



down. I support a lot of bands by getting them onto MTV, radio, mags, etc., spreading the word on some of the best upcoming bands of today. It's a privilege to all of their support teams. I get telephone calls, etc. from the band members personally. I help pass out flyers and they also reward us by giving us stage passes. It's the best thing to be part of. So could you please contact

Perched in Poughkeepsie with Chris Robinson

BY RICH MALOOF

Strut. In one word, that sums up Chris Robinson's stage presence, offstage demeanor, and general attitude. The Black Crowes' vocalist, clocking in at the green ol' age of 24 years, is endowed with all the confidence and mannerisms of a ripened veteran. Sitting in a dimly lit bar on a cloudy day in Poughkeepsie, New York, Chris most notably dons dark shades and a pair of oversized red patent-leather shoes. With a debut album soaring past platinum, perhaps the Crowes have earned the right to strut, and many would probably agree — Chris among them. But he says it has little to do with album sales.

"We walk around like we're still the snotty f**kin' kids who used to play clubs and thought we were the Rolling Stones — before we got a record deal!" Robinson says over an early afternoon Heinekin. "It's very weird, y'know. Eleven months on the road into it, you start to really weed out the parts that kinda ... It all smells sweet, y'know, but at some point it gets so sweet that it makes you sick."

With an early string of hits and a sizeable budget, it's obvious that the Crowes please the pallets of the industry types. Nonetheless, the necessary business aspects of sending his band to the top of the charts leave a bitter taste in the vocalist's mouth.

"You know how radio stations have sister stations and they have 'con-



PHOTO: RON AKIYAMA

sultants.' What is some old man sitting in New York with a suit and tie going to consult about the Black Crowes? You don't f**kin' know who I am, you don't know what I'm about. Oh, because 'Twice As Hard' was catchy then you'll allow it to be on the radio. Well, f**k you.

"I'm not here for them," he emphasizes in a voice loud enough to make the

waitress scurry back behind the bar. "I'm there for me, y'know? I'm a f**king songwriter. I'm not some f**king guy who read an ad in a newspaper and said [affecting a wasted surfer voice], 'Man we need a hot lead singer with long hair and leather pants for a sleazy rock band.' Get that outta here. You can move to L.A. and shlop around with all the other people


who don't have an ounce of talent."

Yikes. When Chris is on a roll he is no slave to discretion. He chuckles about his outspoken nature, and claims that he gets admonishing phone calls from the record company every two days. Prudence, however, is a rule in a game he doesn't care to play.

"Your mouth does get you in trouble. Who speaks the truth? Man, you know, everyone's being very diplomatic. Because God forbid you say something bad about Mark Slaughter. Then all the little girls who buy Slaughter records and bought your record will say 'How could you say something bad about Mark?' I didn't say anything bad about him, I'm sure he's a nice guy. I wouldn't wear laminates onstage," he adds coolly, "but I guess some people do. Y'know it's funny — people don't want to hear the truth at all."

Getting to the truth in this industry is seldom easy. If today's musicians really had a direct medium for dialogue, we'd have much different pictures than the ones touched up by managers, publicists, journalists, et al. Chris talks a bit about how that painting is blurred, and sympathizes that Faces can't really print everything he has to say. But even though he and his band have been criticized for their pomposity, Chris admits that the impression is not so far off the mark. He says that "being a little bit arrogant is a part of it." Why is that so?

"Because," he answers with an appropriate snarl, "we can be. And we're not scared. Being confident throws people off. We're just a different animal out there. So what I'm saying is, if you want to go for the ride, go, man. But don't get in the middle of it and then chicken out! You want to go for the ride, go for the ride!" He laughs. "Don't chicken out. Once you get there, get your feet planted and just f**kin' go with it. Whatever that means,



"This band will put me in my grave."

y'know." After a long pull on his beer he adds, "This band will put me in my grave."

The fact that Chris says that and still makes no concessions is evidence of his persistent confidence. Better to burn out than to turn to rust, I guess, but sometimes it's tough to see past his thick sunglasses to judge whether his eyes have as much conviction as his words. Maybe that's why he keeps them on. But as our discussion draws to a close, Chris leaves no room for disclaimers or excuses.

"I just think the main thing about the Black Crowes is ..." he pauses to get the words just right. "There's nothing safe about the Black Crowes. And a lot of bands out there want to say that about themselves. Well, I want those guys to ride on my tour bus for a week. And if they can deal with it without going to the emergency room at the end of it? Good for them, man. But a lot of bands are living a lie. And we don't. And, that's not just musicians, man, that's everyone. A lot of people live lies. I can't. What you see is what you get. So that's basically the

whole thing. The Black Crowes do not live a lie."

Late that night at a club called The Chance, the five members of the Black Crowes roar into their set. Beneath a huge banner painted with an inebriated Heckle and Jeckle, the stage glows with the light from hundreds of candles. Sitting on top of amps, cases and the drum riser, the candles send giant, looming shadows flickering across the backdrop and onto the crowd. The Jack Daniels bottle atop the bass amp is not out of place.

The Crowes run through most of their album, bow to the blues masters for a few long jams, and introduce some new material. Chris, with the back of his wrists at his hips, does Mick Jagger better than Mick Jagger. His brother Rich stands as motionless and placid as the statue David, not even contorting his face the least bit as he slings some slide guitar. When the sweaty gritty set comes to a close, the Black Crowes take a deep bow. And as the other members slowly walk toward the backstage, Chris Robinson exits with a strut. ■