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AMERICA'S ROCK MAGAZINE

# CIRCUS



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AMERICA'S ROCK MAGAZINE  
**CIRCUS**

311



# 311's P-NUT

## ALL GROWN UP

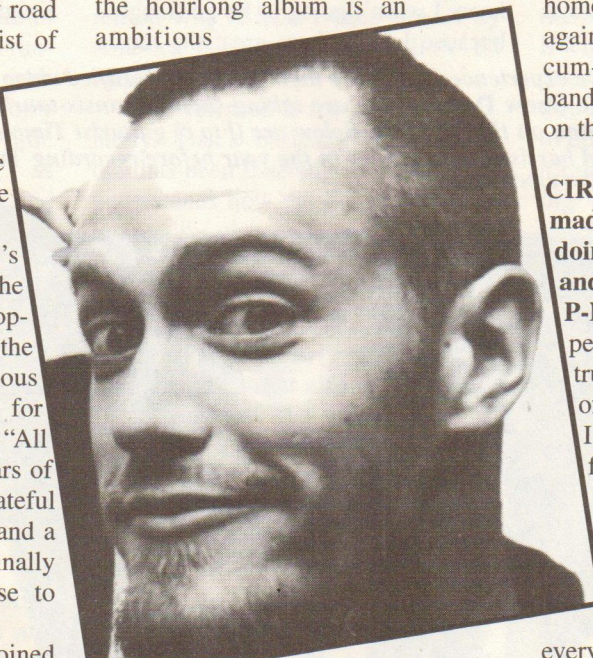
BY DAN DAVIS

In the music world, many industry execs constantly look for ways to cut corners – to take the easy road and the shortcut. The lengthy list of “here today and gone tomorrow” could wallpaper the Great Wall Of China. But an enduring band like Nebraska-bred 311 are one of the bands that chose the pure path.

With their third album, 1995's self-titled or “Blue Album”, the metal, reggae, funk and hip-hop-melding quintet finally achieved the commercial success that previous years of hard work had built for them. Powered on the singles, “All Mixed Up” and “Down,” the years of endless touring to become the Grateful Dead of the underground scene and a non-compromising work ethic finally paid off. That album sold close to three million copies worldwide.

As new-found fans of 311 joined one of the largest core audiences in the alternative world, Nick Hexum (vocals/guitar), SA Martinez (vocals/scratcher-dj), P-Nut (bass), Tim Mahoney (guitars) and Chad Sexton (drums) headed back into a studio in Los Angeles with longtime sound engineer Scott Ralston to record

their eagerly-awaited follow-up, *Transistor*. Released in early August, the hourlong album is an ambitious



*P-Nut was officially in 311 after they had undergone an early incarnation where they were called Unity and were only a trio (also sans Martinez).*

concept package fueled with unrelenting themes of electricity, outer-space travel and objects in the universe.

*Circus Magazine* had the pleasure

to speak with bassist P-Nut while he was taking a short rest at his California home before the band hit the road again. P-Nut discussed his cult band-cum-commercial monster and the band's response to their long stretches on the road.

**CIRCUS:** How does it feel to have made it to this point where you are doing things on your own terms and through hard work?

**P-Nut:** I love that and I love when people tell me that too. I think that's true. Especially since that I was one of the ones who worked as hard as I did to get us where we are. It feels great to have the media working for us under our own terms. That's the thing that is very rare with our careers and the way things have run.

We've been able to do almost everything under our own control and the label's [Capricorn] been really cool to us. They never tried to put us into any artistic cages. They never told us to bring back some of those weird styles we were throwing out. They almost always just let us do what we wanted.



**Do you think 311 are one of the forefathers, even at your young ages, of the eclectic movement in music, followed by bands such as Squirrel Nut Zippers, Mighty Mighty Bosstones and Ani DiFranco?**

That's tough because those bands you named are so different from us. That's probably the point you were trying to make. Of course we're not the only band leading this eclectic revolution of sorts but since there's no real dominating music force right now. It's not a rock world anymore, not like it was. And it certainly isn't a reggae world even though Sublime and 311 would like you to think that, especially off this new album. But it's cool to see bands like Squirrel Nut Zippers and Ani DiFranco busting out different things and having them being accepted by the same types of people. It's really weird.

