

Echinacea-pill-popping, ginger-beer-guzzling, corn-fed moshers from Nebraska: **NUMBER CRUNCHERS**

WRITTEN BY MIKE ALBO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN MINH NGUYEN

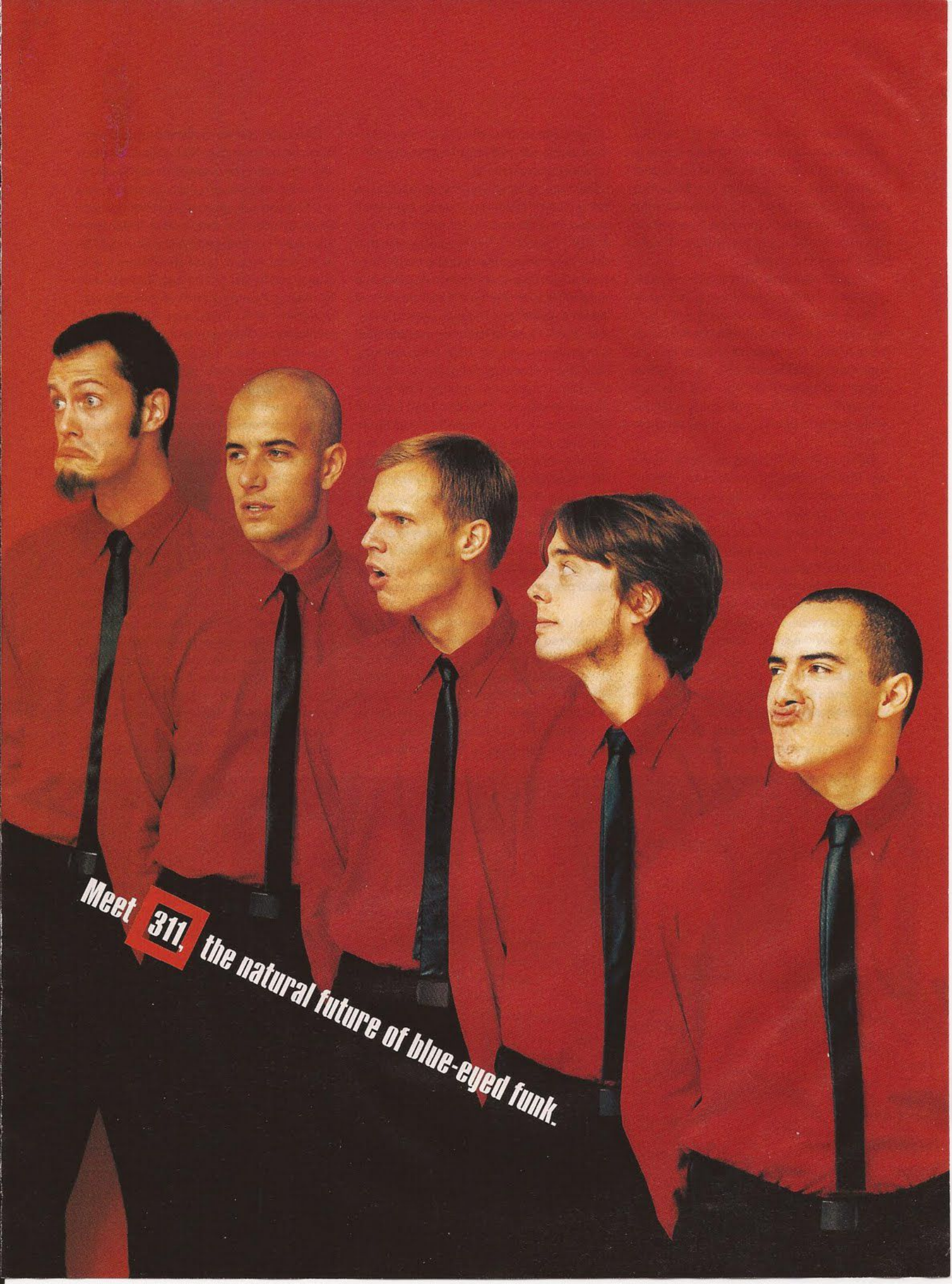
Figures with attitude (from left): P-Nut, Nick Hexum, Chad Sexton, Tim Mahoney, and S.A. Martinez work their craft.

