

# THE KOOKS

BY CALLUM FITZPATRICK

**Following a six-month break, The Kooks have been busy crafting material for a “groovier” fourth album, as well as rehearsing for their upcoming Australian tour. But unlike many musicians who you may expect to spend the time off collaborating, working on a solo project, or putting in some time with the family, The Kooks’ lead guitarist Hugh Harris says he did what every other young man would do when given a career break – he went backpacking around Southeast Asia.**

“It was actually really cheesy – it was just me and a backpack, with no return plane ticket,” Hugh laughs. “I had a friend in Hanoi, so I travelled down south with him for a bit. Then I went through Cambodia and Thailand. I met loads of Aussies. You guys are killing it out there!”

The typical SE Asia backpacking trail is always littered with as many amusing anecdotes as buckets of Sangsom, and Hugh admits that his experience was no different. The funniest story he says, occurred at a bar in Vietnam...

“It sounds like it should be scary, but it was fucking hilarious!” he recalls. “We were drinking in my friend’s bar in Hanoi after hours, but then we got a bang on the door from the police – who have started to crack down on lock-ins – so we hid upstairs under a table. However, it turned out that the police were just smashed and wanted to continue drinking! We stayed in hiding for about an hour listening to these Vietnamese policemen getting absolutely trolleyed downstairs at the bar. The noise was insane!

“Eventually we decided enough was enough, so we ran away as fast as we could. The policemen chased us,

blowing their whistles, but they were so drunk that they were all stumbling and falling over each other in the street. It was hilarious.”

Evidently, the trip did Hugh and the indie four-piece a world of good. Hugh says he returned refreshed and with a much more relaxed approach to songwriting.

“I think we’ve found the fun in music again,” he says. “We’re not over-analysing things anymore and we’re being spontaneous and getting ideas down as soon as they come. An idea can become stale if you stew on it too much – it’s more vibrant and fresh when it’s first birthed. You can often have an idea for a song and discuss it so much that by the time you get to putting it down, you’re not that excited about it anymore. It’s quite detrimental to the music.”

This spontaneity is something that was lost on the band’s previous two albums, *Konk* and *Junk of the Heart*, which were both heavily produced and processed in comparison to their rawer debut, *Inside In/Inside Out*.

“If you look at the first album, we wrote *Ooh La* and then recorded it that evening,” Hugh says. “It definitely has



that fresh feel to it. *Junk of the Heart* didn’t really have that vibe – it was very ‘thought out’, but that was part of the concept for the album. There are parts on *Konk* where you can definitely tell that the excitement and the moment of a song was over-rehearsed. When that happens, a song can lose its fizz...its shazam...its twang, funk, or mojo... that’s as many buzz words as I can think of right now,” Hugh laughs.

Even though the fourth album is still in its infancy, Hugh says the output has been surprisingly far removed from the indie-pop sing-a-longs we’ve come to expect from the band.

“We have around five or six songs ready to go, and they’re all sounding really fucking cool,” he says. “It’s sounding totally different to *Junk of the Heart*. It’s more rhythm-based and it’s more about big grooves with big melodies – it’s a bit Prince-y in places and even Michael Jackson-y in other ways. It’s bizarre.”

Unsurprisingly, it’s the artists Hugh has been listening to recently that have instigated this shift in direction – namely Nile Rodgers, Prince, David Bowie, as well as Yeasayer for

their production style. However, don’t expect to witness any of this new incarnation on the band’s forthcoming tour.

“It’s really not worth it to have the crappy YouTube videos surface online – I think we’re better off waiting for a proper release,” Hugh explains. “Otherwise you get people watching gigs through their fucking cameras, which is a bit shit. We don’t want to encourage people to start recording gigs instead of enjoying them.

“I think that when I see a live recording of a band, I don’t judge it very harshly as it’s just a live gig. You don’t need to be precious about it, but I think that a lot of bands are. For me, it’s not about the content being online, it’s more about the person behind you having to watch the gig through a fucking digital camera. It’s not the best vibe for a gig.

“Either way it’s not a huge deal I suppose. There are worse things going on in the world.”

**THE KOOKS play the Palais Theatre on Wednesday May 1 and Friday May 3 (sold-out), as well as Groovin’ The Moo in Bendigo on Saturday May 4 (sold-out).**