**Growing up, did you ever think that one of your future bands would be able to marry two totally different styles such as metal and reggae and be as successful as you are?**

Man, I wouldn't have even been able to conceptualize that at that age for sure. It would've been like, 'No

way!' As a listener to music you can make up so many different ideas of what you think is going on, how big you think this person is, and in reality it can be so much different.

As a kid I never thought seriously that I was gonna get an opportunity to do so. But I knew as a kid that if I did get that opportunity I would give it all I got and really try to put my personality into things. I can sit right back on my couch and feel like I've done that. But as far as looking back, I thought that music was so big I didn't think I would never get any opportunity to say one word on an album, let alone four or five.

It's a total culmination of a life's dream.

**Well you pretty much did grow up in this band.**

Yeah, I've been in the band since I was 14. It was playing with a different guitarist and a different drummer but we were still being called 311. We transferred the name over and made it make sense within our group of five and it's been really cool.

When Chad and I got together, I knew I wasn't going to let go (laughs) because I knew how great the music

he and I had created was.

**The band as a whole has grown up together from your teen years to now.**

We all went into manhood together (laughs). If taken out of context that can have an entirely different meaning. But that's okay, I'm comfortable with my sexuality (laughs). It's been really cool. Especially when I first got here [Los Angeles] in 1992, we all lived together in a little three-bedroom house with a pool and that was the time when we really got to know each other.

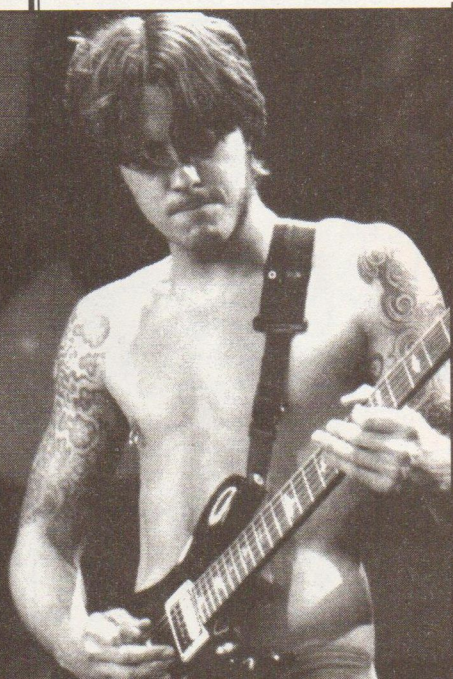
**How was it opening for KISS at Madison Square Garden?**

I just barely remember our show. What I remember is KISS. It wasn't as much of a show for us as it was just free tickets to watch KISS (laughs). The crowd was not interested in seeing us, they just wanted KISS.

That was the first time I got to see them with the makeup after growing up with a religious zealot father who wouldn't let me listen to them [because] he thought their name meant Knights In Satan's Service.

*Those uninitiated with the 311 live experience should see their platinum-certified video of concert footage and behind-the-scenes glimpses, Enlarged To Show Detail. They are taking their "Transis-tour" across the States into at least December, with heavy concentration on the Midwest. Below are (l to r) guitarist Timothy Mahoney (before his drastic haircut), rapper SA Martinez and bassist P-Nut earlier in the year before recording Transistor.*

ALL PHOTOS BELOW BY STEVE TRAGER/FRANK WHITE





**There really isn't a word that can describe 311's music anyway.**

Yeah, totally, it makes sense. The first definition of 311 was an incident when a friend of mine got arrested for skinnydipping in a pool and came home with a ticket that said, '311—indecent exposure' on it. And we were really impressed as you could guess (laughs).

Also knowing a little numerology and studying a little magic, which I do. In some factions, three is man and 11 is magic. So it's like a 'magician' kind of thing? (laughs).

**I think you just make up little things to keep people wondering.**

(Laughs) Yeah, we can do that and say that we've been saying it for years. It goes a million different directions and that's why the name really stuck for us and we knew it was the right one.

