

LOUIS XIV

Jason Hill (vocals/guitars/piano), Brian Karscig (vocals/guitars/piano), Mark Maigaard (drums), James Armbrust (bass)

Most artists are content to stick with the formula they're known for, changing as much (or as little) as they think they can get away with — but Louis XIV are not most artists. In fact, on their new album, *Slick Dogs and Ponies*, the San Diego-based quartet has headed into new sonic terrain. It's a bigger, bolder, more ambitious record that shows the band's growth and evolution while also staying true to their innovative take on modern music.

The album opener, "Guilt By Association," immediately heralds something that's not only new for Louis XIV, but for popular music in general. "On that song, we invented a sound," frontman Jason Hill boldly states. "It's definitely unlike anything you hear in current music."

"And a moment of clarity occurred when we recorded it," recalls guitarist Brian Karscig. "That song defined where we wanted to go and set the bar for the rest of the album."

Amidst all of this change, one element that remains firmly intact on the new album is a fierce commitment to independence, evidenced by the band's decision to once again eschew an outside producer. "I've always produced and engineered our music from the very beginning," Hill explains. "It was one more way we were going to do things on our own terms," reiterating a DIY ethos that's inherent to the way Louis XIV operates, and can be traced back to their very roots.

Originally consisting of childhood friends Hill, Karscig, and drummer Mark Maigaard, Louis XIV began in 2003 when the trio went to Paris for an impromptu writing and recording session. Two weeks later, they returned with the songs that would later comprise their first self-released LP, *Louis XIV*. "Louis XIV was actually a song title when we started... just a guitar riff, really," recalls Hill. "One of our friends built a website and we posted some songs there, but really didn't expect anything." Yet the reaction to Louis XIV, the *band*, was immediate. With a sound best described as modern rock 'n' roll recontextualized through the Rolling Stones, Spiders From Mars-era Bowie, and T. Rex, their music was familiar in aesthetic yet completely fresh in execution.

Word spread across the pond with support from influential BBC1 deejays Zane Lowe and Mary Anne Hobbs, and the band made their first trip to the UK without having played a single show. Upon their return home, they found sales of their independent album shooting through the roof. Local stations were already playing the non-album track, "Finding Out True Love Is Blind," which was literally pulled from their website. With the addition of bass player James Armbrust, the still-unsigned Louis XIV hit the road in the summer of 2004. "Finding Out True Love Is Blind" was rapidly becoming a modern rock smash, with airplay spreading to other parts of the country, prompting the release of the

Illegal Tender EP, which included the track, on the band's own Pineapple Recording Group in January 2005. After an intense bidding war, the band chose to sign with Atlantic Records, who gave their word that this staunchly independent band would remain just that.

The band's Atlantic debut, *The Best Little Secrets Are Kept*, was released just a few months later to rave reviews, while the band quickly made an impact with their live show, sharing stages with the Pixies, White Stripes, and the Killers. Throughout 2005, Louis XIV travelled the world, performing at some of the biggest music festivals, including Japan's SuperSonic and Scotland's T in the Park, not to mention Lollapalooza and the Central Park Summerstage among others back home in the U.S. The band's profile grew with landmark performances on television shows like "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" and "Jimmy Kimmel Live" in the States and "Friday Night with Jonathan Ross" in the UK. After two years of non-stop touring, the band was selling out headlining treks across the country that included stops at NYC's Irving Plaza and San Francisco's legendary, and overseas at similarly sized venues throughout Europe, Asia, and Australia. They closed 2006 by appearing on touring mates the Killers' critically acclaimed *Sam's Town*, and sharing the stage with David Bowie (who cites the group a personal fave) at a benefit concert in New York City.

The band entered their San Diego studio and recorded over fifty songs before choosing the eleven tracks that comprise *Slick Dogs and Ponies*. The lush collection features strings on every track – most arranged by Hill and Karscig themselves; the others came courtesy of renowned composer/arranger David Campbell (aka Beck's father) and were recorded at the legendary Capitol Studios in Hollywood. One shining example of how this symphonic sensibility collided with Louis XIV's blend of inventive pop music can be heard in the epic track "Air Traffic Control."

"That song has a deep meaning to me and the band even beyond the music," Hill explains. "It's about losing a connection with someone or something, and reaching out to get it back. I'm sure many people have been in the position of watching a friend fall from your grasp, whether from drugs, tragedy, or just life pulling people away from each other."

While *Slick Dogs and Ponies* prompted Louis XIV to dig deep and create an honest album that helped to erase any limitations they thought they had, their desire to grow artistically still hasn't been abated. "This record is different, but I know that we'll be switching things up again," Hill summarizes with a smile. "The minute people think they have you pegged, you have to try something new."

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