

SACALT

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311, SacAlt, The Interview



Guest Editorial by Andy Conn



Cannabis Community Corner



BudTender of the Month



311: Unified, Evolved

Nick Hexum sits down with SacAlt

by Ty Rivers

Nick Hexum likes the morning, he says in a recent interview. He's all about waking up, soaking in the sun and easing into the day. Hexum is the lead singer of the reggae/rock/alt/funk/pop/rap/cannabis-community listening/whatever else you want to call them band, 311. It's a Friday morning and Hexum is groggy yet inexplicably alert, and getting ready for what he calls an "unscripted day." Unscripted, that's a perfect way to describe Hexum's life these last two decades. Hexum and his band 311 are a prototype of how to do it your way. Some music purists scoff at the idea that 311 is cutting edge or even relevant. Music snobbery aside, 311 has been offering up decent tunes to different generations longer than these music elitists have been searching for change in their couch to pay their overdue rent. On March 11, 311 debuts their 11th album in 24 years, "Stereolithic." Every 311 album has debuted in the top 100 and eight have reached Billboard's Top 10 alternative rock chart. I sat down with Hexum and talked to him about 311, unity, cruises, kids and concerts.

I'm in my mid-40s and I still listen to your greatest hits album. When you look out in the crowd during concerts, what do you see?

Yeah, that's what's cool, we are seeing multiple generations. It's the great thing, really. We've always been about bringing people together. The word "unity" has always been associated with us; it's been an album, and then a song, and then a tour. We just love that were bringing all walks of life together and different generations. We see a lot of high school kids that want to mosh and get crazy, and college people partying, and people a little older; our age, that have been with us for quite a while, so it's really cool. Everyone, the band, the crowd, we all play well together.

Let's talk about unity. Do different groups fit well together or do they collide? The last time I was in a mosh pit was 25 years ago at a Violent Femmes concert.

(Laughs) You've been there, so you know what it's like to let loose and have fun. That's what we mean by unity, bringing different people together.

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You migrated from the Midwest to the West Coast many years ago. How is California different from the Midwest, both musically and stylistically?

Growing up in Nebraska we were in the middle of quite a few things musically and reaching from a lot of different things. In 1988 I wanted to move to the coast and really there wasn't a question that California was for me. The music, like punk rock, hard rock, and rap was so available. Now, since I've been out here, reggae has really got popular. Also, there's a great ska revival, just a great blend of music out here. We spent a lot of time going down to Orange County and spending time with music friends like No Doubt and Gwen, (Stefani, lead singer of No Doubt.) We were ready to play a lot of different styles.

How has your music evolved over the last two decades?

The genre blending has become more and more seamless. Our sound is a mixture that it just sounds like 311 rather than sounding like reggae or rock or punk. Every song has such a big blend of styles. Our new album comes out on March 11th, 311 Day. I was thinking about it, almost every song has some reggae elements in it, but it's also very rockin', it's big guitars and heavy, and a lot of energy that's good for moshing and dancing. So I just think that as we evolve more and more lines get blurred and we just keep going further and further into our weird niche.

311 Day coincides with the new album "Stereolithic." What does 311 Day consist of?

Our festival is kind of a musical marathon. We play deep sets that the hard core fan appreciates but doesn't often get the opportunity to hear. We bring out special production instrumentation, guests. That makes the day special. It's a huge production and it goes all day. Last year for 311 day we enjoyed a 311 cruise. We had friends of the band and many groups cruised and preformed with us. It was great. We had family there. The music was great, the vibe was excellent and we had an amazing time. This year we're celebrating 311 day in New Orleans. We have a lot of variety and special guests, extended sets, just an all day and night affair.

You mentioned the 311 Cruise, Krooked Treez—who we interviewed last month—was with you on that music cruise. They speak very highly of you as sort of mentors. How does it feel to be mentors to up and coming bands?

Krooked Treez is a great group of guys and very talented musicians. I'm honored they speak of us in a positive way. They really performed remarkably on the cruise and you can see they are a band on the rise. Good things to come.

You're playing the California Roots Music and Arts

Festival this year. What are your thoughts on this year's festival?

It's a really impressive lineup. Groundation, Rebelution, Ziggy Marley, Pepper, Soja, J Boog, Passafire; we've played with Cisco (Adler)...almost half the bill has come out on various 311 tours. It's going to be a family reunion of sorts, a definite 311 vibe for sure. Pepper is really one of our closest friends. I go way back with them, producing a few songs at the turn of the millennium. They are just great guys who have come on our cruise before so I'm really looking forward to seeing them.