**Being on the road as much as you are, do you ever get burnt from playing live shows?**

It's a trying experience but since we have done it as long as we have, we know what to expect. Since we are in a certain role of power, like we're running the motherf\*\*king show now, there's really almost nothing to worry about. Of course there are the little things but mostly everything, as opposed to when we were starting and took care of everything ourselves, almost everything is taken care of by our stage manager or road manager or the production manager. The problems are taken care of by them and we do get the opportunity and the luxury to just sit back and watch everything happening. If there's a problem that needs our attention we're right there but all the little problems we don't even see.

**Just climb on the bus and chill out.**

Yeah. We need to relax and just concentrate on the show and maintain relationships with girlfriends, get a nice long phone bill and take care of yourself. Read a little bit, catch a buzz, watch a movie, soundcheck, go to catering. Which by the way we're taking out our own this year which is an unbelievable luxury which I thought would never happen. I had my first

meal with the cook the other night and it was magnifique, so I'm looking forward to gaining a little weight on the road instead of losing about ten pounds (laughs).

**Touring as much as 311 does, you also have to either love each other like a family or hate each other by now.**

Oh, it's definitely a family atmosphere. We have no choice but to be like family and knowing each other and going through what we all have together, it's just made that bond that much stronger.

**Are you afraid of losing the underground status and/or street credibility that you've worked so hard to build now that you're also a commercial success?**

Definitely. It's not at the forefront of our problems because we know that the integrity is still there. The reason why we released "Transistor" as the first single is to do that — to preserve our hardcore following. The people that do love 311 for what 311 really is are going to love that song. And the reason why it hasn't been braced by America is because it is a little bit weird.

We released it for our fans definitely. That's basically it. Anybody that has been listening to us for years understands how the music is kind of jumpy like that and separated like a rock/dance hall riff.

**The album has gotten some poor reviews in the early going. Does that bother you at all?**

I just think it's great when the critics don't like it or it hasn't been embraced by MTV. It's cool. It just shows that we do have a certain amount of integrity and we are doing something that is unique enough that it can't be embraced by all of America.

**What is the level you would like 311 to get to or peak at?**

It's there. It's beyond any expectation I ever realistically had, so I never

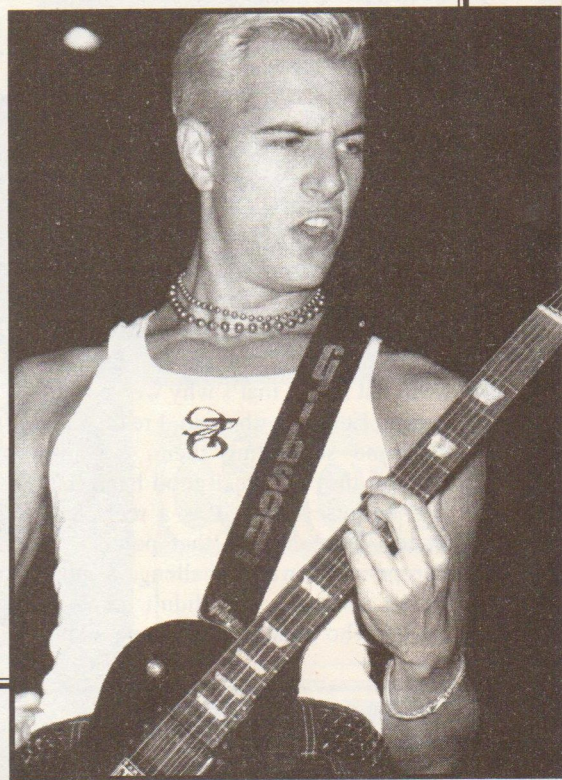
*"The concept behind Transistor is very positive — it's about how all humans are connected," says Hexum about their current album.*

really dreamed I would be looking over Laurel Canyon like I am doing right now. I'm already beyond reality.

It's not a bad thing, it's just that I never had the audacity to believe we would be a double-platinum band. I always thought we were just going to be this obscure little Frank Zappa-like band that was just enjoyed by a certain amount of people. And that would've been fine with me. And success is fine with me too. I'm not bitching about it, that's for sure!

It's maintenance. You have to maintain the integrity and we've still got to sell a certain amount of records. And if it doesn't happen I'm sure we'll be disappointed but it doesn't mean we're going to stop working. We've worked this hard and if we fall upon hard times again, we're just going to be that more hardcore about it.

