

Craig Nicholls, The Vines, Alternative and Autism

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The point of the following is to let people know that Autism does NOT preclude a person being a high functioning member of society. The story of Craig Nicholls, lead singer for the alternative group The Vines tells this tale and shows that Autism strikes everywhere.

Early days

Craig Nicholls is second youngest of four, having two sisters and a brother. He spent his childhood listening to The Beatles and painting. He attended Marist College Penshurst. Nicholls dropped out of school during his tenth grade year of high school. As Nicholls was interested in painting, he chose to enroll in an art school to study painting. He supported his vocation with money earned at a food service job (at a McDonald's restaurant in South Hurstville, Sydney). There he met future bandmates, Patrick Matthews (who left the band in 2004) and David Oliffe (former drummer). To form a quartet, Nicholls invited his school-mate Ryan Griffiths to join in the band. Nicholls said in an interview that he had kept the band's name as Rishikesh pertaining to the place in India where his favourite band The Beatles had gone. During their gig days, the newspapers would misprint their band name as 'Rishi Chasms', so Nicholls decided to change the name to The Vines, a reference to his father's frontman role in the 1960s band The Vynes. His father taught him to play guitar when he was a child.

Nicholls had never written songs until they started playing gigs. He stated in an interview that once he started writing songs, he started loving it and continued to write more and more songs. Moreover, he stated that writing was a good outlet for him.[1] At the APRA Awards of 2003 he won the 'Breakthrough Songwriter Award'.[2]

With gigs that included playing for backyard parties, and a regular spot on a local radio station, they gathered a following in Sydney and eventually reached the notice of Capitol Records. Several of Nicholls' paintings were used as the covers for The Vines' albums Highly Evolved, Winning Days (self portrait only), and singles Highly Evolved, and Outtathaway!.

Asperger syndrome

At the beginning of a promotional show for Triple M radio, Nicholls bleated at the audience and demanded that the crowd not talk during the performance. When Nicholls heard someone laugh, he said to the crowd, "Why the f--- are you laughing? You're all a bunch of sheep. Can you go baa?" When a photographer snapped a picture of Nicholls a second later, he kicked out at her, smashing her camera. As a result, Patrick Matthews never played with The Vines again (he has since joined Youth Group) and Triple M banned The Vines from being played on their radio station. Nicholls was accompanied by his brother Matt, and his manager and friend Andy Kelly in Balmain Local Court in Sydney on 19 November 2004. There it was revealed that Nicholls has Asperger syndrome.

This had been suspected by Nicholls' guitar technician, English roadcrew veteran Tony Bateman, who had toured with The Cure, Sisters Of Mercy and Black Sabbath. He suspected that there was something clinically different with Nicholls and downloaded information about Asperger syndrome, later handing it over to Andy Kelly. The judge dropped all charges against Nicholls on the condition that he sought immediate treatment. Nicholls yelled "I'm free!" upon leaving the courthouse.[3]

He was under medical treatment and underwent therapy for six months. He has given up his intake of fast food and marijuana habit.[4]

Nicholls has spoken about his condition in various interviews when asked about it.[1][4]

Musical equipment

Craig Nicholls' Highly Evolved days live setup included a Marshall Super Lead head and cab with a black Fender Stratocaster. His amp was set on a clean tone and for lead and distortion tones he would use a Boss MT-2 pedal. He also used a Boss Chorus pedal for clean tones and for oscillating feedback. His Winning Days setup was very similar except he used a Garage Spalt & Scala Custom guitar and a Boss tremolo and flange pedal. The Vision Valley setup however changed as he was using a white Stratocaster and a Sunn head and cab and for the Melodia setup his amp, pedals and guitar has remained the same. Nicholls has also always used a Boss TU-2 tuner and has played occasionally a Gibson SG and Guild acoustic guitars. As of late 2010, Nicholls has gone back to using a black Fender Stratocaster.

[edit] References¹.^a b Craig McLean (5 March 2006). "Stop Making Sense". The Guardian. . Retrieved 2007-06-10.

2.^a "2003 Winners - APRA Music Awards". Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA). . Retrieved 16 November 2010.

3.^a "Vines Singer Diagnosis Revealed". NME. 19 November 2004. . Retrieved 2007-06-10.

4.^a b "The Vines". Mushroom Records. . Retrieved 2007-06-10.

[Submitted by Radical Red]