



THE REIGNING KINGS OF POP RUN THEIR OWN SHOW

It's tough to talk about *NSYNC without overusing the words "best," "biggest," and "most".

They're the world's best-selling band (their *No Strings Attached* album has racked up over \$300 million in sales). Their stage show is the biggest in pop history (the current PopOdyssey tour will entertain more than eight million fans, with the production traveling between arenas in an 88-truck convoy). *NSYNC are, in short, the most successful entertainers of the new millennium.

BUT THE STAGGERING SCALE OF THAT SUCCESS SOMETIMES OVERSHADOWS the talent, craftsmanship, and sheer hard work that generated it. As the band has humorously pointed out in their songs and videos, *NSYNC is no puppet troupe. The group parted ways with their original label and management out of a desire to control their own careers. The presence of four strong songs by band member JC Chasez on *No Strings Attached* proved the boys could do more than sing and dance. But *Strings* was a mere warm-up for *Celebrity*, the quintet's third disc. The group wrote and produced most of the album themselves before launching the gargantuan PopOdyssey venture.

We recently spoke to *NSYNC's JC Chasez and Justin Timberlake, whose musical partnership predates the group's 1994 debut. The two first worked together as children on the Disney Channel's "The Mickey Mouse Club."

What are the biggest misconceptions about *NSYNC?

Justin: That we don't do anything ourselves. That we're not involved in our careers. That we don't write our own material, even though we wrote all but two or three songs on the new album.

JC: Some people think we lip-sync everything. But we never lip-sync at all in the States, and we only do it sometimes on TV in Europe because some of the shows are only set up for playback singing there. We're always performing live.

Do those misperceptions bother you—or just amuse you?

Justin: Personally, I could care less.

JC: Well, we do want to be respected. We want to be treated like the artists we look up to. Not today—those artists have earned that respect by doing what they do for years and years. And we're never going to get respect from rock and roll guys because we're not rock and roll. But we want to be respected someday for doing a good job at what we do.

Some of your songs and videos make fun of the idea that *NSYNC is a plastic band.

JC: If you can't make fun of yourself, who can you make fun of? Some of the stuff we do is corny, and some of it is cool. Anyone who criticizes us for making fun of ourselves, well, they're missing out on the sense of humor in it.

What are some of the other ways you've taken control of your careers?

JC: We've grabbed the reins for everything at this point. Ever since we signed with the new label, Jive, they've been taking us seriously as artists. They've put a lot of trust in us, and we haven't disappointed them so far, so they're willing to let us run with the ball. We write the music video treatments. We pick the directors and tell them what we want. We choose the choreographers. So we're at a point where we can definitely call ourselves artists, because from here on out, everything is going to be our call.

You didn't have to start writing your own material. What prompted you to take the plunge?

JC: We've actually been doing it since the beginning. It was just a matter of waiting until our songs got good enough to put on the records. We just weren't comfortable in that skin yet. But the more you do it, the better you get at it, and we felt like our stuff was good enough to put on the record this time.

Justin: I've been writing for a while, but not with this much quantity at one time. But on the new album I co-wrote "Up Against the Wall" and "Pop," the first single. I did "Celebrity," "See Right Through You," "Gone," and "Something Like You."

You've made your songwriting debuts on some of the best-selling records of all time. Was it scary to unveil yourselves so publicly?

Justin: No. I don't look at it that way. It's fun.

JC: It didn't feel risky—it just felt natural. Besides, we had no idea the records would be that successful. We just thought the songs were good, so we stuck them on the record. We had no idea people were going to respond that way.

Who are your songwriting heroes?

Justin: Stevie Wonder.

JC: Definitely Stevie Wonder. Sting. Seal. U2. They write things that people want to hear over and over. The kind of songs you never get tired of. Songs that take you somewhere—that instantly put you in a certain place and time.

Do you write at an instrument?