We're going to f\*\*king dominate for 20 years and whether people will be able to accept that or not is going to be what the future holds. In some people's opinion that won't be true but in mine it will be because I'm going to be here working my ass off until I can't do it anymore. This is what I love and there's no way that I can't do it. If I do it with \$100,000 in the bank or \$10, it doesn't matter because I've been through both and I know what it takes to do both and in the long run it doesn't really matter because I'm just making music. How do you like that (laughs)!





# 311's

## NICK HEXUM: IN LEAGUE WITH THE SUPERSTARS

BY GABRIELLA

After the huge success of their last, self-titled album with the hit single "Down", which sold more than two and a half million copies, 311 are in a league with the superstars. The new 21-song album, *Transistor* has another of their unique mixes of hip-hop, metal, funk, reggae, even lots of dub influences.

Before headlining the current high-profile tour with Los Angeles' Sugar Ray, they were the support band for Primus in Europe. But they don't really seem to mind, at least singer Nick Hexum doesn't. "I've been a Primus fan for ages now, I always really liked them and we've both wanted to tour the States together, but it didn't work out so far, that's why we've been touring Europe with them. I really didn't mind supporting them, not just because they're a real good band, but also because I saw it as a real challenge. We're not all that popular in Europe and it was a challenge to play for an audience who didn't come to see us, who mostly didn't have a clue

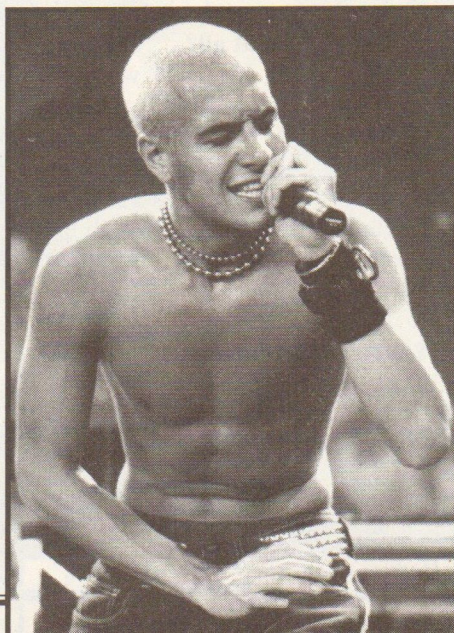
who we were, but who's been cheering and called for encores. I think we've planted a seed there and the next time we might headline our own tour in Europe."

The Omaha, Nebraska quintet — Hexum, bassist P-Nut, lead guitarist Timothy J. Mahoney, drummer Chad

