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BESIDES THE FACT THAT WE WAITED IN VAIN FOR THE NEXT WEEZER ALBUM, 2004 TURNED OUT TO BE A BANNER YEAR FOR MUSIC. WE EVEN MADE IT THROUGH A WHOLE 12 MONTHS WITHOUT A TURD-ER, RELEASE FROM NICKELBACK. BUT DON'T GET TOO COZY MOCKING UP YOUR BEST-OF YEAR-END LISTS, BECAUSE 2005 PROMISES TO BE JUST AS FULFILLING, JUDGING FROM AP'S ANNUAL MOST ANTICIPATED ISSUE. IF YOU AREN'T DOWN WITH OUR CHOICES, THAT'S COOL—WE HEAR THERE'S A SCOTT STAPP SOLO ALBUM IN THE WORKS.



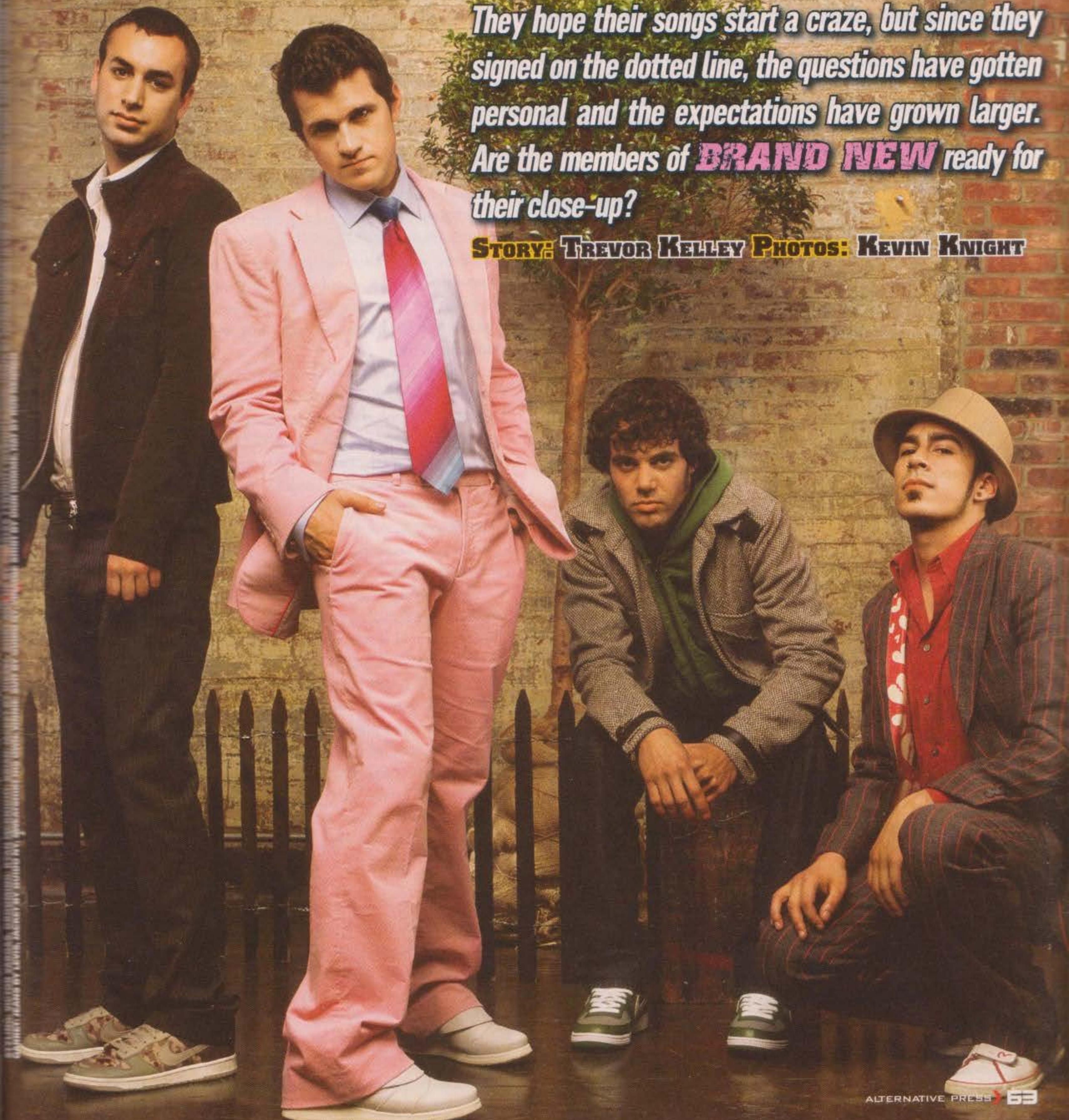
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The PROFESSIONALS

*They hope their songs start a craze, but since they signed on the dotted line, the questions have gotten personal and the expectations have grown larger. Are the members of **BRAND NEW** ready for their close-up?*

STORY: TREVOR KELLEY **PHOTOS: KEVIN KNIGHT**



Well, he was right: This is so messed up.

