

Q&A COURTNEY LOVE PG. 20 | TOUR OF DUTY KINGSWOOD'S DEBUT ALBUM PG. 36

# Rock & Roll



POWER TRIO  
DJ Debris, Suffa and  
MC Pressure

## The Hoods Strike Back

**Y**EAH, OUR MANAGER IS RUTHLESS," laughs Hilltop Hoods' Suffa, aka Matthew Lambert, down the phone from a hotel in Zurich, Switzerland. It's mid-July, and although the hip-hop trio handed their record company the masters to seventh album *Walk-*

Hilltop Hoods unleash their soulful follow-up to *Drinking from the Sun*  
By James Jennings

*ing Under Stars* a mere week-and-a-half prior, they're already ensconced in a European tour that's so far seen them play three sold-out shows in Germany. ("They're pretty happy with how their soccer team has gone in the World Cup," says Lambert, "so the general mood there [Cont. on 14]

COURTESY

## ROCK&amp;ROLL



**GLOBE TROTTER**  
Hilltop Hoods  
recorded part of  
*Walking Under Stars*  
at the Red Bull  
Studios in London.

## HILLTOP HOODS

[Cont. from 13] at the moment is pretty good!") Besides the following day's hip-hop festival Openair Frauenfeld, there are upcoming dates in Austria, Hamburg, Amsterdam and London before they fly back home. Understandably, Suffa and fellow Hoods DJ Debris (Barry Francis) and MC Pressure (Daniel Smith) are weary and plan to spend their day off in a hotel with nothing on the agenda but sleep, soccer and room service.

Written and recorded over the past two years at Lambert and Francis' home studios in Adelaide (as well as a couple of tracks captured at Red Bull studios in London and New York), *Walking Under Stars* was initially conceived as a sequel to 2012's double-platinum *Drinking from the Sun*. As Lambert tells it, the execution of a straightforward continuation didn't pan out as originally planned. "We were working on stuff during the *Sun* sessions, but what happens when you leave material with us [for too long] is we rework it or get rid of it," laughs the MC and producer. "So we wound up creating a lot of new material that's even better than what we had before. We wanted it to be representative of where we're at now."

Produced largely by Lambert but with contributions from One Above, Cam Bluff, SIXFOUR and Debate, Smith sees the LP as classic Hilltop Hoods, but with a twist. "It still sounds like us but it's a bit more modern and progressive and probably a bit

more soulful than the last record," he explains. Besides singing on the album himself, Smith reveals the group employed the talents of 24-year-old British soul vocalist Maverick Sabre on two songs, including first single "Won't Let You Down". "We finished that song and Maverick was like, 'We've got an hour left - let's make another one!,'" laughs Smith. "So he wrote another tune on the spot in 30 minutes and we were like, 'OK, let's do this!' He nailed it in one take... he's a rare talent."

Other guests to appear on the LP include Brother Ali (Smith's favourite lyricist), Australian rapper Drajpt, New Zealand singer Aaradhna and Melbourne singer-songwriter Dan Sultan on "Rumble Young Man, Rumble". "We just love that dude," enthuses Lambert. "He came and spent the day with us and knocked out the vocals in an hour. Then we just went to the pub with him and got some lunch." Smith adds the session involved a lot more talking and drinking than actual recording. "We talked shit for four or five hours and had some beers then went, 'Ah fuck - we better actually make some music!' It was very casual, very cool."

Originally scheduled to come out in 2013, *Walking Under Stars* was delayed when Smith's 10-year-old son, Liam, was diagnosed with Leukaemia. The troubling period is chronicled in heart-wrenching album track "Through the Dark", a song Smith wrote while his son underwent che-

motherapy. "I say in the lyrics, 'I wrote this one from a hospital bed', and I literally did," says Smith. "It was by far the hardest song I've ever written and the most personal, difficult topic I've broached because at the point that I wrote that, the doctors had given him a 50/50 chance to live." Although painstakingly written and rewritten over a six-month period, the track almost didn't make the album. "I thought it was too personal, but Suffa turned me around and demanded that it go on the record," says Smith. "I'm glad he changed my mind."

**"It was by far the hardest song I've ever written," says Smith of "Through the Dark".**

After playing this year's Splendour in the Grass festival and releasing *Walking Under Stars* in early August, the Hoods will take aim at conquering the U.S. - something Lambert says is the "number one" goal for the group. "We'll make inroads by offering a few bribes, buy some CEOs prostitutes," he laughs. "We're doing a 24-date tour that runs everywhere from Salt Lake City to New York. We feel we've got a strong live show that people have fun at, so all we can do is tour and hope that people connect with the music."

2014 will wrap up with an Australian tour that will run from October through to December, ensuring that Hilltop Hoods will be feeling weary for the foreseeable future. "We've been in a tired state for 10 years," laughs Smith. "Don't worry, we're used to it." 75