JC: Every song is different. Sometimes you think of a melody in your head and then bang it out on a guitar or a piano. Sometimes it starts at an instrument and moves on from there. I thought of "Space Cowboy" on an airplane, but "Selfish" started at the keyboard. It was a matter of playing and getting a vibe, striking a riff that I wanted to keep playing over and over until it became something.

How many songs did you develop in the studio before choosing the ones that appear on *Celebrity*?

JC: We developed almost 30 and picked 13.

Justin: We have meetings where we decide which songs sound best. But the real sifting process comes at the end when we have the final A&R meeting to decide what's going on the album.

JC: You're looking for that piece of magic, and not every song has magic.

How do you know when you have it?

JC: There's no one thing. You just know a good song when you hear it. When a song grabs your attention and means something to you, you figure, if it has that effect on me, maybe it will have it on other people as well. In the future, if other people deliver songs that are better than what we've written, it will be our choice to record them. If we like what we've written better, we'll use that. At the end of the day, it's about great songs. What will reach people. What will touch them. We'll always choose that over being selfish about our own songs.

Justin: For the most part, we agree about which songs to keep.

JC: Yeah, we tend to be on the same page. And if we're not, we always come to a compromise, because we all respect each other as artists. And those compromises almost always work out for the best.

So there's no boss in the studio?

Justin: Everybody just kind of takes turns.

JC: Yeah. It's really about who's in what mood what day. We change hats every day. If someone feels like wearing the leader hat that day, they wear it.

Justin: If you wrote the song, then you take the lead. Like when we recorded my song "Something Like You," I produced. I actually got to produce a Stevie Wonder harmonica part. I was so impressed with how he played! Even everything he "messed up," we kept—that's how good it was. I'm definitely learning more every day about how to communicate a vision to the



***NSYNC are (l-r):**
Lance Bass
Joey Fatone
Chris Kirkpatrick
Justin Timberlake
JC Chasez

"WE JUST MAKE MUSIC WE LIKE AND HOPE OTHER PEOPLE WILL LIKE IT, TOO."

musicians who play on our records.

Now you're about to embark on one of the biggest tours of all time.

JC: Actually, it's the biggest production of all time. We have surpassed all previous tours in size. It takes a while to put something like that together, especially when all the ideas are yours and you want to see them realized the way you originally dreamt them up.

Justin: At the end of the No Strings Attached tour, we started thinking up concepts. It took us like two months to put this together after we had all the ideas together and had the stage built.

JC: It's a lot of work. See, the difficult part about being in a band like ours is that we have to do twice as much work as a lot of other bands. A rock band has to get their music together, and then they pretty much just go out and play it. But we have to rehearse the music, learn the choreography, and put the two together. Then we have to work in the theatrics, rehearse the

transitions and costume changes, bring in the props and explosions, and make everything line up with everything else so it creates a picture and touches the audience.

Tell us about *NSYNC's relationship with Yamaha.

JC: Yamaha has been totally cool with us. Everyone there is real supportive, and they hook us up whenever we need gear on tour. When we need a sampler, they send one. If we need an O2R mixing console to do some demos or maybe a show somewhere, they send it. The thing has total recall, so you set it, and you can have all your settings right back up just by pushing a button, which is nice. The Yamaha gear is usually the best stuff on the road, because it's so reliable.

How do you strike a balance between attempting new things and giving your audience what they want?

JC: In the beginning at least, we do everything for ourselves. If we don't like some-

thing, we're not going to listen to it, and if we wouldn't listen to it, why would anybody else? So we just make music we like and hope other people will like it, too. That's all we can do, really.

Justin: The main thing is that the sound keeps evolving into something more different and original.

Do you ever pause to consider the fact that you are providing many young people with their first memorable musical experience?

JC: Yeah, that's definitely a trip. I hope it's a good thing. I'm definitely proud of everything we've done, and if we're somebody's first album or first show, I hope they got their money's worth. I know if I came to one of our shows, I'd be entertained. There's something there for everyone, and the visual aspect is important to me. I always looked up to people who were entertaining that way, like Michael Jackson. I hope people are getting the same feeling from us. I can't put myself in the audience's shoes,