Chad Sexton looking good*

people like their local bands and come to their gigs. It may sound cheesy, but we had a great time growing up there."

Hexum doesn't sound too impressed by the glitter and glamour that surrounds them in Los Angeles. "It was easier for us this way. The music business is there, and we grew up in Omaha—and you don't want to spend the rest of your life in a small town. I like parts of Los Angeles, and after living here for four years, I grew fond of my favorite places. I always loved the beaches, and the weather is great here. I can't really say I'm that fond of the big town. Everybody tries to be so trendy here—and I'm glad that we didn't grow up in L.A."

Their formula for success is just as hard to pinpoint as their hybrid sound. In fact, band members say that their next album—which they have begun taping earlier this year—should be at least a light year away from standards in their repertoire like "Jackolantern's Weather" and "Guns (Are For Pussies)." [It should be] a step into outer-space dub-music with similar elements from past 311 albums," Hexum remarked. According to a source in Capricorn Records, the group is currently working on the new sounds in Los Angeles for a tentative August release date.

Explaining their ever-evolving trend, Hexum says "We always liked different music, and we were all influ-

enced by different music—I think that saves us from repeating ourselves. 311 is not static. We change all the time. Chad and I used to write almost all of our songs, but slowly the others got involved too. That's a good sign."

"Whenever somebody comes up with a new idea, we try to do something with that idea—to play around and see what we can do with it," adds Hexum,



*Mahoney, forward, Martinez behind*

explaining their composing process. "On our new album we mixed two songs—well two songs became one song, and I think it sounds pretty good. As a band we're pretty democratic, and I think it's the only way for a band that's healthy. Everything else would be a solo-project with additional musicians. There's no point in calling that a band—even if it happens a lot."

Speaking of giving the band a name, inquiring minds want to know just how they came up with their moniker. Hexum is pretty talkative and only grows quiet when the question about their unusual name comes up.

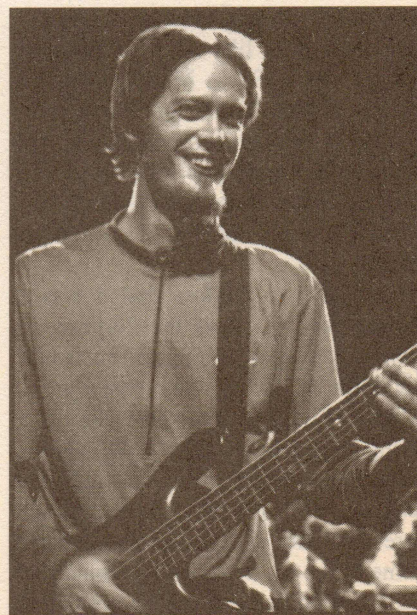
"Well, I prefer to think about it as five friends making music. 3 + 1 + 1 makes 5, and to me it makes perfect sense, but I doubt you'll leave it there. It really is a stupid story, and sometimes I think we should have changed our name a while ago, but by that time we were already making a name for

ourselves—so we couldn't."

"Okay, I'll stop rattling and spill the beans, but remember that it was really a long time ago—more or less just some sort of juvenile stunt. It happened," Hexum reveals, "when we were still living in Omaha. P-Nut, our bassist, was a little bit drunk. You see, he was on his way home from a party, and he had a sudden urge to go swimming. There was this pool, and he simply climbed over the fence, stripped off his clothes and jumped into the pool. Unfortunately somebody saw him and called the police, and they came and arrested him. Poor P-Nut was dragged out of the water, handcuffed and brought to the police station where they kept him the whole night. It was ridiculous—They didn't even give him the time to get dressed. They arrested him on the spot!"

"He was taken to court, and the law he had broken was a '311,' the police code for indecent exposure. Just imagine that. The person who called the police must have stood at a window on a pitch-black night—most likely hiding with binoculars to see something indecent. We thought that was such a laugh that we had to rename our band—and so we called ourselves, '311' and the name stuck..."

*(Additional material and narrative format by Edward Fruchman)*



*P-Nut: his arrest brought the idea for the where the name 311*