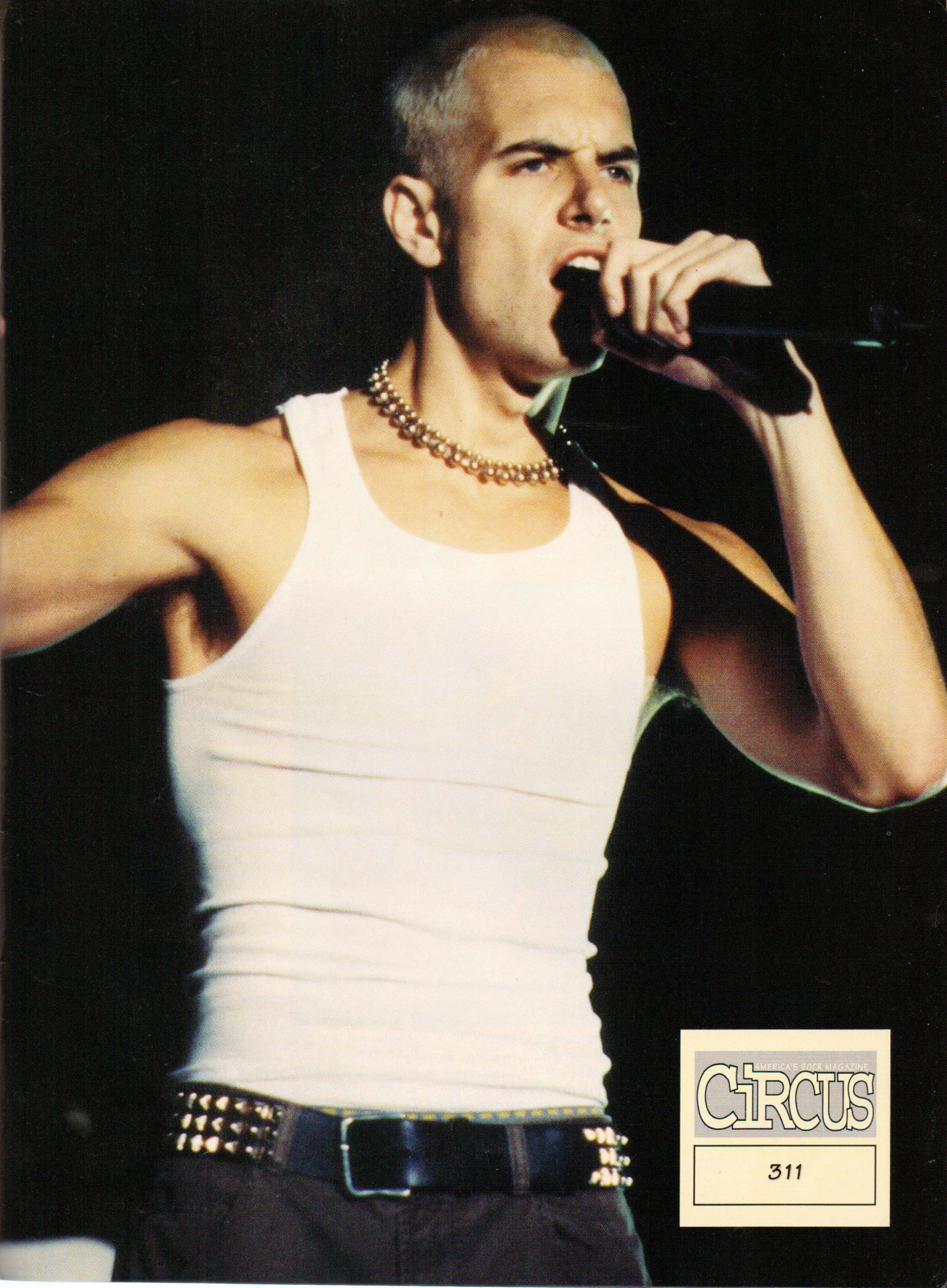
Sexton and co-vocalist SA Martinez — go back as far as 1990, as merely an opening act for hardcore punk band Fugazi. Greatly influenced by the Clash, they originally named themselves Unity, but chose their present moniker after their first guitarist, Jimi Watson, was arrested for skinny-dipping. "311" is the police code in Omaha for indecent exposure, contrary to earlier false reports that they symbolized the initials for the Ku Klux Klan.

Their first three self-released albums all sold well in their hometown, boosting their confidence to relocate to Los Angeles. They laid low for a while building a solid reputation among forthcoming bands established in that area, like Korn and No Doubt.

*Nick Hexum, 27, came from a musically-oriented family. His father was a trumpet player and his mom was a crooning jazz pianist. According to Rolling Stone, the turning point in Hexum's infatuation with music was Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's*







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*Catch 311 on the road on their "Transistour" with openers Sugar Ray. Above is SA Martinez right is an animated P-Nut and below is Timothy Mahoney.*