People describe your music as a sound, like a 311 sound. Your music has a 311 sound but an unmistakable reggae vibe. What direction is your music going and is it on the same trajectory as reggae music?

I just think that Reggae is such a unique genre and I love knowing about the roots of it; having visited Jamaica a few times and learning that this relatively small island has created such a sound that has been embraced worldwide. I first heard reggae when I went on family trips and I went to England and picked up Bob Marley records and was just hooked on the groove of it. Now, (reggae) has just permeated the world. Most islands don't have such unique sounds where so few people have influenced so many. I just love being part of that family tree as someone who has incorporated that and taken it to new styles. It definitely has a big future. I love working with reggae producers that have big futures. There's this guy named Supa Dups that is an amazing producer that I've worked with before and has an amazing sound. I'm looking forward to working with him more. It's a huge part of my life.

What's your personal situation? Do you have kids?

I'm married. I have two daughters, [ages] 2 and 4. They both love music that's danceable, and reggae is definitely included in that. There's a new song that I wrote that has a line about a roller coaster and my 2-year-old daughter keeps requesting the roller coaster song. My older daughter, Echo, is 4 years old and I practice with her every day. I think that even if they don't get into music the discipline of music is so important. Echo is actually very, very gifted. She can just sing a middle C at the drop of a hat, even without a piano around. Her piano teacher is really impressed and I'm pretty proud.

OK, last question. I'm thinking of starting a 311 cover band. I'm not sure if I'll call it 312 or The Ides of March Minus 4. Thoughts?

Either. Both are excellent.



311 Bio and Highlights

311 was formed in 1990 in Omaha, Nebraska by vocalist/guitarist Nick Hexum, vocalist/dj SA Martinez, lead guitarist Tim Mahoney, drummer Chad Sexton and bassist P-Nut. The band now resides in Los Angeles.

311 has sold over 8.5 million units in the U.S.

311 has had 8 albums reach the Top 10 on Billboard's U.S. Top 200 Sales Chart

311 has had 9 singles reach the Top 10 on Billboard's U.S. Alternative Chart (including the #1 singles "Down", "Love Song" & "Don't Tread On Me" along with "Amber", "All Mixed Up", "Come Original", "Creatures (For a While)", "Hey You" and "Sunset in July")

311's most recent album, *Universal Pulse*, debuted at #7 in July 2011 and was produced by Bob Rock (Metallica, Bon Jovi, Motley Crue, Aerosmith).

311's sound is a unique hybrid of rock, reggae, hip-hop & funk. A balance of hard rocking anthems and melodic reggae grooves - with an underlying message of unity & positivity.

After years of incessant touring, 311 has developed a reputation as one of the most influential & most entertaining live bands in the U.S.

With their celebratory live shows, 311 has earned a massive grassroots following. For the past nine years, 311 has headlined their summer "Unity Tour" in amphitheatres across the U.S.- drawing crowds of 10,000 to 18,000 people in Atlanta, Boston, DC, New Jersey, Los Angeles, St. Louis,

West Palm, Charlotte, VA Beach, Denver, etc. The tour is consistently one of the largest modern rock concerts of the summer in the U.S.

Past 311 tours have included an impressive array of opening acts. Bands such as No Doubt, Korn & Incubus all supported 311 on U.S. tours before they became headliners.

Support acts on 311's Unity Tour have included:

Sublime With Rome, The Offspring, Snoop Dogg, Slightly Stoopid, The Roots, Papa Roach, The Wailers, O.A.R., Matisyahu and Ziggy Marley.

311 has always stayed true to their own approach and their underlying message of unity and positivity. That message still rings true for them today...in their lyrics and at their celebratory live shows. Singer Nick Hexum typically ends each show with the words, "Stay Positive and Love Your Life."

Every other year on March 11th ("3-11 Day"), 311 holds a special concert event that attracts thousands of 311 fans from around the world. The show includes an extended setlist (5 hours / 60+ songs) and state of the art production. Last time (March 2012), the band sold-out the Mandalay Bay Arena and tickets were sold to fans in all 50 U.S. states and 13 different countries. 311 fans traveled from around the globe to meet each other and to celebrate 311 Day together.

FOR MORE INFO GO TO: www.311.com