"WE AIN'T GONNA CHANGE!"

Nick Hexum promises from the stage of New York's Coney Island High. The mosh pit roars back, reassured. After all, 311 spent last night opening for Kiss at Madison Square Garden, and the band's third album is shooting toward *Billboard*'s top twenty. But tonight, 311 are playing a free show for 450 fans at this cramped, poorly ventilated East Village club. Midway through their manic set they have to take a break—a couple of band members are about to pass out. Minutes later, a few dozen pairs of feet are pointed at the ceiling again.

When K-ROCK FM announced it was giving away passes to the show, 311 fans threw a little tantrum: Hundreds of them stormed the K-ROCK van in Washington Square Park, rocking it back and forth until the promo guy had to climb onto the roof. One especially zealous kid nabbed twenty of the tickets right out of the guy's hand. Very French Revolution.

STYLING: GABRIEL FELICIANO. JEANS BY CALVIN KLEIN.
SHIRTS FROM POLO BY RALPH LAUREN.
TIES FROM SMYLYN NYLON, NYC.



Meet **311**, the natural future of blue-eyed funk.

RIGHT NOW, THREE-FIFTHS OF 311 ARE DE-compressing by the pool at their home in L.A.'s Laurel Canyon. Singer Nick, drummer Chad Sexton, and guitarist Tim Mahoney moved into this large, airy house last year; there's still barely any furniture. A bad poster of a sailboat hangs in the studio. 311 are never home to decorate.

I intend to ask them what it's like to incite small riots, but they get me really stoned on their big leafy California weed and all I do is say "Wow" a lot. Tim does reps on the bench press while Chad goes off to try to find the rest of the band: Bassist P-Nut lives in West Hollywood, rapper/scratcher S.A. Martinez in Koreatown. Nick, meanwhile, is articulately stoned, dreaming up ways to sell more 311 CDs.

Not that he particularly needs to. In the last few months, 311 have seen "Down" become an MTV Buzz Clip and their latest album go platinum. This year they've joined both the Warped and H.O.R.D.E. tours and teamed up for shows with No Doubt, the Pharcyde, Cypress Hill, and Kiss—a mix that's a fair reflection of 311's own sound.

And the inevitable backlash has begun. "Now that we have a huge hit, there are people who say we suck," Nick tells me. "That doesn't happen until you're *big*, you know?" A couple of nights ago Nick was on the Web, and he dropped into a chat room where people were discussing 311. "Someone wrote, '311 makes me cry,' and I thought it was going to be this huge emotional com-

pliment, but instead the guy started slamming us. He said Midwestern guys shouldn't be stealing urban music."

But there isn't anything *that* unusual about five guys from Nebraska fusing dancehall reggae, hip-hop, and crunch-guitar rock. Not in 1996 there isn't. What's unusual is that today they can succeed without much more of an angle. Blue-eyed hip-hop has become so familiar that the band's self-described "Omaha stylee" now sounds perfectly natural. And 311 are as natural as it gets—this is a group notable for what they *don't* do. They don't dress up as lightbulbs or '70s cop-show characters or hang tube socks on their phalluses. They don't put forth an aggressive political vibe—311's antigun, antijunk, pro-pot message is as uncontroversial as Amnesty International. And unlike most Buzz Clip bands, they don't want anything to do with, you know, *whining*. As one line goes, "All the angst shit is just cheesy!"

No glam, no angst, no tongues in cheek: What *is* 311's hook, anyway? In Nick's view, they don't need one. "It's just about songs, about playing. We try to be almost faceless."

ADAM, THE BAND'S ANXIOUS MANAGER, has cooked us a healthy dinner covering all four food groups. He calls us in from the pool like the perfect mom, and the guys report with flip-flops and bare chests to stuff their faces. P-Nut and S.A. have finally straggled in. The others call S.A. Grandpa because he sleeps a lot. "Southsider," Chad explains.

