

SPINAL TAP

STILL ALIVE AND BACK FROM THE DEAD

//WORDS: SUSAN MICHALS

It's hard to believe it's been 25 years since *This Is Spinal Tap* made stars of David St. Hubbins, Nigel Tufnel and Derek Smalls (Michael McKean, Christopher Guest and Harry Shearer, respectively) and made us all realize it really was a fine line between stupid and clever. After 17 breakups, 2,109 groupies (now mostly middle-aged Japanese housewives) and numerous drummers (most lost to strange circumstances), the boys are ready to conquer America ... again. Their new album, *Back from the Dead* is a collection—or rather a retooling—of some of the songs that made them famous, plus a few new ones. There's a reggae version of their '60s hippie hit, "Flower People," and a funky

Derek Smalls, Nigel Tufnel and David St. Hubbins of Spinal Tap—otherwise known as Harry Shearer, Christopher Guest and Michael McKean.

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"Sex Farm." Along with the 19 songs, there's a hilarious one-hour DVD, not to mention a pop-up diorama that unveils three 12-inch action figures of the band, complimented by a proportionally sized Stonehenge. In the midst of prepping for their One Night Only World Tour at Wembley, Spinal Tap (sans Nigel, as he was doing some sort of soy sauce cleanse at a spa in Santa Clarita) spoke with me about the new album, the Internet, and the Jonas Brothers.

We haven't heard from Spinal Tap since your last album, *Break Like the Wind*. What's going on here?

David St. Hubbins: We decided it was time to do something new that was old and redo many of our songs from that film, *This Is Spinal Tap*—that somewhat *scurrilous* documentary that was supposed to make us look good, but, let's face it, made us look *quite* the opposite. We've had very mixed feelings about that film, but it put us on the map in the States. Anyway, we have all this digital technology now—I can't really say it's a "re-imagining" of the songs, because we imagine as little as possible.

Sounds like you've become very tech savvy. Do you spend a lot of time on the Internet?

DSH: You know I just discovered it! I had an email relationship with my former girlfriend Janine—we were virtually married because we couldn't stand being in the same room together, but we still loved one another. I was living in California and she was living in Wales. Our online relationship was the best. Of course we had to end it because she went to a different server or ISP or what have you. But yeah, I'm pretty savvy. I'm always surfing the Internet looking for plans on how to save the planet.

Have you found anything?

DSH: No, just a lot of porn.

Back from the Dead—does that title have some sort of double meaning?

DSH: Double meaning? I don't think there's even one meaning.

Derek Smalls: We're all alive and we're going to take it on the road until we all collapse, which will be about two shows.

Can you elaborate on how some of the tracks have changed?

DSH: We really got a chance to explore material that before we were only sniffing at. There's a new version of "Flower People" done in reggae; we have a flautist—that's a person who plays the flaut. We finally recorded "Short and Sweet," and we got John Mayer, Phil Collen and Steve Vai to collaborate—of course they idolize us, worship us—we had to let them play on the album or else they'd cry, as young men will often do when spurned by idols. There was also the long awaited debut of "Jazz Odyssey," Derek's brilliant jazz suite. Cantata. Whatever it is.

DS: Which, may I remind you, has been mocked and ridiculed for years, and may continue to be so for years to come. **Who or what was the inspiration for "Sex Farm"?**

DSH: (Sigh of concession.) All right, I guess I better come out with it. She went under the stage name of Lhasa Apso—she was a very statuesque beautiful woman—I'm still in love with her, is what I'm saying. We sang together in a band called the Les Chiswick Soul Explosion. Unfortunately, I can't tell you her real name because she's quite respectable now—she lives in Calgary, Canada and, well, let's just say she's in horses.

As a musician, of course you have great rhythm. Would you ever consider going on one of these American shows like *Dancing with the Stars*?

DSH: I would rather be a judge. You know the show is a derivative of *Strictly Come Dancing* which started in the U.K. You know your language started in the Britain of course, so I think that it's only natural that really crap television should come from the UK as well. I actually think Derek would be the perfect candidate for *Dancing with the Stars* because he's so graceful and he's so cute. He's not really that short, he just appears short.

DS: See? This is what David does—he's always ready to judge me. Actually, I prefer *Celebrity Apprentice*. I have a head for business—I'm in the process of opening a chain of food establishments in the U.K. called "Derek Smalls' Big Bottom Burgers."

Now the groupies—do you think they're going to be different now as opposed to how they were back then?

DSH: They're really going to be different now. Back then, they were present, and this time I don't think they're even coming. I have actually become a much more spiritual man, so I'm sort of over that whole thing.

DS: He's over them, but I prefer to be a bit under them. That gives you an idea as to how we differ.

DSH: I had a bit of a revelation, not too long ago. I was shopping on iTunes and this little thing popped up—Josh Groban and Celine Dion singing "The Prayer." This wave of emotion came over me. I fell to my knees and I said, "Please, please, Lord, may I never hear this song ever again."

What do you think of the Jonas Brothers?

DSH: I quite like them. You know what they are? They're a really young Hanson. But slightly older than the original young Hanson and certainly younger than the now middle-age Hanson. They're sort of like, the *real* Jonas Brothers. We see them, and we imagine them that they're one way or another, and then you listen to them and you realize, they're an entirely different group.

You said you weren't necessarily happy with the way the movie made you look 25 years ago, but you said you've also had an epiphany since then. How do you see yourself now when you look back on the movie?

DS: Hacky job—it's been scientifically proven. Talk about taking things out of context.

DSH: We tried to ignore that DiBergi bloke and he put together the movie he wanted to put together—that's his business. We looked like fools, we admit it.

DS: Most of the time we weren't playing second to a puppet show—that was a one-time thing. It's a perfect example of modern propaganda—it's not a rockumentary, it's "rockuganda"—and I'm not speaking about the African country.

Derek—I know this might be a sensitive subject, but ... that incident. In the airport.

DS: (exasperated) Yes.

Has the increase in airport security affected you?

DS: Yes, now I just check in my luggage, darling.

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