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Silverchair has been through a lot since they burst on to the scene back in 1995 when they were fifteen years old. Despite some major setbacks Silverchair has pushed forward and recorded one of the best albums of their career. The band has been missing from the American public eye for the passed few years. In 2002, when they recorded their album "Diorama", front-man Daniel Johns came down with reactive arthritis. He was in so much pain that the band was unable to tour the US in support of the album and the album got very little airplay. In 2007, the band made their US comeback with the release of "Young Modern". They collaborated with the great Van Dyke Parks who has worked with U2 and The Beach Boys as well as Silverchair's 2002 album "Diorama". I recently had the pleasure of interviewing bassist Chris Joannou at one of the final stops on their first US tour since 1999.

SMP: In the United States it seems as though the music that has the most commercial appeal follows a distinct formula: get to the hook in 30 seconds, repeat that hook 4 times and make sure your song is 3 minutes 30 seconds on the dot.

In the DVD released that chronicles the making of Diorama... Daniel says that he believes American audiences are smart enough to not need their music spoon fed to them. Do you agree?

CJ: Well that is something that I think all three of us have said all the time. A lot of people tend to underestimate the listener. Not just here in the states, but all over the place. I think a lot of people just see a certain formula that's easy to digest and that's how they see fit that that's how music should be given. I think there is no reason why it has to be so formulated and every single song is in some ways the same basically leading back to the structure all the time. I honestly think that a lot of people just underestimate the listener most of the time.

SMP: Now is it frustrating or flattering that after all these years American rock radio still plays "Tomorrow" in heavy rotation?

CJ: I think in some ways it is flattering that they still play a song from 1995 and in some ways it's a little frustrating just because we feel that we have moved on so much since then. We see ourselves as pretty much a different band now. I think there is a lot of stuff off "Diorama" that we wish people had heard and its a bit of a shame that we didn't get out here to tour for that but it seems that this time around actually that a lot of people have been talking more about "Diorama" than previous trips. Hopefully, that will spread the love across the back catalog.

SMP: That brings me to my next question. "Diorama" is one of my favorite albums of all time. I love that album and I recently heard that your label is going to re-release "The Greatest View" as a single to US radio. Do you feel that "Diorama" got a fair chance in the US when it was first released in 2002?

CJ: No, definitely not. I think due to the circumstances we weren't able to tour and I guess America is one of those places where you need a pretty good presence to be able to stand up and listen I guess. There was no support from the record company. If you cannot tour then they aren't gonna throw any money at it.

SMP: And that is really sad because that album is so good.

CJ: Yeah, I mean a lot of people have been saying that it has this real cult following to it. Which is really cool but yeah if there was some kind of re-release option, I'm sure we'd be up for.

SMP: Now after coming off the huge Australian "Across the Great Divide Tour" with Powderfinger, is it refreshing to come back to the US and still have that "cult-like" status?

CJ: Yeah, it's all good and well doing the big shows and it's all a lot of fun but there is still something really enjoyable about doing a 500 capacity club with the crowd basically on the stage with you. I think those shows are somewhat more nerve-racking than larger shows. I don't know why. I guess it's because they are so close and intimate. We've been lucky to have the best of both worlds I guess.

SMP: How would you say your Australian fans differ from your American fans?

CJ: I don't know. I think in general we are pretty lucky. I think we've got a pretty loyal fan base. Its been quite lengthy breaks between albums and people hang in there. Just from the stuff we get on our website, I think across the board we are pretty lucky. I mean when people come to see a rock band its a fun show. One thing here in the states

though is when we play some stuff off "Diorama" and a few things off "Young Modern", you can still see that with some people its the first time they've ever seen the band play those songs, which is kinda cool.

SMP: A lot of people still have the mindset that everything is like "Frog Stomp"

CJ: Or "Freak Show"

SMP: Does that bother you at all?

CJ: No, I think it's good that we are now actually getting to play other stuff for people so they can actually hear it for themselves. Its almost like we've been away for so long that we are re-educating people on where we're at and bringing them up to speed.

SMP: You guys don't play "Tomorrow" anymore live. Why is that?

CJ: Yeah, we haven't play "Tomorrow" for a long time and its not because we dont like the song or anything like that. I think we've just played it so much. We've really changed a lot since then. You know, we've got a lot to be thankful for that song. It definitely opened a lot of doors. Also, live we kinda work on a basis that we'd rather play songs that we are really into or inspired by rather than just a greatest hits sort of show. Therefore, people get a much better show if we're into it and not just standing there like blobs.

SMP: So at your live shows, you mostly focus on "Diorama" and "Young Modern" now?

CJ: It's still a little bit from everything. We still play a song off "Frog Stomp" some "Freak Show" and "Neon Ballroom" Yeah a bit of everything.

SMP: What were your biggest influences in the recording of "Young Modern"?

CJ: Um.. it was pretty diverse. I mean there were things like T-Rex and Bowie and The Beatles and a little bit of Kraftwerk. Stuff like that. It was kind of us listening to all sorts of different things.

SMP: When you were recording "Diorama" and "Young Modern", you got to work with Van Dyke Parks who has worked on such classic albums as The Beach Boys "Pet Sounds" and Brian Wilson "Smile" What was that like?

CJ: That was awesome. I mean after working with him on "Diorama", he and Dan kept in contact quite a bit and we knew from the early days that we really wanted him to work on "Young Modern" and he was up for it. He is just a really super intelligent, talented guy. He is definitely one of the greats. Thats for sure.

SMP: How involved were you guys in the orchestration of the album?

CJ: Dan had a pretty good vision but you know you only need to give a small bit to Van Dyke Parks and he's off with it. The reason why we use him is because we want his touch. I don't know. He's got the gift and he's really good with it.

SMP: How long were you guys playing together before you got signed?

CJ: We have been playing a band together since the age of thirteen. Ben and Dan were doing something probably a few things prior to that. As the three of us we were probably playing together about two or three years before we got signed.

SMP: I heard that back in the day when you were still underage that you had to stand out side the clubs you were playing until it was time for you to go on. Is that true?

CJ: Yeah. It was some strange circumstances. Also we had to have a guardian with us at all times or a parent or someone who was over the drinking age to always be with us at venues and things like that. Yeah we used to tour with a dad or a mom up until the age of eighteen. It was cool. They were pretty modern people and they didnt hamper our fun too much.

SMP: What advice do you have for young bands that want to get signed at an early age?

CJ: There is one thing that I always say which is if you are gonna start a band or whatever, playing music, make sure you are doing it for the love of playing music and all that sort of stuff. Don't just get involved in it all just for the success because success doesnt always come and if it does, it's not always destined to stay forever.

SMP: Who is the most interesting person you have met in all your years in the business?

CJ: I'd have to say that Van Dyke Parks is one of the most interesting people we have ever met. You know in all facets.

SMP: Is there anyone that you haven't met that you'd like to?

CJ: Not really. We always kinda look at like if you wanna meet someone that you look up to or your idol or someone like that, it is almost best to leave it because you don't wanna ruin the myth or idea of that person. Sometimes its best left alone..

SMP: Thank you so much. It has been a pleasure.

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