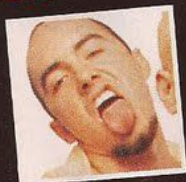
Like every town, Omaha has its neighborhood stereotypes. Nick, Chad, and Tim went to high school together on the west side—"the *regular* part of town," as Nick puts it. P-Nut and S.A. grew up in working-class South Omaha. S.A. met Chad in 1988 when they were freshmen at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and remembers being impressed by his drumming. "Chad would be playing Prince when everyone else was drumming to the Cure," says P-Nut. The following year, Chad dropped out and joined Nick in L.A.—their first band, Unity, played more-straightforward rock, and didn't take off. But they played the role to the hilt. "We hung out with waiters and partyers, doing a lot of hard drugs, getting really messed up," Nick remembers. Exhausted by the scene, he and Chad soon retreated back to Omaha; Tim and the Southsiders joined the band, and they took the name 311.

After a breakthrough hometown gig opening for Fugazi, they took another shot and moved back to L.A. in 1992, befriending groups like No Doubt and Korn, and buckling down to work. "I got very tough," Nick says. The band rarely went out, never lost control, never tripped; at home they still don't drink much more than ginger beer or fruit juice. "In 1989 I was cocaine and Jim Beam," Nick raps on the new album. "But now it's '95 and I'm ginseng." Indulgence after rehearsal usually meant a few joints and a game of basketball in the driveway.

Focused or not, the band hasn't had the

ALLISON DRYER

THE 411 ON 311



S.A. MARTINEZ, 25

Vice: Blue-green algae
Munchies: Fruit Roll-Ups, smoothies, sushi
Roots: Prince, Peter Dinklage, Yellownman, Boogie Down Productions
Worst thing about being in 311: All the naughty people
Kiss or Parliament? Can I have them both?



NICK HEXUM, 26

Vice: Ginseng
Munchies: Sushi, macaroni and cheese with polish sausage
Roots: Cole Porter, the Clash, Bob Marley, Bad Brains, the Smiths, Billie Holiday
Worst thing about being in 311: Strep throat on tour
Kiss or Parliament? Definitely Parliament



TIM MAHONEY, 26

Vice: Grass, tattoos, iced mochas
Munchies: Sushi, Caesar salad, vegetable soup
Roots: Jerry Garcia, Carlos Santana, John McLaughlin, Phish, Minor Threat
Worst thing about being in 311: Sore neck
Kiss or Parliament? Gimme the funk and the rock



P-NUT, 22

Vice: Northern Californian Wonder Weed
Munchies: Snapple raspberry iced tea, Fritos
Roots: Robert A. Wilson's books of wisdom
Worst thing about being in 311: Questions
Kiss or Parliament? Parliament—think about it



CHAD SEXTON, 25

Vice: Herb
Munchies: Chocolate
Roots: Leonard Bernstein, Carmen McRae, Stevie Wonder, H.R. (of Bad Brains), Jaco Pastorius, Frank Zappa
Worst thing about being in 311: Being away from home
Kiss or Parliament? Kiss for show, P-Funk for music

easiest of rides since scoring a contract four years ago. In 1993, they went on the road in Chad's father's ancient Winnebago. One hot day in Missouri, the RV burst into flames. The band dove out to safety and watched all their equipment burn. "All we had on were our shoes, shorts, and wallets," Chad recalls. They somehow made it to the next night's show with borrowed gear; Nick finished the tour with crispy hair and singed eyebrows.

Meanwhile, a friend who was taking care of their house in L.A. started indulging his phone habit at the band's expense. (They slam him in the song "Silver" on their second album, *Grassroots*: "You left a big surprise from Pacific Bell / Called all your relatives and your friends in hell.") After *Grassroots*, relations grew ugly and heated with their then-producer; the band teamed with Ron Saint Germain, producer of Bad Brains, for the latest album. Then came last year's rumor that the band's name stood for Ku Klux Klan (K being the eleventh letter of the alphabet), which caused Omaha's Westside High School to ban 311 T-shirts. Naturally, MTV and *USA Today* picked up the story. "Our first major publicity and it's about *that*," Nick sighs. "We got the name from a friend who was arrested for skinny-dipping—311 is the police code for indecent exposure."