"Right now, you're doing an interview," explains Brand New guitarist Vinnie Accardi. "You're going to make mistakes, and you're going to wish you asked something else. But does that mean there's more pressure on you?"

Seated in the balcony of a swank dinner bar in New York's Lower East Side, the members of Brand New—Accardi, singer/guitarist Jesse Lacey, bassist Garrett Tierney and drummer Brian Lane—are giving their first interview in six months, which, in turn, makes this their first interview since beginning work on the debut for their new label, Interscope. In theory, we're talking about the follow-up to their 2003 sophomore album, *Deja Entendu*, which was one of the most universally acclaimed works ever to have come out of the Long Island post-hardcore scene.

Except that's not really happening. Mostly, we're politely arguing with one another as the band members explain how this interview should continue.

"So what do you want?" Lacey wonders out loud. "Does the editor want this to be about the record or about our personal lives? Because if it's about the record, there's a million things about the process of writing that we could be talking about instead."

But it will be another two days before we get around to any of it. In the meantime, we're left with this:

What do you think you were most unprepared for about the success of *Deja Entendu*?

LANE: Everything outside of playing music.

LACEY: Personally, I realized that you have to not only be a voice onstage, but a voice offstage, as well. People start looking to you for opinions, which is frightening. In an interview, you'll have half an hour with someone, and there's a tape recorder in front of you, and whatever you're saying in that time, millions of people are going to read. So, what are you going to say?

It seems like you're talking about these responsibilities that... [Lacey's cell phone rings]

LACEY: Can you hold on a second? [Answers phone.] Hey, are you playing tonight? This is John Nolan of Straylight Run, everyone. [Turns away from the conversation.]

ACCARDI: Be careful, man! [Laughs.] You know that's going in quotations.

Two years ago, no one was even remotely interested in putting the minor details of Brand New's lives in quotation marks. But ever since the band called for a necessary hiatus earlier this year, a sense of curiosity has begun to surface. Since last June, the members of Brand New have been hidden away in their respective suburban corners of Long Island, demoing new material, building up their defenses and avoiding moments like these. It's up to them now to make sure that nothing they say tonight gets in the way of how you will eventually listen to their next album. It makes sense that Lacey would turn away in the middle of a conversation about expectations and new responsibilities. That's pretty much what he's been doing for the past six months.

"These are very generalized things to talk about," Lacey says when he returns to the table. "I don't know if audiences think about these things or if you do, because you're writing a magazine article about us. But maybe that doesn't matter at all?" He begins to smile. "I would never want to be on your end. Your job is harder than mine; that's for sure."

Thing is, Jesse Lacey does not have this job. The only job he has right now is to write the single most anticipated album of next year. And it's something he is taking very seriously.

Let's make this much clear: Brand New are extremely happy to be on the cover of this magazine. The first thing that Lacey says two days later when he picks me up at the train station in Farmingdale (a Long Island suburb one town over from where he and his bandmates grew up as skate-rat teens) is that he's ready to talk until there are no more cassettes left to record the conversations.

But this isn't to say Lacey's not nervous about how his band's still-uncompleted third album could be perceived. That was the problem a few days earlier: It's not that things didn't go according to plan; it's that they went *too* according to plan. The questions were admittedly typical—nearly all of them addressed artistic pressures and success—but the disc they're currently writing should prove to be anything but.

"I could talk forever about what I was listening to this week, or what kind of guitar I used on the song I was writing," Lacey says, driving past a stretch of strip malls and outlet stores. "But I never know how to talk about what I'm thinking of when the record is going on. 'What am I going to do now that I am successful? What's the difference between now and then?' I don't have an answer for that."

Lacey currently lives at home with his parents, a fact that may come as a surprise to the nearly 500,000 people who bought *Deja Entendu*, or to the dedicated fans who voted Brand New at the top of nearly every single category in last year's AP Readers Poll. (The one category they didn't receive honors in was "Most Unfailingly Respected," but that's only because such a category doesn't exist.) In the past year, Brand New have become the sort of band that people have chosen to invest an inhuman amount of faith in, largely due to the inhuman leap they made between *Deja Entendu* and their barre-chord-heavy debut, *Your Favorite Weapon*.

With nearly two-dozen songs in various states of completion, Lacey describes his band's third album—which they plan on recording this winter, with a still-unnamed producer—as some of their most experimental and poppy material yet. But no matter what it actually ends up sounding like, it's already become part of something they started years ago, when they were driving around Long Island, talking about the endless possibilities music can provide.

"To say that music saved my life is a very cliché thing," Lacey stresses, as he pulls into the parking lot of a local record store. "But it definitely made me who I am today. To be an instrument in shaping the way someone grows up and the way that someone looks at the world is a great opportunity, and I'm not about to ruin that."