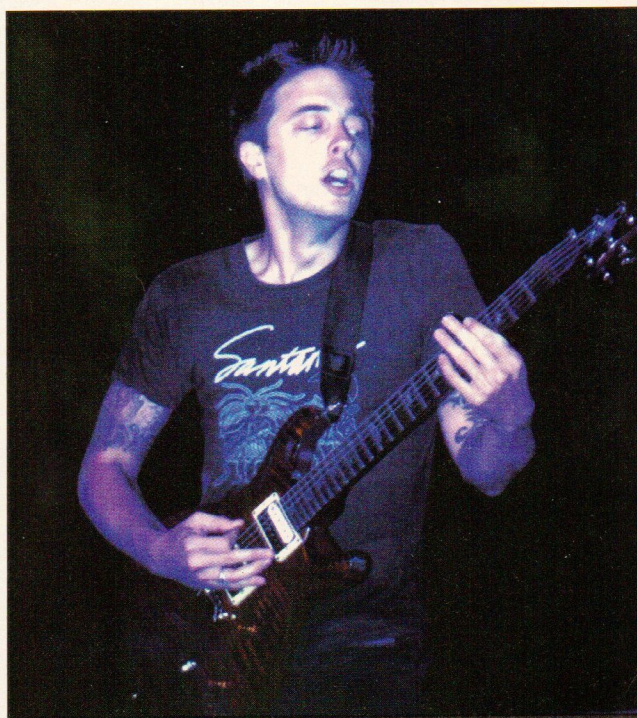
Finally, they signed up with Capricorn in 1993 and recorded two moderately-selling albums before the platinum 1995 s-called "blue" disc (nicknamed after its overtly aqua design of the CD booklet).

In our exclusive *Circus* interview, Hexum discussed his favorite music, expectations of the band and the *Transistor* album.

**CIRCUS:** On *Transistor* your producer is Scott Ralston, who was the assistant engineer on your first three albums and your mixer at live shows.

Hexum: It's our strategy not to work with big names but to work together with people who grow with us and who are close to the band, who are part of it all.

Take our manager [Adam Raspler], for example. He never managed a band before and he's doing a great job with us, just like Scott did a great job. We don't need big names, we prefer to work with real



*The 311's new album, Transistor, was meant to be a gift for their fans, as much as it was a natural outpouring of their skill and talent "Although we had enough material, we did not want to release a double-CD because we did not want our fans to have to pay \$22 bucks for the album," said drummer Chad Sexton (not pictured).*

So far we had to get used to a new face with every record and this time we just wanted to be among ourselves.

**What's the biggest change for you with *Transistor*?**

The biggest change for me personally is that I hardly rap on the new album and concentrate more on reggae. I do more singing instead of rapping. There are only two songs on the album where I rap.

**Why? Don't you like rap anymore?**

I wouldn't say I don't like it anymore, but lately I've been listening to far less hip-hop than I used to. I started to listen to more reggae, funk and jazz, more melodic stuff. I still like hip-hop beats a lot, but somehow looking at the vocals, it really struck me that rap always can be dated. I mean rap always sounds like a certain year and can be out-of-fashion pretty soon. On the other hand if you take a melody, a melody can become a classic – I don't say it has to or it will, but it's got the potential. And a classic is timeless, that's a very fascinating thought and that has influenced me a lot.



In our last interview, you said that *Transistor* would be an album where you're going to experiment a lot. It sounds like you experimented with a lot of different guitar sounds.

Yes we did, but in the end we focused on the Hawaii guitar sound. We were fascinated by its dreamy and psychedelic character.

Then we've got the vibrato-sound, sort of a dinosaur left over from the good old days of analogue effects and well, I play a lot guitar on the new album, far more than I ever did on another album. On