S.A. TELLS US HE WAS AT THE RECORD STORE and saw all three 311 CDs. Nick sits up. "You didn't try to sell them?" he says. "You should have been like, 'Ladies and gentlemen, here's good value for your money.'" Nick may be the Future Business Leader of the band, but he's equally concerned about holding onto 311's core fans, keeping control of the band's success. "We don't want to be seen as a mainstream band. That way we can keep making unusual music."

Then again, Nick has a different idea of what constitutes the fringe: "Kiss is kind of a role model. I mean, Kiss became huge and only had one big hit—that really bad song, 'Beth.' But besides that, they were a tour band that came from the underground."

Somehow Kiss isn't the first thing that comes to mind as we pass ginger beer around the dinner spread of grilled salmon and oil-free salad. Apart from the sinsemilla, the strongest thing in the house is a bottle of echinacea. But it turns out that even clean living has its excesses. "Oh, man," Nick says, "I puked on ginseng once."

Mike Albo likes to do hits of nutmeg and Freon shots from the air conditioner.

THE ARMY VS. THE BOMB

KISS AND PARLIAMENT: TWIN SONS OF DIFFERENT MOTHERSHIPS



Two decades after the *Destroyer* and *Mothership Connection* tours, the greatest live shows of the '70s are back: This past summer, Kiss and George Clinton's Parliament (under the guise of the P-Funk Allstars) reunited original cast members—and, just as important, costumes and props—for standing-room-only tours. Coincidence? You be the judge. —Keith Blanchard

KISS

First stop to stardom: signing with Neil Bogart's Casablanca Records.

Didn't register a blip on rock radar until a sold-out Detroit show became *Alive!* Repaid the debt with "Detroit Rock City."



Entertainingly overwrought stage show features cartoonlike costumed characters and a space-age drum kit festooned with flashing lights which hovers over the stage.

In Kiss's crypto-heroic mythology, Paul Stanley is known as Starchild.

Had to re-create the goofball outfits and lure the estranged Peter Criss and Ace Frehley back for their first tour in seventeen years.

The songs: "Love Gun," "Detroit Rock City," "Love Theme From Kiss."



The characters: Dr. Love, Mr. Speed, God of Thunder.

Gene Simmons' recipe for blood: "Yogurt, cottage cheese, maple syrup, eggs, cornstarch, and red food coloring."

Abject humility: "You wanted the best? You got the best! The hottest band in the world: Kiss!"

—That announcer guy

They can fly.

Male bonding: "Me and the boys'll be playin' all night." —"Beth"



Without demon Kabuki makeup, six-foot tongue, and outrageous costume, Gene Simmons would be recognized on the street by exactly seventeen people.

Shot Lincoln in a theater, hid in a warehouse.

The whitest band on earth.

PARLIAMENT

First stop to stardom: signing with Neil Bogart's Casablanca Records.

Didn't register a blip on rock radar until Clinton moved the act to Detroit. Repaid the debt by living nearby ever since.



Entertainingly overwrought stage show features cartoonlike costumed characters and a life-size spaceship festooned with flashing lights which hovers over the stage.

In Parliament's crypto-heroic mythology, George Clinton is known as Star Child.

Had to re-create the Mothership and lure the estranged Bernie Worrell and Bootsy Collins back for their first tour in fifteen years.

The songs: "Bop Gun," "Chocolate City," "Theme From the Black Hole."



The characters: Dr. Funkenstein, Mr. Wiggles, Wizard of Finance.

George Clinton's recipe for funk: "It's an attitude. You do the best you can. You just let go and trust your attitude and be loose."

Abject humility: "We've been the best improvising band in the world for a long, long time."

—P-Funk Allstar DeWayne McKnight

They can fly.

Male bonding: "If you hear any noise, it's just me and the boys" —"Mothership Connection (Star Child)"



Without rainbow dreads, sunglasses, and outrageous costume, George Clinton would be recognized on the street by exactly seventeen people.

Shot Kennedy from a warehouse, hid in a theater.

The blackest band on earth.