

# The New York Times

New York, NY  
December 9, 2019

---

## Arts

The New York Times

---

### Can a Movie Restore the Legacy of INXS?



Michael Hutchence in "INXS Live Baby Live," which will be in select theaters across the United States on Monday.

A remastered concert film is a reminder of the band's appeal.

By KRISTI YORK WOOTEN

In the opening scenes of the concert film "Live Baby Live," INXS bangs out "Guns in the Sky," an anti-nukes anthem from its six-times-platinum 1987 album "Kick." As beats reverberate across London's old Wembley Stadium, the Australian rock band's appeal leaps to life: funky guitar rhythms, saxophones, tight trousers and the soulful flow of the singer Michael Hutchence's voice.

The movie, which captured the band's July 1991 show before a crowd of nearly 74,000, has been fully restored from its original 35-millimeter print, and is rolling out in theaters across the globe in 4K Ultra HD; Monday it comes to America for a one-day-only event. It will be followed on Jan. 7 by "Mystify," a biographical documentary about Hutchence directed by Richard Lowenstein. Taken together, this is a rare moment of visibility for a band that achieved global superstardom but has been notably absent in the digital age.

"It may seem preposterous, but I hope young musicians will see the film and say, 'Let's be different. Let's be like *this*,'" Tim Farriss, one of the band's founders and its lead guitarist, said of "Live Baby Live" in a phone interview from Australia.

CONTINUED ON PAGE C5

# Can a Movie Restore the Legacy of INXS?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

INXS — which included Tim Farriss's siblings Andrew (keyboards) and Jon (drums), along with Kirk Pengilly (guitar, saxophone), Garry Gary Beers (bass) and Hutchence — started out as the Farriss Brothers in 1977. After years of writing and performing, INXS broke out in the United States in 1983 with an MTV video for “The One Thing” that helped push the song into the Top 40. The band followed up with a freight train of high-energy hits: “What You Need,” “Need You Tonight,” “New Sensation,” “Suicide Blonde” and “Beautiful Girl.” But the group's popularity started to wane around the time of its 1993 album “Full

**A younger generation has spoken up about INXS's influence, particularly female artists.**

Moon, Dirty Hearts,” and in 1997 Hutchence hanged himself in a Sydney hotel room. He was 37.

The band went on hiatus and returned with a series of guest singers, including Terence Trent D'Arby in a gutsy 1999 stadium performance. In 2005, it searched for a new vocalist on a CBS reality show, “Rock Star: INXS,” carrying on with the winner, J. D. Fortune, on and off until 2011 (though the experiment wasn't as successful as Queen's tours with Adam Lambert, or Journey's live work with the singer Arnel Pineda). In 2012, INXS announced it was stopping touring entirely.

“Live Baby Live” captures INXS at its peak; “Mystify” uses intimate interviews with Hutchence's inner circle (U2's Bono, Kylie Minogue and the model Helena Christensen) to paint a soft-focus picture of the singer. The documentary reveals the brain damage he suffered after an altercation with a taxi driver in 1992, and quells, but never dispels, speculations about why he hanged himself. Both films prompt questions about the band's subsequent struggles to translate worldwide record sales of more than 50 million into lasting visibility.

Hutchence's influence on other rock frontmen was profound: “Bono and I both lifted from him a lot,” Michael Stipe of R.E.M. said in a recent interview. “As a performer, my



God, he was equal to none. Not unlike seeing Elvis Presley at his greatest.” At a November concert in Sydney, Bono called Hutchence “a true beauty.” But the singer's death came at a moment of transition for the music industry: right before Napster's rise. The result was a “lost decade” of music sales and “deleted years” of MP3 files until streaming services, which restored the idea that music wasn't free, overtook downloads. In some ways, the internet swallowed INXS.

In the years after Hutchence's death, “everything changed rapidly,” said the producer Giles Martin, who remastered the sound for “Live Baby Live” at Abbey Road Studios. “If you look at someone who is comparable to Michael Hutchence, like Jim Morrison from

the Doors, that band didn't suffer the same sudden changes in technology as INXS did,” which had an impact on its legacy, he said.

Still, a younger generation has spoken up about the band's influence, particularly female artists such as London Grammar's Hannah Reid, Paloma Faith, Courtney Barnett (who sang the whole “Kick” album) and Bishop Briggs, who said her take on “Never Tear Us Apart” for the “Fifty Shades Freed” soundtrack last year gave her a deep appreciation for Hutchence's “soulful essence.”

The singer Ben Harper, who performed on INXS's 2010 album “Original Sin,” believes there's still time for the band to be discovered. “The music isn't going anywhere, it will be here as long as humans let it,” he said.

“INXS stands out, because not a lot of the bands from the 1980s had those pop sensibilities with a true rock edge.”

Last month, the Matchbox 20 singer Rob Thomas performed with INXS's Andrew Farriss in Australia to mark the anniversary of Hutchence's death. “More people should have been saying the name Michael Hutchence as much as they said Prince, Madonna or any of the other great icons from that era,” Thomas wrote in an email, adding that a resurgence could be right around the corner, “maybe a film or television moment that brings them back into the grand consciousness. They certainly should be in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.”

“INXS Live Baby Live” captured the band's July 1991 show before a crowd of nearly 74,000 at London's old Wembley Stadium. A restored 35-millimeter print will be screened in theaters in 4K Ultra HD.

EAGLE R