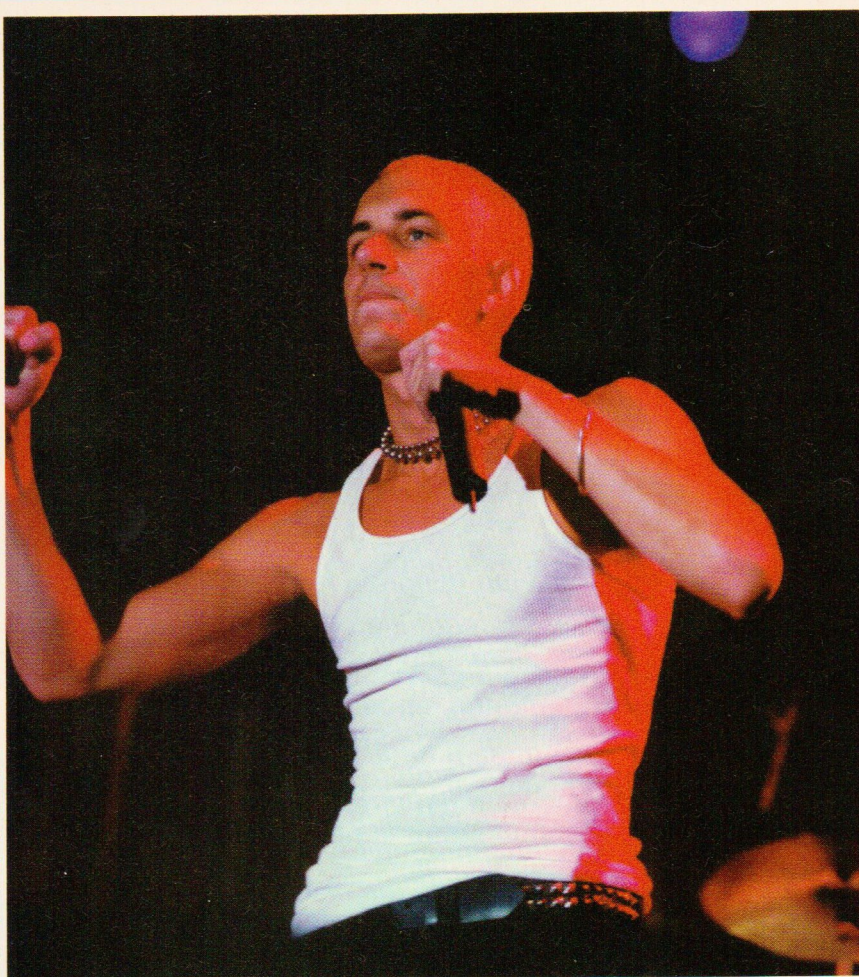
*Transistor*, I play a rhythm part on every song, usually I only played on one third of all the songs.

Tim, our lead guitarist, loves his classic sound and he sticks with it, while I keep changing my styles.

**Was it the success of your last album that gave you the confidence to experiment more?**

Definitely, we could be far more relaxed, we could play around and check out all our opportunities, we could act out our creativity and use everything modern sound and engineering techniques have got to offer.

After *Music* was history, we started to reduce the songs on the following albums. We went more and more back to the basics with each following album. Look at our last album, the instruments are as simple as possible, loud guitars, drums, bass and vocals. The samples, percussion and pianos we added on *Transistor* were left behind because we were scared to



*311's Transistor was intended as an inspirational album that fits perfectly with their philosophy. "The concept behind 'Transistor' is very positive – it's about how all humans are connected," said Hexum, who's pictured above in concert.*

become too complicated. We were scared to move too fast and leave everything and everybody behind.

*Transistor* is definitely a new step forward. Most of it is rather mellow, but we've definitely got three songs on *Transistor* [which] are the hardest rock songs we've ever have written.

**Is the "mellow" sound you display also part of the success you've enjoyed? Being relaxed and laid-back seems to be far easier for you now than it was five years ago.**

I think it's more that we grew up a lot, our music grew with us and our taste did. We wanted to make an album you can listen to, not something for the moshpit but something you can lean back with, something you can enjoy in an easy chair with a pair of headphones. The reggae-vibes are much stronger because I've been listening to a lot of reggae.

OK, we have the added security that we don't have to worry anymore about working at McDonald's to support our music. We're in the lucky position that we don't have to care about hits or hit singles and can decide whatever we want to do and what we want to record. We've been focusing on an album we all can be proud of and that's a great feeling, we feel very lucky about that.

**What else - except reggae - do you like?**

Jazz, funk and of course ska, I really do like ska, but I don't like straightforward rock music, I'm not a fan of that type of music. I prefer bands who combine a couple of different styles, like the Mighty Mighty Bosstones, Gold-

finger or No Doubt. I think that's music for the year 2000, while Bush or other grunge bands just play what has been played a million times before.

Rock can be interesting, but a mix of different genres is far more interesting.

**You seem to be a rather positive band, a lot of other bands seem to complain a lot.**

And that annoys me without end! People who are having a tremendous success but who've got nothing better to do than whine or complain about the hard life they lead simply annoy me. Well, I guess that success just doesn't help you in any way if you've always been miserable. I've always tried to have a positive approach, even when I didn't have any success and even when I was flat broke and now with all the success, I just feel great.