People must really be surprised that you still live here.

LACEY: I catch myself on a daily basis being surprised by it, actually. It's very odd that my life at home hasn't changed much in the last three years. Because everything else in my life has. This is very far away from where it started, but when I come home now, I am still one of seven children, and I still have to find my place in the family. When I go to sleep, it is literally across the hall from my parents. That's really comforting.







Do you pay any attention to how you're being perceived now?

In the last year, we became very content on guarding ourselves. At some point, it became ridiculous. I can't have a drink in an interview now without it being about alcohol. But what does that have to do with music? Usually, I'm drinking water, because I'm a singer, and I can't drink alcohol because it messes with my throat. And you know what? I can't smoke cigarettes, and I can't stay up very late, either. But no one wants to hear that. They want to hear about all these great things that are happening. But we're just four normal kids. I've said that a million times.

The majority of bands that are featured in AP who've experienced similar ascents—from their small town's scene to recording their first album for a major label—all say the same thing. They all say they're just four normal guys.

[Laughs.] Okay...

But you really do seem committed to that. It's not that you were four guys who live in Long Island. You still are four guys who live in Long Island.

That's true. I have spent so much time around this area—we were all born and raised within 10 minutes of each other—and it really is a unique place to live. But I'm not sure if that's always a good thing. A lot of it is really white and really middle-class, and I think that's created an interesting phenomenon. You have all these middle-class white kids making music now, and that's never been a place where great music has come from. One of the things we've always said is that we never want this band to be commonplace, even if it is comprised of four very commonplace people. We have always wanted this to be a monster.

Really? You've always wanted this to be a huge band?

I've always had an inkling it could be. But when you're a young band and you're playing to a very specific audience, you're scared to do certain things. You're scared to write a really great record in some ways. Back then, I think

"We're not writing this record for the people who bought the last record.

We're writing it for the millions of people who didn't"

—JESSE LACEY

we were hoping that we would touch four or five people. But now, not only do we have the songs to reach more people than that, we also have the ability. If we make the right record, the people [at Interscope] are going to make sure that everyone who needs to hear it are going to hear it. When you first start out as a young band, you don't think that way.

How can that realization change things?

It changes everything! Suddenly, you're trying to write a song that might change the world, as opposed to a song that might just touch a few people. That's a big difference. I don't want to say that when we were first starting

out we weren't trying to make a very big sound, because we were. But I think that right now is probably one of the best times to be an exploratory band on a major label. There are definitely some gambles on this record, and there are definitely things that aren't normal for a band on a major. We're not just putting out another *Deja*, which, I think, had it been put out by a major label, would have sold two to three times the amount of records it sold. There's no doubt in my mind about that. But we're not writing this record for the people who bought the last record. We're writing it for the millions of people who *didn't*.

There must have been a time when saying that would have seemed...

It would have seemed ridiculous, yeah. But that was at a time when, on a personal and songwriting level, we didn't have very much confidence. Luckily, I think we have a very strong pop sensibility. We are able to write songs that are very listenable and kind of immediate in a way that other people can enjoy. Before, I would have never said that we were writing music for the masses. But we are now. That's what we are doing.

The last record went to great depths lyrically—do you have any idea what effect that will have on the songs you're writing right now?

Being white and middle-class is a very shallow thing to draw from. You can very easily start whining about things that really aren't relevant to very many people. It's important to me that they come out on a very large scale. Listening to Springsteen or Morrissey or Bono—they are all very universal lyricists, and they all say things that I wish I could say. But I really can't write about anything else. Even if I'm writing about an experience in someone else's life, I'm only going to be able to write about it if I'm very close to it. I have to have a good perspective on it. There wasn't much about anyone else on that last record.

Deja Entendu was a record people related to, partially because of the similarities it contained—people were at the same age, finding themselves in the same types of situations. But there wasn't a song on that record that people could relate to on the same level as, say, U2's "Where The Streets Have No Name." You haven't written a song that my mom can relate to yet.

Which really intimidates me. Honestly, I don't know how to relate to your mom. But great songwriters do, and that's what I'm trying to be. I want to say something that will not only be significant to myself and to people like me, but to everyone.

What if that happens on this record? This could be the Brand New record that really defines this band.

I was thinking about that this morning. Who knows if that will ever happen? There is that arc in so many people's careers where they start this upward trajectory and they make this amazing thing, and then it just drops off after that. I don't know if those bands just literally made the best thing they could make, or they started believing certain things and became jaded by what that record did for them. I hope that *Deja* isn't a [My Bloody Valentine's] *Loveless* for anyone. That would be very upsetting to me, because that would mean that the person listening to it isn't allowing the possibility of getting even better. For me, I can't even imagine what the Brand New record would sound like.

Why? Because you're not there yet?

[Smiles.] I don't think we're even close. **alt**

