

WEEKEND

FRIDAY

July 13, 2007

Time apart serves Silverchair well

Reunited alt-rockers to release 'Young Modern' stateside July 24

By David Friedman
MUSIC WRITER

The nearly five years between Silverchair's award-winning 2002 masterpiece, "Diorama," and this year's "Young Modern" LP have made the alt-rock band stronger, bassist Chris Joannou said in a June 21 interview.

The group, which rose to stardom when all three of its members — Joannou, singer-guitarist Daniel Johns and drummer Ben Gillies — were in their early teens — has already released its new album in its native Australia. There, the album became the band's fastest seller yet and its fifth No. 1 album — a record for Australian acts that puts Silverchair ahead of AC/DC and Midnight Oil, among others.

The U.S. release is due out July 24 on Eleven: a music company, through Warner Music Group. Silverchair, which sold out two New York City shows earlier this



Martin Philbey

Silverchair bassist Chris Joannou, singer-guitarist Daniel Johns and drummer Ben Gillies were still in their teens in 1995 when they toured with the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

► SILVERCHAIR, PAGE D3

year, will return to the city to play the Roseland Ballroom on July 27.

"We all took a really long break and we all went off and did some different projects," Joannou said from his home in Sydney. "I think (the goal was) just to step back from Silverchair for a bit and go and do something different. ... Dan went off and did the Dissociatives and Ben had another band called Tambalane and I did some production work with other bands (most notably The Mess Hall). I think that it kind of worked out really well.

"When we actually got back together and did a one-off show for a thing called Waveaid out here — which is the tsunami benefit for the people in Indonesia — it had been about two years since we had done a gig together," he added. "After that gig, we were thinking, 'Why the (heck) haven't we still been playing as a band?' We just enjoyed it so much. From that day forward, we realized what the three of us had. Going off and doing other projects, you have a chance to realize that you can't just recreate something like that. It's one of those things that you either have with people or you don't."

With such chart hits stateside as "Tomorrow," "Pure Massacre," "Abuse Me," "Freak," "Ana's Song (Open Fire)" and "Anthem for the Year 2000," Silverchair are ready to build upon their earlier success with "Young Modern." The CD's theme is, in a word, acceptance.

"It's got a lot to do with just accepting more so that you're in a band and all the things that go with it, including being in the public eye," said Joannou, whose band mate, Johns, has battled an eating disorder and reactive arthritis. "Also I guess a big thing that comes through a lot more in his lyrics, in the subjects that he's writing about, instead of kind of speaking about anger toward things, we're all a lot more comfortable with where we're at."

Born Nov. 10, 1979, Joannou is originally from Newcastle, Australia. He comes from middle-class parents; his father is a dry cleaner who years ago played in a pub band. Chris has a twin sister, Louise, and an older sister, Nicole. His earliest music memories were similar to those of his band mates.

"I think we were all in the same boat," he said. "That's probably one of the reasons why we hit it off well with each other at the beginning — all our dads' record collections were pretty much identical to each other. At the age of 12, you're not exactly going to the record store buying your own albums. So (it was) whatever dad had in the cabinets. It just turns out that pretty much record for record, all our old men had the same ones. It was Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Fleetwood Mac, the Beatles."

When Chris joined Silverchair — known early on as Short Elvis and then as Innocent Criminals — the guys were attending New-

castle High School. In mid-1994, they won a national demo competition with their eventual first No. 1 hit, "Tomorrow."

"We had a few originals by then, so there was definitely more than just that one," Joannou recalled. "I guess we just thought it was our best song. I think it could have been because it was the best recorded of the original songs that we had to just send in. And it's quite funny now — we don't actually really play that song very often, or hardly ever."

Why not play a song that defined Silverchair's explosion onto the U.S. music scene back in '95? The MTV hit was the most-played song that year on modern rock radio. And it helped the band's debut CD, "frogstomp," sell more than 2.5 million copies and reach the U.S. Top 10. No Australian band had done that since INXS.

"I think we just played it so much that we got a little bit bored with it," Joannou said. "We get bored pretty quickly. In fact, even with the songs

on the new record now, live we're just changing them all the time. We'll literally change how we play them sometimes. I think 'If You Keep Losing Sleep' (from 'Young Modern'), the end of that always is open-ended. Sometimes we finish normally and sometimes we go off in some weird tangent again!"

Though "frogstomp" showed signs of Silverchair's early grunge rock influences — among them Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Screaming Trees and Soundgarden — the band has always been about evolution. Lyrical and musical direc-

tion has shifted from album to album, although fan support has remained strong over the years, something Joannou and his band mates appreciate.

Following two gold-selling albums — 1997's "Freak Show" and 1999's "Neon Ballroom" — Silverchair began working with now 66-year-old composer, arranger, songwriter and session musician Van Dyke Parks for 2002's "Diorama" LP. Parks' resume includes working with Brian Wilson, U2, Ringo Starr and Toad the Wet Sprocket.

"Daniel has actually become really good friends with Van Dyke Parks," Joannou said. "I remember our manager, John (Watson), he was saying, 'There's this really cool guy called Van Dyke Parks to do strings. He's done a really good job of it, but I think he's dead.' And we're like, 'God, that's a bummer' — because he's worked with so many great people. Someone found out he was still alive and we just called him up and he was into it. He came to Australia and he stayed a couple weeks. He's an amazing inspiration, that's for sure."

Parks returned to the fold for the recording of "Young Modern," which includes such stellar tracks as "If You Keep Losing Sleep" and "The Man That Knew Too Much" — in addition to lead single "Straight Lines."

With Johns, who's married to singer-actress-model Natalia Imbruglia, having overcome his illnesses, Silverchair are ready to continue where they left off — with six million albums sold and 39 ARIA Award (Australian Grammy) nominations. They won six for "Diorama" alone.

"The three of us now are probably enjoying playing in the band and making music more so than we ever had before, which kind of sounds strange — but even more so than probably at the start," Joannou said. "I think this record really reflects that and obviously I think this is our best one yet."

■
The show begins at 8 p.m. The venue is at 239 West 52nd St. Tickets are \$27.50. Call Ticketmaster.com at (203) 744-8100.